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**Gender and Genre**  
**in Young Adult Dystopia:**  
Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*  
and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*

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*To Anna and Piero*

# **Gender and Genre in Young Adult Dystopia:** Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the relationship between gender and genre in two Young Adult (YA) dystopian series, drawing on two key concepts. The first is the assertion (made, among the others, by critics Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini) that critical dystopias, unlike classical dystopias, present a tendency towards the blending of different genre conventions. The second is the opposition, highlighted by Roberta Seelinger Trites, between two literary patterns which characterise YA fiction: depending on the level of maturity that the protagonist reaches by the end of the novel or series, it is possible to define a work as *Bildungsroman* (coming of age novel) or as *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of development).

Based on these premises, I first argue that *The Hunger Games* and *Delirium* present features thanks to which the former can be considered a *Bildungsroman* and the latter an *Entwicklungsroman*, making these dystopian series good examples of the mixture of genres which characterises critical dystopias. Secondly, I show how the identification of the two female protagonists as main characters of a *Bildungsroman* or of an *Entwicklungsroman* is strictly linked to their gender, in aspects concerning both their subjectivity and the bonds they create or develop.

## List of Abbreviations

**HG:** Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2008

**CF:** Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2009

**MJ:** Collins, Suzanne. *Mockingjay*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2010

**Del:** Oliver, Lauren. *Delirium*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011

**Pan:** Oliver, Lauren. *Pandemonium*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012

**Req:** Oliver, Lauren. *Requiem*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Dystopia: the Roots of the Genre

The presence of dystopian energies has characterised Young Adult (YA) literature since the beginning of the twenty-first century, to the point that YA dystopian fiction is currently one of the main sub-genres in the field of literature for teenagers. In order to analyse the blurring of genres between dystopia and fiction for young people, as well as the matter of gender in YA dystopias, it is first necessary to retrace the history of literary utopias and to clarify where dystopia comes from. To borrow Lyman Tower Sargent's words, "this will involve those tedious but essential processes known as definition and classification, processes frequently ignored by scholars in the field"<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the first issue which will be discussed in this section is the struggle that critics had to face while they were trying to clarify the usage of certain terms; in particular, as we will see, these difficulties regard the differences between the words *dystopia* and *anti-utopia*. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to retrace the trajectories followed both by dystopian works and by criticism, in order to show which aspects of adult dystopias belong to YA dystopian novels as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited". *Utopian Studies*, June 1994, p. 2

### 1.1.1 When does Dystopia begin?

In the last decades, the term dystopia has come to be increasingly used in our common, everyday vocabulary. At an informal level, it is frequently used to refer to the general idea of a grim future, rather than a specific literary genre; yet, the fact that its broad meaning is easily recognised by the vast public indicates how relevant a discourse about dystopia can still be.

As Keith M. Booker asserts in the *Introduction* to his volume *Critical Insights: Dystopia*, more than one reason is at the basis of this tendency:

Partly, no doubt, this development is due to the imitative nature of our popular culture (...). On the other hand, the dark turn taken by the American popular mood and the dystopian turn taken by American literature and popular culture in the early twenty-first century are also responses to real, specific events in the recent history.<sup>2</sup>

As Booker highlights, imitation certainly has a role. However, as we will see, the influence of real events and of the socio-economical and political situation as a whole play a much more prominent role. And yet, these reasons alone are not enough to justify the widespread tendency that led to imagining the future as a dystopia<sup>3</sup>. While it is true, as Tom Moylan states in the opening of *Scraps of the Untainted Sky. Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, that dystopia is first and foremost the product of the twentieth century

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<sup>2</sup> Booker, Keith M. *Critical Insights: Dystopia*. Ipswich: Salem Pr., 2012, pp. 5-6

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*



<sup>4</sup>, the turn towards pessimism can be tracked back at least to the nineteenth century. As David W. Sisk points out <sup>5</sup>, however, any discussion about dystopian fiction must be based on an understanding of how dystopia evolved from utopia. Thus, in order to identify the correct terminology to use for critical purpose and to deal with dystopia from a historical point of view, it is necessary to focus on utopia first.

### **1.1.2 Utopia in Dystopia**

As Krishan Kumar underlines <sup>6</sup>, the precision with which it is possible to identify the beginning of the utopian western tradition is noteworthy: indeed, the genre was born in 1516, with the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*. More's work is fundamental for two reasons: not only did he coin the name that defines the genre; he also set the rules for the structure of the utopian novel. David W. Sisk insists on both matters: on the one hand, he underlines that the genre is still named after More's work, proving its importance; on the other hand, he points out that the structure of the utopian novel has not undergone significant changes since *Utopia* was published. The question, then, is how these two issues influence dystopian novels. As for the structure, it is a fact that dystopian works are significantly different from utopian ones; nonetheless, it is true that all of them are based on how dystopias respond to the utopian structure. As Sisk points out, one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. xi

<sup>5</sup> Sisk, David W. *Transformation of Language in Modern Dystopias*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 7

<sup>6</sup> Kumar, Krishan. *Utopia e Antiutopia. Wells, Huxley, Orwell*. Edited by Raffaella Baccolini and Lucia Gunella. Ravenna: Longo Editore Ravenna, 1995, p. 4

most eloquent examples is perhaps that, while utopias are characterised by the journey of the protagonist to the utopian world, in dystopias the main character is already immersed in the dystopian society, and the novel begins *in medias res*<sup>7</sup>. Although it is evident that the two worlds portrayed are undoubtedly different from each other, and that the two genres use different strategies to present this world to the main character and to the reader, the strategy employed by the dystopian novel remains an answer to the utopian one.

The features of dystopian fiction will be discussed in the following section of this chapter; as for now, I would like to stress that all these features derive from the way the utopian novel was initially structured by More. Dystopia, in short, can be defined as an answer to utopia: however subtle, there is always a link between dystopian works and utopian ones.

When and why, then, did the shift from utopia to dystopia occur?

### **1.1.3 Dystopias as Products of their Time**

Whether the general tendency of a period leans towards utopia or towards dystopia depends, as I have mentioned before, on its historical, political, and socio-economical context. Therefore, it is not possible to identify a single turn from utopia to dystopia; rather, in the last two centuries, the tendency has shifted more than once from one mood to the other. Consequently, it is necessary to retrace the birth of dystopian fiction and to discuss the reasons for which it has developed in a certain manner. While, as we have

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<sup>7</sup> Sisk, David W. *Transformation of Language in Modern Dystopias*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997, p. 7

seen, it is easy to identify where and when the utopian genre was born, it is more complicated when it comes to dystopia.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Gregory Claeys identifies two major dystopian turns<sup>8</sup>. The first, he asserts, takes place during the eighteenth century, under the form of “satires upon enlightenment conceptions of a life lived according to the principles of reason”<sup>9</sup>, while the second begins in the 1890s and paves the way for the great development that the genre will undergo throughout the twentieth century. Tom Moylan, however, in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky. Utopia, Dystopia, Science Fiction*, argues that the main dystopian turn takes place in the 1980s<sup>10</sup>; he also highlights that the dystopian novels written from this decade onwards show features thanks to which it is possible to consider them as a different kind of dystopias, as we will see later.

The twentieth century is undoubtedly the key moment for dystopias. It is telling, however, that these two scholars identify what they call “the main turn” with different moments.

This happens because of the two different focuses of their studies: while, for Claeys, what matters is the history of the genre since its birth, Moylan discusses the changes that took place towards the end of the twentieth century and that, as we will see, reshaped the genre.

Regardless of the critical approach, scholars agree on the role of three writers in the birth of the dystopian genre: H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. Claeys, for

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<sup>8</sup> Claeys, Gregory (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 109-111

<sup>9</sup> Claeys, Gregory (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 110

<sup>10</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 147

instance, dedicates a whole chapter to these three authors, when he deals with the origins of dystopia<sup>11</sup>. Although all these writers have contributed greatly to the birth of the genre, Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini underline how Wells's work can be considered the most influential in its development, as they state in the *Introduction* to their volume *Dark Horizons*: "No doubt prompted by H.G. Wells's science fictional visions of modernity, a number of other works (...) came to represent the *classical*, or canonical, form of dystopia"<sup>12</sup>. In spite of the fact that these authors wrote in the first half of the twentieth century, they represent the peak of a tendency that began earlier, as Claeys underlines: indeed, he argues that works which indicate a negative trend in the utopian genre began to appear since the 1890s<sup>13</sup>. Claeys's reflection also focuses on the causes of these tendencies: wondering what went wrong, he argues that "corrosive urbanization, the creation of 'this great machine of the city', concentration of wealth, and an incessant economic struggle, compared to the 'idyllic easy-going life' of the nineteenth century" are the main reasons for this shift<sup>14</sup>.

While the dystopian trend is typical of the first half of the twentieth century, the 1960s and 1970s are, for the first time since the end of the nineteenth century, characterised by a comeback of the utopian narrative. The reason, again, lies in the historical and socio-

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<sup>11</sup> Claeys, Gregory (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 107-127

<sup>12</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003

<sup>13</sup> Claeys, Gregory (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 111

<sup>14</sup> Claeys, Gregory (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 113

economical situation of the period, defined by Moylan and Baccolini as “oppositional political culture”<sup>15</sup>. Although this turn in the tendency will only last a couple of decades, one aspect of the utopian fiction written in this period will continue to have great importance, even when the trend will be reversed: indeed, the utopian works published in this decade are, for the first time, defined as *critical*. As Moylan and Baccolini explain, “(...) ‘Critical’, in this sense, incorporates an Enlightenment sense of critique, a postmodern attitude of self-reflexivity, and the political implication of a ‘critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction’ ”<sup>16</sup>.

Moylan and Baccolini underline that, in the 1980s, the socio-political situation undergoes a significant change; consequently, they argue, the mood switches again from utopia to dystopia. To motivate this change, they identify three aspects: the economic restructuring, a shift of politics to the right, and growing fundamentalism and commodification<sup>17</sup>. The shift which occurred in the eighties does not seem to have ended yet, Moylan and Baccolini argue. “We live in dystopia”, Sargent adds<sup>18</sup>; as a consequence, it is hardly surprising that dystopia is still present in fiction, both for adults and for younger readers. What dystopian works seem to have preserved after the utopian period in the 1960s and 1970s is the critical approach: as we will see, the dystopian works written from the second half of the eighties onwards are defined as *critical* dystopias. Even though this term was

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<sup>15</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 2

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 230

first used by Sargent in the 1990s, a reflection about the different sub-genres of the dystopian genres began much earlier.

#### **1.1.4 For a Clarification of Terms: Anti-Utopia or Dystopia?**

As we have seen, dystopian literature developed during the twentieth century; accordingly, criticism followed this tendency, and scholars began to work on the genre. As Tom Moylan underlines, however, the most part of the critics failed at finding definitions for the “dark side of utopia”<sup>19</sup>: as he explains, one of the main mistakes which were made was reducing the utopian genre and its sub-genres to a mere binary opposition<sup>20</sup>. Although scholars have frequently used the terms *anti-utopia* and *dystopia* during the last century, they have often treated them as synonyms, and they have failed at providing accurate definitions for decades. Most of Moylan’s chapter “New Maps of Hell” is devoted to illustrating how critics sought to use these terms appropriately without succeeding. Even scholars who have given important contributions to studies on the utopian genre, such as Krishan Kumar, have not been able to use the terms correctly; the first who had an intuition about the correct understanding of the sub-genres of utopia was George Woodcock, who, as Moylan explains<sup>21</sup>, distinguished between *anti-utopian* works and *ex-utopian* works, arguing that while the latter “have abandoned all hope”, the

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<sup>19</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 122

<sup>21</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 124

former are still characterised by an hopeful aspect. Although the terms that are currently being used are not the ones that Woodcock suggested, his contribution is the most relevant among the ones discussed by Moylan: indeed, the concept of hope is fundamental in the understanding of the dystopian genre.

The key role in the clarification of terms, however, is played by Sargent. As we have seen, the main mistake that critics before Sargent made was reducing the categories to a simple juxtaposition between utopia and everything else; in addition to this, terms such as *anti-utopia* and *dystopia* were used as synonyms. With his 1994 essay *The Three Faces of Utopians Revisited*<sup>22</sup>, Sargent proposes a solution to both issues. First, he refuses to reduce utopia and anti-utopia to a simple binary opposition; rather, he considers utopia and its sub-genres as elements of a continuum, where different degrees of pessimism or hope can be present: as he asserts, “Some dystopias are deeply pessimistic and can be seen as a continuation of the idea of original sin (...) But many dystopias are self-consciously warnings. A warning implies that choice, and therefore hope, are still possible”<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, he provides definitions for all the sub-genres derived from utopianism, underlining that the terms *anti-utopia* and *dystopia* should be used to indicate different aspects of utopian literature. Indeed, he defines anti-utopia as “a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some

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<sup>22</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”. *Utopian Studies*, June 1994

<sup>23</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”. *Utopian Studies*, June 1994, p. 26

particular eutopia” and dystopia as “a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in a time and space the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived”<sup>24</sup>. These two definitions have fundamental implications: indeed, according to Sargent, while dystopias criticise the flaws of a precise manifestation of a failed utopia, anti-utopias criticise the very idea of utopia. Moreover, as Booker highlights in *Critical Insights: Dystopia*, didacticism is fundamental in dystopian works: indeed, he defines dystopias as “‘if this goes on’ cautionary tales”<sup>25</sup>, underlining that their aim is to warn the reader about the possible consequences of trends which already occur. On the contrary, anti-utopias “warn against the potential negative consequences of seemingly utopian projects”<sup>26</sup>. As a consequence, Booker remarks, anti-utopias come out as much more skeptical: they are doubtful of utopianism in general, not of a particular manifestation of utopianism which may lead to a negative outcome. Thus, the didactic account of anti-utopias is much weaker than that of dystopias.

As Booker makes clear, however, the distinction between dystopias and anti-utopias is not the only possible one. Indeed, he argues that, even among dystopias, some differences can be identified. These differences mainly regard the relationship of the novels with the utopian thought, and Booker distinguishes between *classical* dystopias and *critical* dystopias<sup>27</sup>. Again, Sargent’s contribution is fundamental. Indeed, he is the first critic

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<sup>24</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”. *Utopian Studies*, June 1994, p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Booker, Keith M. *Critical Insights: Dystopia*. Ipswich, Salem Press, 2013, pp. 6-7

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*



who uses the term *critical dystopia*: in *Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited*, he defines it as

a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view on the utopian genre.<sup>28</sup>

While, in giving this definition, Sargent does not address the matter of hope, he still provides a concept on which scholars after him will draw. Among these scholars are Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini; because they work on aspects of critical dystopias which, as I will argue, can be found in YA dystopias as well, the next section is based on their studies.

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<sup>28</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited". *Utopian Studies*, June 1994, p. 9

## **1.2 Critical Dystopia**

As I have anticipated in the previous section, the dystopian genre has undergone major changes since the end of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, several critics have focused on the differences between the first dystopian works and more recent ones. In particular, many have analysed the dystopian works written from the eighties onwards. Among the most prominent scholars who have worked on these matters there is Sargent, who, as we have seen, has coined the term *critical dystopias*. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the features of a critical dystopia and to show how it differs from a classical dystopia; to do this, I will discuss the process which led from the initial difficulties that critics faced to Sargent's definition and to the studies of other scholars, namely Moylan and Baccolini. Baccolini's work, in particular, is useful to demonstrate how YA dystopias share some features with critical dystopias. Moreover, an important part of Baccolini's study focuses on the relationship between gender and genre in critical dystopias; this will be the starting point to show that some aspects of critical dystopias can be found in the two series I consider in this dissertation.

### **1.2.1 Classical or Critical?**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the 1960s and the 1970s were characterised by a strong utopian stance, which came to a sudden end in the eighties, with a consequent comeback to the dystopian mood. Again, the historical and socio-economical situation plays a major role in this change; according to some scholars, including Baccolini and

Moylan <sup>29</sup>, this new turn towards dystopia can be much more clearly identified as such, as compared to the earlier ones. In *The Persistence of Hope in Science Fiction*, Baccolini underlines that the conservative reaction and the triumph of free market liberism, as well as the consumerism which came to represent the only way to achieve happiness, made utopia become “an outmoded value” <sup>30</sup>. The dystopian works written from the 1980s onwards, however, differ from classical dystopias in a substantial way. In the previous chapter, while dealing with Sargent’s contribution, I have anticipated that one of the most important matters has to do with the possibility, both for the characters and for the reader, to expect a change for the better. Indeed, as Baccolini and Moylan explain in the *Introduction to Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*, the main difference between classical dystopias and critical dystopias lies in the amount of hope in the work <sup>31</sup>. In *Dark Horizons*, the two scholars also argue that hope is not necessarily an element which characterizes classical dystopias, and that, when it is, it is left “outside the pages” <sup>32</sup>. In critical dystopias, however, both the readers and the protagonist are allowed to believe in change, because hope is preserved inside the pages of the novel <sup>33</sup>. As Baccolini and Moylan underline again, “if we consider dystopias as a warning (...) we as

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<sup>29</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 4

<sup>30</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella. “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction”. *PMLA*. 119.3 (2014), pp. 518-519

<sup>31</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Utopia Method Vision*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2007, p. 14

<sup>32</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 251

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*

readers can hope to escape [a] pessimistic future”<sup>34</sup>; with this statement, they highlight the main difference between this new kind of dystopias and the traditional ones, arguing that, for instance, in *1984* or *Brave New World* this option is not given to the protagonists, who “are all crushed by the authoritarian society”<sup>35</sup>.

While the amount of hope in a work is the starting point to distinguish between classical and critical dystopias, is not the only criterion to identify the latter: indeed, these particular dystopias are characterised by several features.

### 1.2.2 Genre Blurring and Gender Issues

One of the main characteristics of critical dystopias is their “hybrid textuality”<sup>36</sup>, or genre blurring. This mixture of literary genres is based on the relationship that dystopias in general, and critical dystopias in particular, have with utopia and anti-utopia. Indeed, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the utopian genre and its sub-genres should be imagined as a continuum with varying degrees of pessimism, rather than as a binary opposition between positive and negative utopia. While even classical dystopias are not as grim and pessimistic as anti-utopias, critical dystopias add another layer of meaning. As Sargent explains in *The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited*, dystopias do not criticise utopia itself, as anti-utopias do; however, in classical dystopias, hope is still

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<sup>34</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>36</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 147

“maintained outside the pages of the story”<sup>37</sup>, as Raffaella Baccolini states in *Dark Horizons*. Thus, in a way, even classical dystopias can be considered works which are characterised by a mixture of genres, as they show both aspects belonging to anti-utopias and features that characterise utopias. This aspect is highlighted by Tom Moylan, who states that “Dystopias negotiate the social terrain of Utopia and Anti-Utopia in a less stable and more contentious fashion than many of their eutopian and anti-eutopian counterparts”<sup>38</sup>.

In other words, dystopia has been a hybrid form since the beginning; moreover, it has always been much closer to utopia than anti-utopias. However, it is only with critical dystopias that these aspects become clear. In which ways, then, do critical dystopias mark these features more clearly than classical dystopias? Baccolini argues that this is possible due to the ambiguous and open endings that characterise critical dystopias:

Rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective “ex-centric subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by the hegemonic rule.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 240

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>39</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7

As we will see in the next chapter, Baccolini and Moylan's study discusses two aspects of critical dystopias that characterises YA dystopias as well: first, the blurring of genres; second, the fact that the protagonist does not belong to a group which identifies itself with the hegemonic rule. This is even more relevant when the protagonist of a dystopian novel is a girl or a woman: indeed, Baccolini's studies underline the link between gender and genre, highlighting the role of dystopian novels written by women and with female characters. She argues that women's utopian literature has had a prominent role in the renovation of the genre<sup>40</sup>; she quotes Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as the main example, underlining that the novel was initially considered a failure by some critics, because it did not follow the traditional conventions of the dystopian genre<sup>41</sup>. However, as Baccolini argues in *Dark Horizons* as well<sup>42</sup>, Atwood's novel employs the conventions of the epistolary form (and, I would add, those of the diary), introducing the notion of an impure genre, which displays dystopian elements as well as features that belong to other genres. After Atwood, a number of other female writers of dystopian fiction, such as Olivia Butler and Marge Piercy, will do the same. According to Baccolini, "it is the very notion of an *impure* genre, with permeable borders which allow contamination from other genres, that represents resistance to a hegemonic ideology that reduces everything to a global monoculture"<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Utopia Method Vision*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2007, p. 163

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>42</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7

<sup>43</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 8

Feminist theories contribute to critical dystopias in another fundamental way: indeed, as Baccolini argues, genres are “culturally constructed and rest on the binary between what is *normal* and what is *deviant*”, a binary that feminist criticism has deconstructed <sup>44</sup>. Baccolini’s studies are also relevant due to the fact that she focuses on the role a female protagonist in a critical dystopia, as this means that a woman has the agency and the power to change a dystopian society.

### **1.2.3 The Protagonist of a Critical Dystopia: a “Character who Questions”**

The first aspect Moylan and Baccolini examine in their studies on critical dystopias is the narrative structure. In order to differentiate the dystopian trajectory from the typical utopian narrative, as Moylan states in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* <sup>45</sup>, Baccolini draws on Vita Fortunati’s *La letteratura utopica inglese*. To begin with, she points out how dystopias usually begin *in medias res*, as opposed to utopias, which typically imply the journey of the protagonist to the utopian world (which can be either an actual journey or an imaginary one, such as a dream). The fact that the protagonist is already immersed in the nightmarish society in question is also the means by which estrangement is achieved: indeed, according to Sargent’s definition, a dystopia portrays a world which can be easily identified as worse than the reader’s one, so that he or she is immediately aware of the discontent felt by the characters. However, dystopian characters do not seem to feel this

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<sup>44</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Utopia Method Vision*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2007, p. 164

<sup>45</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 148

discontentment: in fact, they appear satisfied with their society. This feeling of contentment, however, is only apparent; the role of the protagonist is fundamental precisely because he or she is the one who begins to see the flaws of the world they are living in. The main character is, as Tom Moylan argues, “a character who questions”; the whole dystopian work revolves around him or her, focusing on what happens to them <sup>46</sup>. As Moylan remarks, in *Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katherine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler* Baccolini points out how the consequence of the importance given to a specific character is confirmed by the ending of critical dystopias, because these texts reject “the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel” <sup>47</sup>. Moreover, it is thanks to this feature that the endings of critical dystopias are “open”; indeed, the ending is precisely the space where the forementioned new sources of agency have the possibility to obtain their subjectivity <sup>48</sup>. The formal strategy of focusing on the experiences of the protagonist, however, plays an important role even before the ending. As soon as the protagonist realises that he or she is not, in fact, living in a perfect society, a *counternarrative of resistance* develops, in opposition to the hegemonic order; thus, the dystopian text is built around the construction of these two narratives. In particular, as Moylan and Baccolini assert in *Dark Horizons* <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>47</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 189

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>49</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7



borrowing a term first used by Sargent<sup>50</sup>, the counternarrative is achieved by means of an “eutopian enclave” in the dystopian society. The very presence of these eutopian enclaves is a proof of the utopian aspect in critical dystopias: without a horizon of hope, the characters would not be able to create it. This enclave, and the protagonist in particular, does not necessarily challenge the dystopian society, as Moylan points out<sup>51</sup>; however, he or she always recognises the true nature of his world. Indeed, what accounts for the difference between classical and critical dystopias is that the possibility of a change is recognised by the protagonist and, as a consequence, by the reader. Obviously, this does not mean that the protagonist already knows that his or her agency will prove useful to achieve change; and, at times, the protagonist is characterised by a strong pessimistic attitude. However, as Moylan explains, two types of pessimism are available to any dystopian work. He quotes Soren Baggesen, who identifies them in his 1987 essay *The Word of World is Forest*:

(...) in the face of a bad situation, which must be grasped in an honest pessimism rather than an idealist optimism, there are still two available responses: a “resigned pessimism” that suppresses or refuses to consider the actually existing but latent possibilities of the

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<sup>50</sup> Sargent, Lyman Tower. “US Eutopias in the. 1980s and 1990s: Self-Fashioning in a World of Multiple Identities.”, in *Utopianism/Literary Utopias and National Cultural Identities: A Comparative Perspective*. Edited by Paola Spinozzi. Bologna: COTEPRA, 2001, p. 222

<sup>51</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 148

period, and a “militant pessimism” that (...) stands “with world-changing humanity in the front line of the historical process.”<sup>52</sup>

Moylan insists on militant pessimism and returns to this matter in the conclusion of *Dark Horizons*, which consists of a discussion with Baccolini on what they define as the “persistence of Utopia”<sup>53</sup>, and where they agree that it is precisely thanks to critical dystopias that, rather than indulging in a resigned pessimism, the possibility for a different kind of pessimism begins to be explored.

An important consideration has to be made about pessimism and hope. As Baccolini makes clear in *The Persistence of Hope*, the fact that the protagonist and the readers are encouraged to believe in the possibility of a change does not mean that every critical dystopia necessarily portrays an happy ending. On the contrary, as Baccolini underlines, “a sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained”. Indeed, the hopeful aspect does not lie in an easy outcome: as Baccolini argues in the conclusion to *Dark Horizons*, the idea that utopia magically appears without hard work is a fake belief<sup>54</sup>. The knowledge gained by the main character, and not his or her happiness, is the most stressed matter: it is precisely in this aspect that the strong didactic account of critical dystopias is more evident. By showing that choices have consequences

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<sup>52</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 153

<sup>53</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 234

<sup>54</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 236

which must be faced, the author of a critical dystopia is also able to show how the protagonist can aim at the transformation of reality<sup>55</sup>.

Up to this point, I have discussed the features of critical dystopias, mainly based on Baccolini and Moylan's work. In particular, Baccolini's studies have proved useful to underline the link between gender and genre. The following chapter will focus on YA dystopias and on the features that they share with critical dystopias.

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<sup>55</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 241

## 1.3 YA Dystopias as Critical Dystopias

### 1.3.1 Dystopia: a New Trend in Young Adult Literature?

Many critics and writers have wondered whether or not dystopia has always been part of YA literature. Surely, the fact that young adults read dystopian fiction is not new, nor is it a trend which has developed in the last few years. However, as we will see, significant changes have occurred in the last decades, in YA literature in general as well as in dystopias for YA. Critics agree on the fact that young people have always read books about grim futures. As Laura Miller notes<sup>56</sup>, adolescents are used to reading classics for adults, such as Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World*, which often were – and still are – assigned reading in high school. Moreover, dystopias for young adults were written and published even before the recent success: for instance, *The Giver* was published in 1994, more than a decade before the publication of *The Hunger Games*.

However, it is a fact that there has recently been an increase in dystopian fiction for young adults, and critics agree that the series which has triggered this process is indeed *The Hunger Games*. Many critics have wondered why this increase is occurring in this specific period, and why these works are much more often dystopian than utopian. Two aspects seem to be at stake here: one, again, is linked to the historical period we are living in; the other has to do with the links between dystopia and adolescence.

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<sup>56</sup> Miller, Laura. "Fresh Hell: What's behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?". *The New Yorker*, 14 June 2010

As for the historical period, what critics have argued about critical dystopias is true in this context too: the moment in which authors live has a fundamental impact on the kind of fiction they write. As Moira Young underlines<sup>57</sup>, the authors of YA novels are usually adults; consequently, it makes sense that the *Zeitgeist*, as she calls it, influences them, exactly as it influences the writers of critical dystopias. According to Laura Miller, moreover, YA dystopian literature differs from adult dystopias for another reason: she argues that the former often portrays what is already happening, rather than what may happen<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, one of the main changes that YA literature has undergone throughout the second half of the twentieth century has led to an increase in realism, as Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz underline in the *Introduction* to the volume *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. They define the 1970s as the “Golden Age of YA literature”, and point out that a major change occurred in that decade, stating that authors “tackled relevant issues of adolescence in relatable, realistic ways”<sup>59</sup>. While, as they argue, the first decade of the twenty-first century has been characterised by “sprawling fantasy worlds” and “supernatural romances”<sup>60</sup>, what has recently taken place is a sort of synthesis of the two trends: while dystopian series significantly differ from works that tackle every-day issues realistically, they are still able to deal with certain matters in

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<sup>57</sup> Young, Moira. “Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?”. *The Guardian*, 23 October 2010

<sup>58</sup> Miller, Laura. “Fresh Hell: What’s behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?”. *The New Yorker*, 14 June 2010

<sup>59</sup> Day, Sara K., Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz (eds). *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 6

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*

relatable ways. The question is, how can a young adult relate to a novel or a series set in a dystopian world?

### 1.3.2 Dystopia as a Metaphor for Adolescence

Many of the scholars and writers who have tried to answer this question argue that dystopia can be seen as a metaphor for adolescence. Some of them, such as Dana Stevens<sup>61</sup> and Charles McGrath<sup>62</sup>, focus on the original meaning of the word dystopia; they state that it is not difficult to see how a book about a “bad place” would immediately remind young people of the place they spend most of their time in – high school. As McGrath underlines, “these new YA books imagine (...) a world where civilization feels an awful lot like high school and everyone is under pressure to conform”<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, as Stevens notes, reading about dystopian worlds helps teenagers to externalise what takes place in their bodies<sup>64</sup>, and, I would add, in their minds. Thus, the reader is able to create links between the “outer journey” of the protagonist, who has to figure out how to survive in his grim and post-apocalyptic reality, and his own “inner journey” in which, similarly, he has to understand how to resist to his “own private dystopia”, as Young calls it<sup>65</sup>.

Another important point is made by Laura Miller<sup>66</sup>. She asserts that “the typical arc of the dystopian narrative mirrors the course of adolescent disaffection”, showing how, in

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<sup>61</sup> Stevens, Dana. “Why Teens Love Dystopias”. *Slate*, 21 March 2014

<sup>62</sup> McGrath, Charles. “Teenage Wastelands”. *The New York Times*, 19 February 2011

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>64</sup> Stevens, Dana. “Why Teens Love Dystopias”. *Slate*, 21 March 2014

<sup>65</sup> Young, Moira. “Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?”. *The Guardian*, 23 October 2010

<sup>66</sup> Miller, Laura. “Fresh Hell: What’s behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?”. *The New Yorker*, 14 June 2010

several instances, YA dystopias “may seem pleasant enough” for its characters, before “a crack opens in the façade”. Interestingly, the person who causes this crack is never a grown up. This is important for two reasons: first, the initial contentment of the dystopian citizens, which then turns into awareness and leads them to create an enclave, is very similar to what Moylan and Baccolini argue in their analysis. Second, it is necessary to bear in mind that it is the young protagonist who creates the possibility for the *counternarrative of resistance* (and, again, I am quoting Moylan and Baccolini): as a consequence, the discourse concerning hope can be applied to YA dystopias, too. As Miller notes, it does not matter how dark and traumatic the experiences the protagonist has to face are: the lesson, in every case, is that they are survivable<sup>67</sup>. The fact that characters in fiction can survive bad experiences is only possible thanks to the horizon of hope that is present in the books; as a consequence, just as the dystopian world mirrors the reader’s own dystopia, the fact that the protagonist is able to survive his experience aims at encouraging the reader.

### **1.3.3 Can Youngsters handle Dystopia?**

It has been wondered why recent fiction for YA portrays dystopias much more often than utopias. As we have seen, dystopia works as a metaphorical representation of adolescence. What about utopia? Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, in the *Introduction to Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, underline that utopia is

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*

often used as a metaphor for childhood, rather than for adolescence<sup>68</sup>. This, they argue, has to do with the *Romantic conception* of childhood, which idealises childhood and sees it as utopian, as children are considered less corrupt than adults<sup>69</sup>. Because it is an idealised vision, it can lead to a misconception: in fact, as they make clear, “no child knows utopia”<sup>70</sup>. At a metaphorical level, then, it is true that recognising the flaws of utopia means leaving childhood behind (just as dystopia represents adolescence), even though it is clear that the identification of childhood with utopia and of adolescence with dystopia is not necessarily true for actual readers. YA dystopias also raise another issue; indeed, parents and teachers sometimes express a concern: are certain topics in YA dystopias too dark to be read by youngsters? Bearing Hintz and Ostry’s argument in mind, I do not consider this concern to have valid grounds. The concept that young people are used to negative experiences was discussed in an interview with Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*; when she was asked if children and teenagers can handle dystopia, she answered:

Young people handle dystopia every day: in their lives, their dysfunctional families, their violence-ridden schools. They watch dystopian television and movies about the real world where firearms bring about explosive conclusions to conflict. Yes, I think they need to

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<sup>68</sup> Hintz, Carrie, and Elaine Ostry (eds). *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*. New York, Routledge 2003, p. 9

<sup>69</sup> Hintz, Carrie, and Elaine Ostry (eds). *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*. New York, Routledge 2003, p. 6

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*



see some hope for such a world. I can't imagine writing writing a book that doesn't have a hopeful ending.<sup>71</sup>

In YA fiction, utopia and dystopia mingle together, just as they do in critical dystopias. The utopian potential, as I have anticipated, is also evident if one analyses the role of adults in YA dystopias.

### **1.3.4 Adolescents as Agents of Change and the Concept of Liminality**

In dystopian fiction for young people, adults are always those who accept the status quo, while it is always a young character who creates the possibility for change. Many have wondered why adults are depicted in this way. Partly, no doubt, this happens due to the forementioned Romantic and idealized vision of childhood, and, as Hintz and Ostry highlight, a child who saves an adult belongs to this idea<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, as Debra Donston-Miller remarks<sup>73</sup>, several authors, such as Todd Mitchell and Claudia Gray, underline that youngsters are usually more sensitive than adults; the idea is that young people are not used to the dystopian regime yet, and, as a consequence, they are able to imagine a different world.

Considering the role of young dystopian characters as agents of change is hardly possible without taking into account the aspect of rebellion. If dystopia is a metaphor for

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<sup>71</sup> Hintz, Carrie, and Elaine Ostry (eds). *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*. New York, Routledge 2003, p. xi

<sup>72</sup> Hintz, Carrie, and Elaine Ostry (eds). *Utopian and Dystopian Fiction for Children and Young Adults*. New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 10

<sup>73</sup> Donston-Miller, Debra. "Why Young Adults 'Hunger' For The Hunger Games And Other Post-Apocalyptic Dystopian Fiction". *Forbes*, 20 November 2014

adolescence, the rebellion of the young protagonist can be analysed on a double level: indeed, he or she rebels both against the dystopian regime and against the adults who have built it. Consequently, their rebellion has a double meaning: it highlights their condition of dystopian citizens, but it also reminds the reader that the protagonist is a young boy or girl in the process of growing up.

Focusing on the age of the main characters raises another crucial issue, in particular if we analyse their agency: that of liminality. In the *Introduction to Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz argue that the idea of liminality can be applied to many aspects of young adult dystopias<sup>74</sup>. They relate to Victor Turner's definition, who describes liminality as "an interstructural section" in which individuals are "in a state of transaction". This definition is used to prove that the protagonists of YA dystopias, and female protagonists in particular, are often "between states"<sup>75</sup>. As they explain, adolescents occupy a liminal position between childhood and adulthood; Hintz and Ostry highlight this as well, arguing that adolescents are "on the brink of adulthood and close enough to see its privileges but unable to enjoy them"<sup>76</sup>. This is true for all adolescents; however, in the case of a female protagonist of a dystopian series, the issue of liminality goes even further. Not only are young female protagonists between childhood and adulthood; as women, they also stand between strength and weakness, to

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<sup>74</sup> Day, Sara K, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz (eds). *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 3

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>76</sup> Hintz, Carrie, and Elaine Ostry (eds). *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*. New York, Routledge 2003, p. 9

the point that “they may also be understood as representations of contradictions”<sup>77</sup>. Nonetheless, as I have shown, they are presented as agents of change; thus, the common perception that girls are too young or too powerless to question and to rebel is contradicted. Even the matter of hope is presented by Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz in terms of liminality: indeed, what was referred to as “utopia in dystopia” by other critics is here considered as liminal space between hope and despair<sup>78</sup>.

### 1.3.5 Genre Blending in YA Dystopias

YA dystopias have one more aspect in common with critical dystopias: indeed, both are characterised by genre blending. As we have seen, Raffaella Baccolini argues that critical dystopias are often the result of the mixture of different genres. Similarly, the blending of genres in YA dystopias is a matter on which most critics agree, and it is mentioned in several collections that deal with YA dystopias. In the *Introduction to Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults*, Basu, Broad, and Hintz discuss the reasons behind this frequent genre blending in dystopias for youngsters<sup>79</sup>. While they acknowledge that it is partly because of the lucrative aspect and assert that the result of placing a work that belongs to another genre in a dystopian setting is that sales immediately raise, they also highlight that this is not the only reason. Indeed, their analysis focuses on the audience,

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<sup>77</sup> Day, Sara K, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz (eds). *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 3

<sup>78</sup> Day, Sara K, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz (eds). *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 9

<sup>79</sup> Hintz, Carrie, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad (eds). *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. i

too. As the implied reader is a young person, they argue, he or she may not have encountered a work that follows the traditional dystopian narrative structure yet. On the one hand, this means that, in order for young readers to enjoy dystopian narrative, fiction does not have to be innovative: rather, it is supposed to be thrilling, as Laura Miller argues<sup>80</sup>. On the other hand, this reminds us of what youngsters need in a book: something that speaks to them, and that is relevant to their experience. To which genres, then, do the conventions which are reshaping dystopian YA narrative belong?

To begin with, Basu, Broad, and Hintz mention the adventure genre, arguing that YA dystopias could be considered a reinvention of the adventure tradition, which reached its peak between the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. As they underline, John G. Cawelti defines it as “the story of the hero - individual or group - overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission”<sup>81</sup>. They also quote Martin Burgess Green, according to whom adventure hints at an experience “beyond the law, or on the very frontier of civilization”<sup>82</sup>. The breakdown of society in YA dystopias, they add, causes the occasion both to break the law and to live on the fringes; in other words, it creates the setting for an adventure<sup>83</sup>.

While fighting against the dystopian regime, YA protagonists are also faced with the first romantic experiences. Therefore, romance is the second element that Basu, Broad, and

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<sup>80</sup> Miller, Laura. “Fresh Hell: What’s behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?”. *The New Yorker*, 14 June 2010

<sup>81</sup> Hintz, Carrie, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad (eds). *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. vii

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*

Hintz mention when they list the genres which influence YA dystopias <sup>84</sup>. Although, even in this case, this is partly to attract the interest of the readers, other reasons contribute. First, fighting for a better world means fighting for love, as the dystopian regime has a fundamental role in the choice of the protagonist's mate: it either steers the decision, or imposes one, or denies the character the possibility to choose at all. Moreover, I would add, the presence of the romance plot allows us to reflect on how the female protagonists looks at matters such as marriage and motherhood. This has to do with two issues: first, with their interiority and with the thoughts and feelings they have, which are expressed through first-person narration; second, with the actual relationships they develop. As for relationships, I am not just referring to romantic ones: I think of their mothers, for instance, or the younger characters they take care of.

It is important to bear in mind that characters in YA fiction are youngsters who find themselves in the middle of the growth process. Consequently, it makes sense that the third genre on which YA dystopias would draw is the *Bildungsroman*. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites makes an important distinction between two terms used to describe novels about the maturation process: indeed, she defines the *Bildungsroman* as “a novel in which the adolescent matures to adulthood” <sup>85</sup> and the *Entwicklungsroman* as “a category of novels

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<sup>84</sup> Hintz, Carrie, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad (eds). *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. vii

<sup>85</sup> Trites, Roberta Seelinger. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000, p. 10

in which an adolescent character grows”<sup>86</sup>. Thus, if the former is a proper coming-of-age novel, the latter should be thought of as a novel of growth or development. The difference, Seelinger Trites explains, is in the ending: while the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman* has reached adulthood by the end of the novel or series, the main character of an *Entwicklungsroman* has not. This issue is of particular interest, as the next two sections of this thesis deal with Katniss’s and Lena’s process of growth, first focusing on their interiority and then dealing with the relationships they develop.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*

## 2) The Creation of Identity through Narrative

### 2.1 Development of Political Awareness

In the two series I am dealing with, the protagonist is a teenage girl who engages in an uprising which eventually leads to a war between the dystopian government and the resistance. In both cases, the heroine plays a fundamental part in the revolt, as well as in the process of challenging the status quo. Moreover, both Collins and Oliver write in first-person narration: as a consequence, not only does the reader follow the events which take place in the outside world; he is also shown the heroine's inner world. The two trilogies, then, can be analysed with a focus on the development of the heroine's political awareness. Again, the starting point is Roberta Seelinger Trites's definition of *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*<sup>87</sup>, to which I referred in the previous chapter. As I will show, *Delirium* can be considered an *Entwicklungsroman*, with the heroine who has yet to reach adulthood at the end of the narrative, as opposed to *The Hunger Games*, which is more typically a *Bildungsroman*. These two patterns, I believe, characterise the development and the growth of the two protagonists even before the ending of the trilogy: indeed, in a number of instances, Katniss shows a much higher degree of maturity and independence as compared to Lena.

This section deals with each girl's relationship with politics, and in particular with the way they develop an interest in (and involvement with) political issues. In order to analyse

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<sup>87</sup> Trites, Roberta. *Disturbing the Universe. Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000, p. 10

the development of the protagonists' political consciousness, it is first necessary to analyse the dystopian worlds they live in: before the young protagonists are able to develop political opinions, they must come to understand what kind of society they live in. Indeed, the degree of awareness that Katniss and Lena show about living in a dystopian society varies significantly in the two series.

### ***2.1.1 Dystopia and Awareness***

At the beginning of each series, the relationship of the two protagonists with their own dystopian society is portrayed in a different way. Surely, part of the reason why the two depictions are so distant from one another is that Katniss and Lena live in two worlds which differ greatly. While both Katniss's Panem and Lena's alternative U.S. are ruled by dystopian, controlling governments, the citizens of each society are controlled through means that show a number of differences.

Panem, where Katniss lives, is built on what is left of the United States of America. It is made up of "a shining Capitol" (HG, 20), where well-off people live, and by twelve districts, where all other citizens live, and whose only task is to produce wealth for the Capitol. In addition, in order to pay for the uprising which took place seventy-four years before, each district must select two kids every year, one boy and one girl, through a procedure called *reaping*; after they are chosen, they must participate in the Hunger Games, where kids fight each other to the death, until only one is left. In a society like Panem, it is easy to see why the level of awareness that the citizens have about the



dystopian setting would be high. The inhabitants of Panem, as Miranda A. Green Barteet underlines, know perfectly well how their society works: as she asserts, “Panem is stark and fractured, with most of its impoverished citizens aware of their disenfranchisement and their inability to change their futures”<sup>88</sup>. This is an important feature to highlight, as it provides an exception in the general trend of YA dystopias: indeed, both in *Delirium* and in *Divergent*, the series by Veronica Roth with which Green-Barteet deals in her essay (as well as in a number of other YA dystopias), a fundamental moment in the narration is when the protagonist becomes aware of the dystopian traits of his or her world.

Katniss, on the contrary, already knows at the beginning of Book I that the Capitol is responsible for her poor condition. When *The Hunger Games* begins, fourteen-year-old Katniss has already reached a high level of resignation towards the fate of her country, especially as compared to when she was younger. Indeed, as early as in Chapter I of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss recalls how, when she was a child, she used to “scare her mother to death” : “(...) the things I would blurt out about District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called the Capitol” (HG, 7). In spite of her young age, at the beginning of the narrative she is already aware that even complaining is pointless.

Although she has these thoughts, the only person with whom she can talk about these issues is Gale, her best friend: when they go hunting and spend the whole day in the

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<sup>88</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 34

woods, they often discuss about how “the reaping system is unfair, with the poor getting the worst of it” (HG, 14). While it is very clear that Gale would be ready to rebel, Katniss does not even feel the need to express her dissent out loud, or to find comfort in words when she is upset. Her usual response to Gale’s rants against the Capitol underlines how useless she finds his behaviour to be: “But what good is yelling about the Capitol in the middle of the woods? It doesn’t change anything. It doesn’t make things fair. It doesn’t fill our stomachs. In fact, it scares off the nearby game” (HG, 16). In a society that is aware of its unfair condition but also of the impossibility to change things, Katniss has no time or interest to feel something other than disillusionment, even when she knows that the person she is speaking to would agree with her.

In Lena’s Portland, on the contrary, people are generally much less aware of their condition. Citizens are lobotomised at the age of 18 in order to stop feeling love or affection, which were declared illegal by the government; moreover, people believe that the “cure” against Delirium, the illness of love, aims at protecting them. What Green-Barteet states about *Divergent*, when she asserts that “(...) the majority of the citizens in Roth’s Chicago believe their society is structured to protect them and ensure their well-being”<sup>89</sup> is, I believe, valid for *Delirium* too. Moreover, in Lena’s society, occasions to meet others and celebrate are not as rare as in Panem, where even “travel between the districts is forbidden except for officially sanctioned duties” (HG, 47). In Portland, for

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<sup>89</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 34

instance, the Fourth of July is a bank holiday (although what people celebrate there is “the closing of [the] nation’s border forever”): on this occasion, children and adults gather to watch fireworks and listen to live music, and the curfew for uncured youngsters is postponed to 11 pm, two hours later than it usually is. Through situations of social aggregation, the government ensures that the element of contentment is maintained.

Another issue is at stake in determining the perception of the citizens, and it regards privilege. While Katniss (as well as all the citizens of the districts) knows that a tiny part of the population is much more privileged than her, Lena believes that the other citizens are all in the same condition as she is. However, as she discovers in Book II, she is actually part of the privileged group: indeed, there are quite a number of people, either ill with Delirium or affected by other illnesses and deformities, who are forced to live underground, in the sewers. This has consequences on how the narration develops: while in *The Hunger Games* trilogy the narrator is not part of the privileged group, in *Delirium* she is, making it more difficult for the reader to see where injustice lies. In general, what characterises the world depicted in the *Delirium* trilogy is the kind of “obliviousness” which Sonya Sawyer Fritz mentions when she deals with other YA dystopias, namely Scott Westerfield’s *Uglies* and Moira Young’s *Blood Red Road*: again, Katniss’s awareness constitutes an exception in the conventions of YA dystopias.

Lena’s experience, however, does not differ from Katniss’s only because their two models of society are different from one another: they also prove to have two utterly different personalities. Initially, indeed, Lena does not feel the slightest need to rebel. Katniss, as I

have shown, begins to express her dissent when she is still very young; Lena, on the contrary, feels terribly endangered whenever she remembers that she has not been cured yet, and she is really looking forward to the cure. She states it in the very first page of the trilogy:

Many people are afraid of the procedure. Some people even resist. But I'm not afraid. I can't wait. I would have it done tomorrow, if I could, but you have to be at least eighteen, sometimes a little older, before the scientists will cure you. (Del, 1)

Lena's fear of the illness is also evident if one compares the closest friends with whom the two heroines speak about the dystopian regime. As we have seen, Katniss often discusses with Gale, whose impulse to rebel depends on the fact that he understands the Capitol's responsibilities in his quality of life. Oppositely, Lena's closest friend is Hana, one of her schoolmates. At the beginning of the trilogy, Hana is strongly motivated to rebel against the rules imposed by the government. However, her reasons to rebel differ in a significant way from Gale's: in fact, Hana's behaviour resembles that of the average teenager much more than Gale's or Katniss's. Lena, at this point, is both afraid of and fascinated by Hana's attitude: at first she cannot believe the change her friend is undergoing, and states that she "has been strange recently" (Del, 22). The idea that Hana could be sick with Delirium scares Lena to death; however, she grows more and more curious, and when she joins an illegal party Hana is attending her strongest reason to do so is to protect her friend. It is interesting to note the way Hana is the more self-confident,

outspoken of the two, while Lena is a shy and insecure adolescent for whom the thought of the cure is utterly comforting:

That's what Hana doesn't understand, has never understood. For some of us, it's about more than the deliria. Some of us, the lucky ones, will get the chance to be reborn: newer, fresher, better. Healed and whole and perfect again, like a misshapen slab of iron that comes out of the fire glowing, glittering, razor sharp. (Del, 22)

Katniss's and Lena's different attitudes towards their governments, then, depend both on the worlds they live in and on their personalities, and all these differences influence the two girls' first approach to rebellion as well.

### ***2.1.2 Triggers for Rebellion and Reasons to Rebel***

As we have seen, neither Lena nor Katniss show much interest in the rebellion, at the beginning of the trilogy: the aim of their rebellious acts, at least in the early part of Book I of both trilogies, is not being subversive. Still, several among Katniss's and Lena's actions, even those done before they actively decide to rebel, can already be considered part of a rebellious behaviour. Even in this instance, the different degree of maturity reached by Katniss and Lena is clear: as Sonya Sawyer Fritz underlines, for example, even when Katniss behaves in a rebellious way out of anger, such as when she throws a knife at the Gamemakers' table before the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, she "is also aware that her

actions have added meaning as a form of political rebellion”<sup>90</sup>: indeed, she starts wondering “What will they do to me now? Arrest me?” (HG, 119). Lena, on the contrary, does not develop this kind of awareness until Book II.

As Miranda A. Green-Barteet notes, if YA dystopian heroines did not live in oppressive societies they would obviously not feel the need to rebel<sup>91</sup>. However, the fact that Katniss and Lena live in a dystopian society is only one of the reasons why they need to rebel, and not even the first one to push them towards rebellion. Obviously, Katniss and Lena have more in common than the fact that they live under a dystopian regime: they are both teenage girls. While on issues concerning their gender I will return later, this section deals with the links between being an adolescent and rebelling against a dystopian regime.

Because the two fictional worlds show a number of differences, Katniss’s first rebellious acts are different from Lena’s. First and foremost, it is important to note how in Portland there is space for teenage rebellion, while in Panem it is not even possible to consider this option: in *Delirium*, for example, there are instances of kids who listen to illegal music or join illegal parties; on the contrary, in *The Hunger Games* there are no examples of rebellious acts done just for rebellion’s sake. As Miranda A. Green Barteet has commented: “Adolescent rebellious acts (...) are never seen in Collins’s Panem (or in Roth’s futuristic Chicago). In these worlds, teens do not try to challenge their parents’

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<sup>90</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. “Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 23

<sup>91</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 34

authority or to subvert social mores as a way to exert their burgeoning sense of independence”<sup>92</sup>. Although, even in Portland, teens are strictly controlled, they can certainly rebel much more easily than adolescents in Panem can.

The next issue to consider is: do Katniss and Lena rebel against their government, and only against it? As a matter of fact, in both cases, the initial stages of their rebellious attitude are not explicitly against the government. As Sonia Sawyer Fritz underlines, it is important to bear in mind that our protagonists are teenagers, and that, as such, their rebellious acts are, at times, merely those of angry adolescents. For example, when Sawyer Fritz deals with the scene in Book I where Katniss loses her temper in front of the Gamemakers, she asserts that “in doing so, Katniss is in many ways responding with the frustration any typical adolescent would feel who has been treated callously by adults”<sup>93</sup>. However, in Katniss’s case, the motivation is often much stronger than simple teenage anger. As we have seen, unlike Lena’s, Katniss’s attitude can be considered rebellious even before the beginning of the first book. Her hunting activity is illegal in District 12, and could be punished with death anytime. However, as Green-Bartet notes,

These activities, while dangerous and even subversive, are not simply the stunts of an angry, defiant adolescent, although Katniss is arguably both. Katniss does not see these

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<sup>92</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 34

<sup>93</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. “Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 23

actions as rebellious; she sees them as necessary if she, her mother, and her sister are to avoid starvation.<sup>94</sup>

As Green-Barteet underlines, Katniss rebels against hunger much earlier and much more remarkably than when she rebels against the Capitol<sup>95</sup>; indeed, her only occupation and concern has always been to provide for her family. Before she is selected to participate in the Hunger Games, however, the only aim of her “dangerous and even subversive” acts is to survive. As I showed before, she is not even convinced that it makes sense to rebel against the Capitol; as a consequence, as Green-Bartet argues, “she does not believe she possesses the power to evoke larger changes, in District 12 or elsewhere”<sup>96</sup>. This belief, which will influence her greatly later on, is already part of her at this point in the narration. Lena, on the contrary, does not need to behave in a rebellious way to survive. Her behaviour is much more typically that of a teenager who rebels against adults, rather than against the regime, and often does so either to emulate her peers, or to be accepted by them, or simply to subvert authority. For instance, one of Lena’s first minor rebellious acts has nothing to do with the dystopian setting of the book:

[When] Carol asks me whether I don’t mind having hot dogs for the fourth straight night in a row (...) I say that actually, Sophia Hennerson from St. Anne’s invited me and some

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<sup>94</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 38

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*



other girls over for dinner. I don't even have to think about it. The lie just comes. And even though I still feel sweat pricking up under my palms, my voice stays calm, and I'm pretty sure my face keeps its normal color, because Carol just gives me one of her flitting smiles and says that that sounds nice. (Del, 176-177)

In this instance, Lena's reason to lie is Alex, the boy she falls in love with. As we will see, boys are often what triggers the heroine's rebellion in YA dystopias. Indeed, Katniss's and Lena's reasons to rebel depend on different aspects, and the only motivation they have in common is the romantic interest they have. However, since this has to do with the relationships the girls develop throughout the narrative, it will be dealt with in the next chapter. What I would like to focus on here, rather, is the difference in Katniss and Lena's discovery that even the rebels' faction has its own flaws, since this influences greatly the change in the relationship they have with the rebels.

### ***2.1.3 Revolt and Disillusionment***

Both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, after the initial encouragement given by the idea of an alternative government, that very idea proves to be a disappointment both for Katniss and for Lena. The dynamics are similar: when the heroines discover that the rebels (District 13 in Katniss's case, the Invalids in Lena's) have been using them without them knowing, they both start wondering whether the rebels are really any different from the regime. Although the initial situation is similar in the two trilogies, Katniss's and Lena's

behaviours differ both in their immediate reaction and in the relationship they develop with the rebels from this point onwards.

Katniss is revealed the truth at the end of Book II, when her mentor Haymitch explains to her that there was a plan to save her since the beginning of the 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games; that most districts are rebelling against the Capitol; that District 13 does indeed exist and that it is where Katniss is being taken. Katniss's reaction to this revelation is very sharp:

It's an awful lot to take in, this elaborate plan in which I was just a piece, just as I was meant to be a piece in the Hunger Games. Used without consent, without knowledge. At least in the Hunger Games, I knew I was being played with. My supposed friends have been a lot more secretive. (CF, 432)

This sounds very similar to what Lena says when her rebel friends Raven and Tack tell her that it was their plan, and not the regime's, to hijack her: “«You're just as bad as they are», I squeeze out, through the tightness of the fury in my throat, the heavy stone of disgust.” (Pan, 391). This episode, too, takes place at the end of the second book of the trilogy. However, in Lena's case, the conflict is resolved within a few pages, when Lena is rescued by Raven after running away, and forgives her for the rest:

Raven offers me her hand, helping me scoot out of the van. Her grip is strong.

«What's the magic phrase?», she says, as soon as my feet hit the pavement. She is relaxed now, smiling and easy.

«How did you find me?» I ask. She wants me to say thank you, but I don't. I don't have to. She gives my hand a squeeze before pulling away, and I know she knows how grateful I am. (Pan, 448)

Katniss's resentment, on the contrary, continues until the end of the trilogy. Here lies the greatest difference in Katniss's and Lena's approaches to politics: while Lena, throughout the third volume, never seems to have doubts about the rebels' cause and about the fact that she belongs to them, Katniss's doubts increase. She is suspicious towards the rebels, and particularly towards Coin, their leader; so much so that, at the end of Book III, even though she is given the possibility to kill Panem's President Snow – after she has been dreaming to do so for months – she kills Coin instead. This is, I believe, the most important difference between Katniss and Lena: as Sonya Sawyer Fritz underlines, the fact that Katniss makes her own decision about killing Coin “demonstrates that she is capable of thinking and acting as an independent political entity”<sup>97</sup>. Lena, on the contrary, does not achieve this degree of independence before the end of the novel, proving that Seelinger Trites' definitions of *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman* can be applied to the *The Hunger Games* and *Delirium* trilogies.

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<sup>97</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. “Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 24

## 2.2 Point of View: First-Person Narration

As I have mentioned in the previous section, both Collins and Oliver, in their trilogies, choose to use first-person narration. In this section, I am going to focus on two aspects of first-person narration and on their consequences: first, the portrayal of the character; second, the approach of the reader to the text. With respect to the depiction of the character, I am going to focus on the process of growth of the two heroines throughout the two trilogies, first discussing how the protagonist's words shape the development of subjectivity and identity, and then the change Katniss and Lena's agency and initially passive role undergo.

### 2.2.1 *Emerging Subjectivity and the Creation of Identity through Words*

As Miranda A. Green-Barteet underlines, "Claiming one's subjectivity is a major theme in YA literature"<sup>98</sup>. Subjectivity, she explains, is reached through rebellion: indeed, under a dystopian regime, it is hardly possible to develop subjectivity, and characters can only do so after their rebellion occurs. For Katniss, for instance, spending days in the woods hunting with Gale is not just a means of survival; it is also what makes her feel comfortable, whole, and happy:

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<sup>98</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. "I'm beginning to know who I am": The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 36

In the woods waits the only person with whom I can be myself. Gale. I can feel the muscles in my face relaxing, my pace quickening as I climb the hills to our place, a rock ledge overlooking a valley. A thicket of berry bushes protects it from unwanted eyes. The sight of him waiting there brings on a smile. Gale says I never smile except in the woods.

(HG, 7)

In short, Katniss can only be her true self if she rebels against the government and behaves illegally. In Lena's case, as we have seen, rebellion occurs later than it does for Katniss. In spite of this, even at the beginning of Book I, Lena has already begun to question her true identity; at times, she wonders if her personality is compatible with the rules imposed by the regime. She seems to be aware of the fact that she is too sensitive to be at her ease in a society where feelings are forbidden, and her thoughts confirm this: "Once Hana told me that she likes me because I'm for real – because I really feel things. But that's the whole problem: how much I feel things" (Del, 118). In both series, the only way for the protagonist to let her personality emerge from her actions is to subvert the authority of the regime by doing exactly what the law forbids to do. Furthermore, in both cases, the reader is informed about the girl's personality from her thoughts much more than from her actions.

Green-Barteet argues that rebellion is not simply the means through which subjectivity is achieved: she suggests that, by rebelling, teenage protagonists are also able to reach adulthood. Since, as she underlines, "the dystopian governments of these novels need their citizens to remain in an extended state of childhood if the governments are to

maintain absolute control”, the only manner for the protagonists to truly grow up is to rebel against the regime that forces them to continue behaving like children. I find Green-Barteet’s analysis to be particularly interesting if it is applied to Roberta Seelinger Trites’s definitions of *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*: as I have argued in the first chapter, I consider *The Hunger Games* trilogy to be a *Bildungsroman*, because Katniss has reached adulthood at the end of the trilogy, and the *Delirium* trilogy to be an *Entwicklungsroman*, because the reader only sees the heroine during the process of growing up and not at the end of it. In a way, then, Katniss is portrayed as more mature than Lena; bearing in mind, as I have mentioned, that the achievement of subjectivity represents the achievement of adulthood as well, it is useful to include Balaka Basu’s contribution to the volume *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* to this analysis. In her chapter about Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* series, Basu argues that, in a number of YA dystopian series, “at the end of their quests, the heroes of YA narratives tend to find not an individual identity but a collective one, defined mainly by membership in a particular group”<sup>99</sup>. I find this to be particularly relevant to the two trilogies I am analysing. If we think of the final scene of each series, the difference between Katniss and Lena is evident, and not simply because the former is already an adult while the latter is still a girl. The main difference, I believe, lies in the role they play in each of the two scenes. Lena is in the company of her Invalid friends, and is still

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<sup>99</sup> Basu, Balaka. “What Faction Are You In? The Pleasure Of Being Sorted In Veronica Roth’s *Divergent*”. In *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. Edited by Carrie Hintz, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 19

portrayed as a rebel: although she has had a prominent role in the rebellion, she is still defined by the group she belongs to. On the contrary, the character that Collins chooses to represent is a mother and a wife; although Katniss's trauma is still evident, she is nonetheless represented as an individual who has achieved her own maturity.

The fact that *The Hunger Games* trilogy deals with the issue of subjectivity in an original way is something many critics have underlined. Andre Guy Risko, for instance, stresses how

*The Hunger Games* becomes unique within YA literature because of its focus on the process of emerging subjectivity (...). In focusing on the process of subjectivity, *The Hunger Games* opens up new spaces for the possibility of ethical representation and new possibilities for imagining agency.<sup>100</sup>

As I have already mentioned in the first chapter, and as Risko shows here, Collins's trilogy marks an exception in YA literature in many ways: one of these ways is precisely the depiction of the main character. Along with the representation of Katniss's subjectivity, Collins's originality lies in the portrayal of the heroine's agency and of the shift from a passive role to an active one.

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<sup>100</sup> Risko, Andre Guy. "Katniss Everdeen's Liminal Choices and the Foundation of Revolutionary Ethics". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 80-81

### 2.2.2 *Opening Up Spaces for Agency*

If, as Anne M. Canavan and Sarah N. Petrovic state, in YA dystopian novels actions are often shaped by words <sup>101</sup>, it is easy to see why an analysis of the narrative aspect would be inherent to the agency of the main characters. We should not be surprised about the fact that the protagonists of young adult narratives often have more agency at the end of the series, especially if we are dealing with a development or coming of age novel. Still, it is interesting to analyse how the role of the protagonists changes from passive to active, and how linear this change is.

However, as far as *The Hunger Games* trilogy is concerned, Amy L. Montz stresses how the change is not linear at all, in Katniss's case: indeed, in most instances, the agency that the protagonist of a YA novel has is at first very limited, and increases over time. Collins, however, develops the issue of agency in different terms. At the beginning of the narrative, Katniss proves to be perfectly able to control her actions. Canavan and Petrovic underline how “Katniss manages four, at times conflicting, narratives – the role of the strong daughter and sister, the star-crossed lover, the tribute, and finally the Girl on Fire” <sup>102</sup>. Because the relationships with other characters will be dealt with in the next chapter, I would now like to focus on the two roles that Katniss plays which do not involve relationships with other people: the tribute and the Girl on Fire.

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<sup>101</sup> Canavan, Anne M., and Sarah N. Petrovic: “Tipping the Odds Ever in Her Favor: An Exploration of Narrative Control and Agency in the Novel and Film”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 47

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*



Starting from the tribute narrative, Andre Guy Risko stresses that a kid who participates in the Hunger Games can do so for two reasons: either their name is selected at random, making them unwilling participants, or, in the case of the Careers, they decide to volunteer after training for months, a volunteering which makes them willing participants. Katniss, Risko argues, marks an extraordinary exception: she volunteers to be a tribute, yet “no one regards Katniss’s decision as that of a willing participant”<sup>103</sup>. Her reasons to do so have to do with the relationship she has with her sister and will be discussed later on; for now, it is sufficient to stress that it is Katniss who creates the tribute narrative, and she does so on her own terms.

At the beginning of the trilogy, then, Katniss is already characterised by an impressive agency, as well as by a lack of passivity in her actions. As I have anticipated, however, Katniss’s agency does not simply increase over the course of the trilogy. As Amy L. Montz underlines, Katniss loses her agency throughout Book II and especially Book III, when she becomes a mere symbol of the revolt, without having an active role in it<sup>104</sup>: Montz stresses that “as Katniss embodies someone else’s definition of the Mockingjay, she shifts from ownership of the persona to a more passive recipient of the designation”<sup>105</sup>. In her analysis, Montz links the decrease of Katniss’s agency to the use the rebels make of her image: in a way which is similar to how the Capitol’s spectacle relied on her

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<sup>103</sup> Risko, Andre Guy. “Katniss Everdeen’s Liminal Choices and the Foundation of Revolutionary Ethics”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 85

<sup>104</sup> Montz, Amy L. “Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 146

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*

appearance, the rebels need her to be the face of the rebellion and to perform as the Mockingjay. Indeed, Montz concludes, “it is not until the rebellion is over and the revolution won that Katniss, instead of embodying the Mockingjay, truly *becomes* the Mockingjay.”

Lena’s process of change, on the contrary, is certainly less innovative, and follows faithfully the conventions of critical dystopias, of YA dystopias, and of novels of development. First and foremost, as Laura Miller argues, YA dystopian novels often appear to be set in a rather pleasant world, before “a crack opens in the façade”<sup>106</sup>. In *The Hunger Games*, the “crack in the façade” is opened long before the series starts, when Katniss is already perfectly aware of the dystopia she lives in, despite being just a little girl. In *Delirium*, on the contrary, the reader witnesses the breaking of this façade: for instance, during one of the first interactions between Lena and Alex, she starts having feelings that she does not seem to be able to control, and thoughts that decidedly go against what she has always been taught by the government:

Then I feel ashamed. He just saved my life. He saved my life – from the raiders. From the people who are supposed to protect us and keep us safe. From the people who are supposed to keep us safe from the people like Alex. (Del, 264)

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<sup>106</sup> Miller, Laura. “Fresh Hell: What’s behind the boom in dystopian fiction for young readers?”. *The New Yorker*, 14 June 2010

Even features which belong to critical dystopias manifest themselves in completely different ways in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*. As I have discussed in the first chapter, according to Tom Moylan, one of the main features of critical dystopias is that the protagonist is usually a “character who questions”<sup>107</sup>. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, however, the thoughts that Katniss has while she becomes aware of the faults of the government are not available to the reader, because, as we have seen, the girl is already aware at the beginning of the series.

On the contrary, Lena’s development is utterly clear and explicit, and this is possible thanks to first-person narration. The change that Lena undergoes is not immediate: she spends most of Book I wondering who the bad ones are, like she does in the following passage, when she is trying to understand whether it is worse to organise an illegal party, as she has always been taught, or to organise a round-up to shut down the party, hurting people and killing a dog:

Someone will hear something; the raiders will catch on, and then we’ll all be screwed. I do a mental correction. They’ll be screwed. I am not like these people on the other side of the door. I’m not them. (...) But then I think of Riley shuddering, going limp. I am not like those people either, the ones who did that, the ones who watched. Even the Richardsons didn’t bother trying to save him, their own dog. They didn’t even cover him up as he was dying. (Del, 254)

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<sup>107</sup> Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, p. 148

Although both Collins and Oliver write their series using first-person narration, the development of the character is, at times, portrayed in two utterly different ways. Not only, as we have seen, is Katniss more mature than Lena at the end of the last novel: she is also more mature at the beginning of the first one. Because of this, in *The Hunger Games*, the process that leads the protagonist to have a certain mindset is not as evident as it is in *Delirium*.

As I have anticipated, first-person narration does not only influence the development of the protagonist: it has an impact on the reader's experience as well, both as far as issues of sympathy and identification are concerned, and because the reader often finds himself in a privileged position, since he or she knows the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist much better than the other characters in the series.

### ***2.2.3 Sympathy and Identification: the Experience of the Reader***

Identification is a key concept in YA literature. According to Maria Nikolajeva, "young readers should be encouraged to identify with the central, or focalising character"<sup>108</sup>. In the trilogies I am analysing, however, the process that leads to identification is not necessarily straightforward. Nikolajeva argues that first-person narration allows the reader to share the protagonist's point of view much more easily<sup>109</sup>; nonetheless, both Collins and Oliver complicate this matter. While, in Book III of the *Delirium* trilogy,

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<sup>108</sup> Nikolajeva, Maria. *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 191

<sup>109</sup> Nikolajeva, Maria. "Exit Children's Literature?". In *The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.2 (1998): p. 221-236

Lena and her friend Hana alternate as narrators, forcing the reader to wonder to whom he or she relates more, in *The Hunger Games* Collins complicates the matter in a more subtle way, keeping Katniss as the only narrator for the whole trilogy.

As far as *The Hunger Games* is concerned, I consider Ann M. M. Childs's reading particularly relevant. Indeed, she argues that Collins finds a way to encourage the reader to sympathise not only with Katniss, but also with the Capitol. Despite Katniss's first-person narration, at times it is easier for the reader to relate to the experience of the privileged Capitol citizens' than to the experience of the districts kids, both because of the socio-economical group the readers belong to, and because of the challenge the kids in the series have to face, which is significantly different from the experience of the average reader <sup>110</sup>. I am going to focus on two of the consequences of this double identification. Firstly, by juxtaposing two possible groups of characters with whom the reader can sympathise, Collins creates "an ambiguous personal space that encourages safe, nonthreatening identification with a disadvantaged Other"; moreover, by making the readers relate both to the oppressor and to the oppressed, the novels make them "vicariously and more fully explore the nature of oppression" <sup>111</sup>. According to Childs, the liminal space occupied by young adults is fundamental to explain this ambiguous approach to the Other. To describe this peculiarity of YA conventions regarding the issue

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<sup>110</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. "The Privileged Reader as Capitol and Leaning Sympathy through Narrative". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 104

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*

of identification, Childs quotes Roberta Seelinger Trites's definition of liminality, and explains that it is exactly thanks to the adolescent's liminal nature that

[T]he adolescent novel as a form is especially conducive to allowing readers to enter and exit identification with Others as well as oppressors, trying out different levels of sympathy and experiencing why sympathy or lack thereof is central to Othering.<sup>112</sup>

It is certainly necessary to bear this mechanism in mind, which allows the reader to relate to both sets of characters regardless of their privilege. However, it is also necessary to consider that the reader has the advantage of knowing the protagonist's thoughts. At times, Katniss's thoughts are exactly what make the reader sympathise with the Other, not just because the Other's condition is more relatable due to his privilege, but also because Katniss often excuses other characters for their condescending behaviour towards the oppressor. The key example is Katniss's prep team: although they belong to the social group which has always been able to lead a much better life than her precisely thanks to the deprivation of the people of the districts, she never accuses them. Rather, she hints at their lack of awareness: "They don't see... I mean, they don't know..." (MJ, 60). Childs argues that the mechanism used by Collins, which creates a nuanced picture and does not

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<sup>112</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. "The Privileged Reader as Capitol and Leaning Sympathy through Narrative". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 105

openly criticise the dystopian government in which the novels are set, hides a critique which is actually more powerful:

*The Hunger Games* encourages identification with non-privileged and oppressed and so *persuades* readers that privilege blinds them to the suffering others. (...) Therefore, it is more successful than the “more radical” and more forceful novels that demonize privileged groups, and I suggest that its greater success makes it, actually, the more radical text. (...) The text demonstrates to readers, in a way in which they can easily relate without being accused, the shades of gray inherent in oppression and blameworthiness.

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Oliver’s rhetorical device is quite different from Collins’s. In Book III, both Lena and Hana narrate the events which close the *Delirium* trilogy. While Lena is now part of the Resistance, and her faith in the revolt has grown stronger and stronger, Hana has been cured, and is now mayor Hargrove son’s wife-to-be. At first, it is hardly possible to relate to the newly cured Hana, who seems to deny not only the feelings of affection she used to have for Lena (“Another change: I can think about 37 Brooks now, and Lena, (...) without the old strangled feeling” (Req, 21)), but also her initial interest in the revolt (“I was glad the Invalids were executed (...) We are not the evil ones.” (Req, 23)).

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<sup>113</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. “The Privileged Reader as Capitol and Leaning Sympathy through Narrative”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 111

Because Hana sides with Lena's enemies, readers do not, at first, sympathise with her: indeed, they have learnt to identify with Lena, who has been the only narrator for two thirds of the series. However, the arrogance that Hana flaunts at the beginning of Book III is soon replaced by an overwhelming sense of insecurity, and by several doubts about the efficacy of the cure:

The truth is, I'm not fine. I'm worried that I can't stop worrying about Jenny and how thin she looked. I'm worried that I've been thinking of Lena again. (...) That's why I'm worried: Everything will go up in smoke if the procedure has not worked correctly.

(Req, 42-43)

This way, Oliver makes the reader sympathise with the oppressor too, or, at least, with someone who belongs to the same social group of the oppressor. For most of Book III, Oliver depicts Hana as a victim who is trying to atone for her mistakes, bringing food to Lena's family, for instance, or showing concern for her husband's first wife, who has been imprisoned in the Crypts, Portland's prison. Oliver creates a sense of uncertainty in which the reader cannot decide whether Hana is good or not: for instance, right after showing to be willing to repent, she reveals her involvement in Lena and Alex's case:

But the guilt goes even deeper than that. It, too, is dust: layers and layers of it have accumulated. Because if it weren't for me, Lena and Alex would never have been caught at all. I told on them. I was jealous. God forgive me, for I have sinned. (Req, 207-208)



What Oliver is trying to show, I believe, is that her characters are not either completely positive or completely negative. The ending of the *Delirium* trilogy is an open one, especially with regard to Hana, whose destiny is not known to the reader. Lena still emerges as the narrator with whom it is easier to relate: indeed, even though Hana proves to be willing to atone for her mistakes, the reader is informed of this by Lena, not by Hana:

«I almost forgot.» She moves toward me, her dress rustling, and for a moment I am struck by the impression that she is a ghost. «Grace is in the Highlands. 31 Wynnewood Road. They're living there now.» (...) Impulsively, without thinking about what I am doing, I reach out and seize her hand. Two long pulses, two short ones. Our old signal. Hana looks startled; then, slowly, her face relaxes. For just one second, she shines as though lit up by a torch from within. «I remember...» she whispers. (Req, 446)

By having two narrators who support two opposed causes, Oliver tries to create nuanced characters, forcing the reader to at least consider the reasons behind the oppressor's behaviour.

#### ***2.2.4 The Reader's Privileged Point of View***

In their analysis, Canavan and Petrovic underline something that might sound trivial: in first-person narration, the perspective of the reader is always a privileged one, as he or she is always aware of the thoughts of the narrator, and not just of the actions and facts

which take place in the book. Canavan and Petrovic, however, give prominence to a fundamental issue: the juxtaposition between the heroine's feelings and her public persona<sup>114</sup>. In both series, indeed, the protagonist finds herself in a situation where she cannot afford to show what she truly feels, and needs to appear much stronger than she truly is. This happens for various reasons: not only because, by Book III of each trilogy, they have both become fundamental for the revolt, but also in order to protect their loved ones. Although in some instances, and especially in *The Hunger Games*, the reason why the protagonist does not express her true feelings has to do with the relationships she develops, how she feels is still conveyed through first-person narration.

In the first book of the trilogy, the fact that Katniss needs to hide her emotions is quite evident since the very beginning, during the reaping scene:

Prim is screaming hysterically behind me. She's wrapped her skinny arms around me like a vise. «No, Katniss! No! You can't go!» «Prim, let go,» I say harshly, because this is upsetting me and I don't want to cry. When they televise the replay of the reapings tonight, everyone will make note of my tears, and I'll be marked as an easy target. A weakling. I will give no one that satisfaction. «Let go!» (HG, 26)

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<sup>114</sup> Canavan, Anne M., and Sarah N. Petrovic: "Tipping the Odds Ever in Her Favor: An Exploration of Narrative Control and Agency in the Novel and Film". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 48

At this point, Katniss's main preoccupation is to "be marked as an easy target". She continues to have this concern throughout all of Book I: for example, she gets furious at Peeta for making her look "weak" by revealing that he has a crush on her (HG, 157). Even in this instance, however, the development of Katniss's character is not linear: she is already able to mask her feelings at the beginning of the trilogy, and by Book III her concern of looking weak has been replaced with hatred and anger. Although the reader is still informed about Katniss's feelings through first-person narration, she does not try to conceal them anymore. For instance, what motivates her is the thirst for revenge and the determination to kill President Snow. She repeats this several times in her thoughts, but she also states it clearly during one of the meetings with President Coin: "My paper's crumpled into a ball in my right fist. I flatten the sheet against the table and read the rickety letters. «Just one more thing. I kill Snow.»" (MJ, 47).

Lena's development, on the contrary, is more linear, as we have already seen in other instances. In Book I, the person from whom Lena feels the need to hide her thoughts the most is her aunt Carol, who has behaved as a mother for her since Lena's own mother died. Even though Lena is terribly concerned about showing how she feels to her aunt, she initially struggles to hide them:

«Nervous about your evaluation?» I turn around. My aunt Carol is standing in the doorway, her hands folded. «No,» I say, though this is a lie. She smiles, just barely, a

brief, flitting thing. «Don't worry. You'll be fine. Take your shower and then I'll help you with your hair. We can review your answers on the way.» (Del, 9)

Unlike Katniss, who is already able to hide her pain and her concerns when she tells goodbye to her mother and sister at the beginning of Book I, Lena learns to do so throughout the trilogy. Again, this proves how Katniss, at the beginning of the series, is presented as a much more mature character than Lena. The shock that makes Lena become numb takes place at the end of Book I, when she tries to escape to the Wilds – the lands outside the control of the government – with Alex, and starts fearing that he has been killed while escaping. Because, in Book II, Oliver alternates chapters set in the present to flashbacks, the reader is shown Lena's process of growth in retrospective, and only after being introduced to the new Lena through her own words:

I'm pushing aside the memory of my nightmare, pushing aside thoughts of Alex, pushing aside thoughts of Hana and my old school, push, push, push, like Raven taught me to do. The old life is dead. (...) But the old Lena is dead too. I buried her. I left her beyond a fence, behind a wall of smoke and flame. (Pan, 3-4)

In Book III, although Lena has become a fundamental part of the Resistance, she is still terribly concerned about the opinion that others have about her, especially Raven: “My throat begins to tighten, but I refuse to let Raven see me cry” (Req, 82). As we have seen, Katniss does not have this concern anymore, in Book III. In District 13, she often hides

when she is upset, not caring that the others know: in this case, unlike in Oliver's trilogy, the reader is informed about Katniss's feelings from her actions as well, and not just from her thoughts.

## 2.3 Gender and Femininity

### 2.3.1 *Femininity in Dystopia*

In her contribution to the volume *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games*, Amy L. Montz argues that the common ground between girl culture and dystopian societies is surveillance<sup>115</sup>. I have already dealt with the links between gender and dystopia in the first chapter; in particular, I have mentioned Raffaella Baccolini, according to whom critical dystopias mark an extraordinary change which affects, among other matters, the role of women as well. As we have seen, Baccolini argues that critical dystopias open up a space where even characters who are traditionally “not empowered by the hegemonic rule”, such as women, can have agency<sup>116</sup>. This space for agency, however, has to be opened up throughout the trilogy. At the beginning of both series, indeed, Katniss and Lena do not live in a society which empowers them. As Miranda A. Green-Barteet argues, the protagonists of YA dystopian novels are often “coming of age in oppressive societies which do not value strong, independent, opinionated young women”<sup>117</sup>. As a consequence, Green-Barteet argues, one of the questions these novels try to answer is how to redefine the role of young women<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Montz, Amy L. “Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 108

<sup>116</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7

<sup>117</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, pp. 33-34

<sup>118</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. “I’m beginning to know who I am”: The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 35

For instance, the political interest that Katniss and Lena develop, which I have dealt with in the previous chapter, is one way of redefining girlhood. One of the main reasons for which it is difficult for girls to engage politically is well explained by Sonya Sawyer Fritz, who quotes Jessica Taft's study *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas* and applies it to YA dystopias with female protagonists. As Taft argues, traits which are explicitly feminine are "often viewed to be incompatible with an activist identity and social movement participation"<sup>119</sup>. This has two implications. One, as Taft argues again, is that the motivation for girls to be interested in political activism often rises out of behaviours that are traditionally associated with women, such as "the role of care giver and nurturer"<sup>120</sup>. If, from a certain point of view, the stereotypical representation of femininity seems to deny women the possibility of becoming involved in politics, from another perspective it seems to overcome the convention according to which politics are exclusively a male interest; however, to assert that women are interested in political issues because they are naturally inclined to be "more emotional, more caring, more sensitive"<sup>121</sup> actually reinforces those stereotypes.

Stereotypes about femininity can concern behaviour as well as appearance. Indeed, the second implication has to do with the interest the stereotypical girl has in "dresses and

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<sup>119</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. "Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 26

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>121</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. "Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 27

shiny things”, as Amy L. Montz defines them <sup>122</sup>. Montz argues that, in a dystopian society, there is often a form of control which is specifically aimed at young girls:

(...) these societies (...) keep the female protagonists distracted with stereotypical markers of girlhood – dresses, boys, shiny things – as a means of deterring individual agency and resistance against the oppressive totalitarian control of a governmental system. <sup>123</sup>

If, in a way, stereotypes about girlhood and femininity in general seem to empower the protagonists of these series, in other instances they add up to the reasons why they are supposed not only to avoid rebellion, but also to avoid showing interest in politics altogether. Indeed, as Ann M. M. Childs suggests, these protagonists are often “not just battling their governments but also ideas of who and what they are based in stereotype” <sup>124</sup>. The stereotypes Katniss and Lena have to fight show some similarities, as I have argued, but they also show a number of differences, because of the differences in the worlds they live in.

In Panem, for instance, conventions about genres are significantly different from those of our world. Their rules are much less strict than ours, especially as far as fashion is

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<sup>122</sup> Montz, Amy L. “Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 109

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>124</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. “The Privileged Reader as Capitol and Leaning Sympathy through Narrative”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 199



concerned and as for defining what is acceptable for each gender to wear, in terms of clothes and make-up. In her contribution to the volume *The Hunger Games and Philosophy*, Jessica Miller argues that, in Panem, there do not seem to be rules which depend on gender. She also adds that

In our culture, gender differences can be seen in the application of makeup and in the types of cosmetic surgeries women and men undergo, as well as in the location and style of tattoos and piercings. But in the Capitol, it's all the same for women and men.<sup>125</sup>

Still, one might argue, it is Katniss, and not Peeta, who has to go through the “beauty process” before the Games. Katniss herself underlines this when, in Book II, she asks Effie Trinket if Peeta will need his prep team to work on him, to which Effie answers “Not the way you do” (CF, 54). After this conversation, Katniss reflects on this, and not without some resentment:

What does this mean? It means I get to spend the morning having the hair ripped off my body while Peeta sleeps in. I hadn't thought about it much, but in the arena at least some of the boys got to keep their body hair whereas none of the girls did. (CF, 54)

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<sup>125</sup> Miller, Jessica. “She has no idea. The effect she can have. Katniss and the Politics of Gender”. In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2012, p. 153.

While it is true that Collins tries to present Panem as a society where gender rules are not as strict as the ones the reader is accustomed to, many of the dynamics of our world repeat themselves in similar ways in *The Hunger Games* trilogy as well.

Lena, on the contrary, lives in a world which is more clearly characterised as similar to ours. Girls are expected to wear make up, like shopping, and in general care about their appearance; if they don't, they are regarded – and regard themselves – as weird, as this passage at the beginning of Book I proves:

The makeup Aunt Carol insisted I wear makes my skin feel coated and slick. (...) I don't like makeup, have never been interested in clothes or lip gloss. My best friend, Hana, thinks I'm crazy, but of course she would. She's absolutely gorgeous – even when she just twists her blond hair into a messy knot on the top of her head, she looks as though she's just had it styled. (Del, 16)

Despite differences in their characterisation as well as in the societies they live in, Katniss and Lena seem to share a similar feature, which might be defined as a “problematic approach to conventional femininity”. I am going to deal with two aspects of their approach: first, the models by whom they are influenced; second, their relationship with masculinity.

### 2.3.2 Gender Models

In order to analyse the behaviours of the protagonists of *The Hunger Games* and of *Delirium*, then, it is first useful to look at the models which shape their personality.

As we have seen, some critics argue that, in *The Hunger Games*, gender roles are more fluid than ours. Jessica Miller argues that differences between genders are reduced not only in what regards appearance, but also as far as roles are concerned: for instance, in the framework of the Games, both boys and girls must participate; moreover, as Katniss explicitly says and as Miller stresses, the Gamemakers “hail from both sexes”<sup>126</sup>. Meghan Gilbert-Hickey goes as far as to assert that, in *The Hunger Games*, it is at times impossible to distinguish feminine from masculine.<sup>127</sup>

On one hand, this reading is accurate. On the other, however, femininity is often decidedly stressed in the trilogy: indeed, except for Katniss, all of the other main female characters are clearly identified as feminine. As Ellyn Lem and Holly Hassel underline, they are all characterised by one aspect of stereotyped femininity: Prim is “innocent and naive”; Katniss’s mother is “emotionally fragile”; and Effie Trinket is “shallow, vain, and twittering”<sup>128</sup>. This, they argue, is stressed in order to underline Katniss’s masculine features, which I am going to examine later.

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<sup>126</sup> Miller, Jessica. “She has no idea. The effect she can have. Katniss and the Politics of Gender”. In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 152

<sup>127</sup> Gilbert-Hickey, Meghan. “Gender Rolls: Bread and Resistance in The Hunger Games Trilogy”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 96

<sup>128</sup> Lem, Hellyn, and Holly Hassel. “‘Killer’ Katniss and ‘Lover Boy’ Peeta: Suzanne Collins’s Defiance of Gender-Genred Reading”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne*

The role models that shape Katniss's and Lena's approaches to femininity are not only those by which their society is shaped: they are influenced by the women (and men) in their lives too. The first characters by whom the protagonists are shaped are their mother, and, in Katniss's case, her father as well. As June Pulliam underlines, Katniss identifies with both genders; in both cases, her first and most important role models are her parents<sup>129</sup>. At the beginning, however, she identifies with her father much more than with her mother, and is indeed portrayed as an utterly masculine character. Pulliam highlights that

Katniss's attire is also masculine and connects her to her father: throughout the Trilogy, Katniss usually wears pants, boots, and her father's hunting jacket. Furthermore, Katniss identifies with her father rather than her mother (...).<sup>130</sup>

The main reason why young Katniss takes her father as a model much more than her mother is the relationship she has with her. After her husband's death, Katniss's mother falls into a deep depression, for which her daughter does not show sympathy or comprehension. For instance, at the beginning of Book I, when Katniss's mother states that after her husband died she got sick, Katniss mentally replies that the "part about her being ill might be true. I've seen her bring back people suffering from immobilizing

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*Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 123

<sup>129</sup> Pulliam, Jane. "Real or Not Real – Katniss Everdeen Loves Peeta Melark (*sic*): The Lingering Effects of Discipline in the "Hunger Games" Trilogy". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 181

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*

sadness since. Perhaps it is a sickness, *but it's one we can't afford*' (HG, 41; italics mine). Katniss cannot avoid being angry at her mother for forcing her to be the family provider. As Jennifer Mitchell argues, Katniss is so determined to show her masculine side in order to underline that she is different from her mother: "Katniss explicitly rejects virtually all aspects of her mother's femininity, manifested primarily in her art of healing and in her melancholy and weak temperament"<sup>131</sup>. Her repeated attempt to highlight her distance from her mother is not only due to her resentment, but also to her lack of understanding of her mother's feelings. As Katie Arosteguy underlines,

While Katniss's father teaches her how to hunt and bargain in the Hob – skills that ultimately allow Katniss to keep her mother and her sister alive following her father's death – it is her mother's "dead eyes" that haunt her because she cannot, at times, understand them.<sup>132</sup>

Katniss struggles with her femininity because she lacks a model with whom she can identify. Both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, the first shift towards a higher degree of femininity takes place at the beginning of Book I, when they are being dressed and prepared for an institutional situation imposed by the government: on the reaping day

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<sup>131</sup> Mitchell, Jennifer. "Of Queer Necessity: Panem's Hunger Games as Gender Games". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 130

<sup>132</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. "I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 151

and by her mother in Katniss's case, on the Evaluation day and by her aunt in Lena's. For both girls, the first change in the appearance aims at making them look more feminine, and it happens thanks to the character which represents the main mother figure. Even Lena, however, has a complicated relationship with her aunt, who has raised her after her mother disappeared. Both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, the scene where the girls are being prepared is perceived by them as an unnatural way of forcing them to be something they are not.

As I have said, Lena's approach to her mother and to female models differs substantially from Katniss's. In general, rather than a role model, older women in Portland serve as constant reminder of the fact that the Delirium is something that should be feared, and that the only honest life that can be led is as cured people. In Lena's world, there is no counterpart to Panem's Capitol: there is no area or social class where clothes and make up are so relevant. Femininity is not flaunted through appearance, neither in Portland nor, obviously, in the Wilds. The true contrast that Oliver chooses to represent, in my opinion, is the capacity of caring for others that the women of the Wilds prove to have, and that cured women obviously lack, due to the cure itself. Lena does become more feminine over the course of the trilogy; however, this regards her behaviour much more than her appearance. As this has to do with the relationships she develops with other character, it will be dealt with later.

### 2.3.3. *Adolescence, Femininity, and Male Features*

In a discourse about the development of femininity, it is particularly important to bear in mind the age of the characters we are dealing with. Katniss and Lena are forced by their governments to be more feminine when they have hardly discovered their growing bodies. At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is sixteen years old, while at the beginning of *Delirium* Lena is seventeen: they both belong to what Sonya Sawyer Fritz defines as the “gendered period of female adolescence”<sup>133</sup>. Sawyer Fritz asserts that, in YA dystopian fiction, it is often necessary that the events take place during this period, in order for the female protagonist to foster the rebellion. Moreover, as Sara K. Day adds quoting Janet Holland,

[y]oung women are under pressure to construct their material bodies into a particular model of femininity which is both inscribed on the surface of their bodies (...) and disembodied in the sense of detachment from sensuality and alienation from their material bodies.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Sawyer Fritz, Sonya. “Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfield, and Moira Young”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 18

<sup>134</sup> Day, Sara K. “Docile Bodies, Dangerous Bodies: Sexual Awakening and Social Resistance in Young Adult Dystopian Novels”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 78

The change girls undergo during adolescence, as I have mentioned, regards both their appearance and their behaviour. As for the relationship that the heroines have with their bodies, Sara K. Day underlines how, in most YA dystopian series, the process which leads the heroines to be more confident is given particular prominence: indeed, a greater awareness of their body also means a higher understanding of their society and of the way their society uses their body. As Day asserts, “the adolescent woman’s body is frequently understood as a challenge to both social and personal control, especially as it is often presented as the location of others’ desires more than a young woman’s own desires”<sup>135</sup>. Both Katniss and Lena have to accept and adapt to the plans others have made about their bodies before they even become fully aware of them. This is how Lena defines herself at the beginning of Book I:

I’m not ugly, but I’m not pretty, either. Everything is in-between. I have eyes that aren’t green or brown, but a muddle. I’m not thin, but I’m not fat, either. The only thing you could definitely say about me is this: I’m short. (Del, 16)

When Lena says this, however, her aunt has just finished insisting that Lena wears make up for the Evaluation Day. Although Lena does not seem to care about her looks, her aunt knows that she needs to look feminine in order to make an impression and, as a consequence, be given the possibility to marry a wealthy man.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem*



In Katniss's case, too, her body becomes controlled by others right when it is changing and she is discovering it. When her prep team is preparing her before the Hunger Games, for instance, this is how she comments on the matter: "My legs, arms, torso, underarms, and parts of my eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving me like a plucked bird, ready for roasting. I don't like it. My skin feels sore and tingling and intensely vulnerable" (HG, 71). The display of femininity that the Capitol imposes on Katniss makes her feel uncomfortable, quite similarly to how Lena feels when her aunt makes her wear make up. If they do not feel at their ease when they behave as females, does this necessarily mean that what makes them feel comfortable is behaving as males?

Katniss and Lena, as we have seen, are not characterised by their femininity, especially at the beginning of the trilogy. Quite the opposite: they share features which are usually considered distinctive of male characters. First and foremost, as Ellyn Lem and Holly Hassel note, the young character that rebels is conventionally a boy: "Whereas boys were often encouraged to rebel and challenge authority, female characters were given fewer opportunities for rebellion in girls' books and often "settled down" to a conforming complacency"<sup>136</sup>. In addition to their rebellious attitude, Katniss and Lena are usually not considered feminine heroines due to the nature of the concerns they have. As we have seen, none of them is interested either in clothes or in make up. As argued by Amy L.

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<sup>136</sup> Lem, Hellyn, and Holly Hassel. "Killer' Katniss and 'Lover Boy' Peeta: Suzanne Collins's Defiance of Gender-Genred Reading". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 120

Montz, Lena's concerns "are those of both genders"<sup>137</sup>: while Oliver does not depict her protagonist with the traditional features associated with femininity, she does not even play with her masculine nature, as Collins does with Katniss. Lena is simply a tomboyish character; Katniss, on the contrary, actually displays features that make her look more masculine than feminine. Lem and Hassel define Katniss as a "'male identified' female character"<sup>138</sup>. Moreover, they stress how Katniss is "most powerful when she embraces masculine ways"<sup>139</sup>: performing as a feminine character makes her weak, while behaving in a masculine way makes her stronger, because she follows her natural inclination.

Undoubtedly, Katniss's relationship with gender changes throughout the trilogy. Although other characters work to make her look and her behaviour more feminine, what is relevant is that, at the beginning, she has no feminine features. As Jessica Miller notes, in the very first scene of Book I, "[e]xcept for the reference to her 'long dark braid' (which she tucks into a cap) there's nothing to suggest that Katniss is a girl"<sup>140</sup>. This does not only regard her appearance: in that scene, her main concern is to find food for her family. If compared to Lena, the difference in the nature of their concerns is quite evident: while

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<sup>137</sup> Montz, Amy L. "Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 110

<sup>138</sup> Lem, Hellyn, and Holly Hassel. "'Killer' Katniss and 'Love Boy' Peeta: Suzanne Collins's Defiance of Gender-Genred Reading". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 118

<sup>139</sup> Lem, Hellyn, and Holly Hassel. "'Killer' Katniss and 'Love Boy' Peeta: Suzanne Collins's Defiance of Gender-Genred Reading". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 124

<sup>140</sup> Miller, Jessica. "She has no idea. The effect she can have. Katniss and the Politics of Gender". In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 145

what worries Lena is the fear of the Delirium, a fear that does not mark her as belonging to a specific gender, the role of the provider that Katniss takes on is traditionally associated with male characters. Once she begins to perform as a traditional female character, however, two things happen. First, as Jane Pulliam notes, she becomes more powerful throughout the trilogy precisely because she is able to behave both as a male and as a female: “Katniss’s androgynous gender performance gives her increased agency”<sup>141</sup>. Second, she becomes so good at performing a female role that she “is able to transition immediately and seamlessly between genders whenever necessary”<sup>142</sup>, as Jennifer Mitchell underlines.

As I have said before, these dynamics are only valid for Katniss. However, there is one aspect which is dealt with in similar terms in the two trilogies. Indeed, both for Katniss and for Lena, romantic bonds seem to have a central role in the development of a more feminine identity. Several YA literature scholars have commented on this issue; Jessica Miller, for instance, argues that Katniss’s womanhood “seems clearest when she is positioned as Peeta’s love interest”<sup>143</sup>. This can be said about Lena too, as we will see in the next chapter, where I will deal with the relationships that Katniss and Lena develop, both with boys and with characters that take care of them or of which they take care.

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<sup>141</sup> Pulliam, Jane. “Real or Not Real – Katniss Everdeen Loves Peeta Melark (*sic*): The Lingering Effects of Discipline in the “Hunger Games” Trilogy”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 181

<sup>142</sup> Mitchell, Jennifer. “Of Queer Necessity: Panem’s Hunger Games as Gender Games”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 132

<sup>143</sup> Miller, Jessica. “She has no idea. The effect she can have. Katniss and the Politics of Gender”. In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 155

### 3) Social Relationships

As I have anticipated in the previous chapters, several issues concerning Katniss's and Lena's development can be best understood by focusing on the relationships in which these two protagonists are involved. While the focus will continue to be their gender, in particular in relation to the dystopian societies they live in, this chapter will deal with the other characters in the two trilogies as well. Although I am going to start from the romantic relationships the two girls have, this chapter will also deal with the other kind of bonds that they create: in particular, I will discuss the ones in which the main point is taking care, both when they take care of someone else and when someone else is taking care of them.

#### 3.1 The Romance Plot

Over the last few years, romantic relationships have become increasingly prominent as a theme in YA literature. As Brian Gillis and Joanna Simpson state in *Sexual Content in Young Adult Literature: Reading between the Sheets*, "Young adult dystopian novels contain elements of science fiction, fantasy, and, more recently, plenty of romance"<sup>144</sup>. The romantic experiences that Collins and Oliver choose to describe share similar features, such as the element of the choice between two boys and the meaning of romance in the discourse concerning Katniss's and Lena's rebellion, as well as aspects that are

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<sup>144</sup> Gillis, Bryan, and Joanna Simpson. *Sexual Content in Young Adult Literature: Reading Between the Sheets*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, p. 94

more problematic, such as an excessively traditional and patriarchal portrayal of relationships and gender roles inside the couple.

### ***3.1.1 Romance as Rebellion***

Both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, romance is strictly linked to rebellion: in the two series, the motivation for the revolt is interdependent with the romantic interests that the girls develop. Initially, however, this is described in different terms by the two authors. Indeed, as I have already suggested elsewhere, Katniss's initial awareness of the unfair system which controls her life is spontaneous, and is influenced neither by Peeta nor by Gale. However, although her lifestyle is based on illegal hunting even before the Games, the true first challenging act towards the Capitol happens because of her interest towards Peeta. Indeed, when Katniss impulsively decides to threaten to eat poisonous berries with Peeta at the end of the Games, so that one of them does not have to kill the other in order for the Games to finish, she does not do so with the idea of a revolt in mind. Rather, she is simply trying to avoid that one of her worst fears becomes true: "«You're not leaving me here alone,» I say. Because if he dies, I'll never go home, not really. I'll spend the rest of my life in this arena trying to think my way out" (HG, 401). This thought has hunted her since the beginning of the Games, and when she makes the decision, a few lines later, she does not even think about the consequences: her main concern, in that moment, is to save both herself and Peeta.

Unlike Katniss, Lena has no interest in politics before meeting Alex. Indeed, in her case, it is Alex who makes her interested in the revolt, and it is exactly after getting to know Alex that Lena behaves rebelliously for the first time. Although in both series the role of one of the boys is central to the relationship of the heroine with rebellion and politics, it is so in different ways, and not only because of the heroine's initial stage of involvement in these issues. The matter of sexual awakening, for instance, is dealt with in completely different terms in the two trilogies. In *The Hunger Games*, and in Book I in particular, intimacy is first and foremost the means through which Katniss protects herself from the Capitol. Although, at a certain point, she begins to develop true feelings for Peeta, the two levels – her actual feelings and the performance she has to put up for the Capitol – continue to be mixed. During the Games, for instance, when Peeta is ill, Katniss begins to realise that the way Peeta makes her feel is changing: “This is the first kiss that we’re both fully aware of. (...) This is the first kiss that makes me want another” (HG, 350). A few pages later, however, they finally receive the food and medicines they have been waiting for days. Peeta does not realise it, but Katniss knows that it is a reward for their behaviour:

Peeta wriggles back inside, his face lit up like the sun. «I guess Haymitch finally got tired of watching us starve.» «I guess so,» I answer. But in my head I can hear Haymitch's smug, if slightly exasperated, words, «Yes, that's what I'm looking for, sweetheart.» (HG, 355)

Throughout the series, Katniss increasingly becomes accustomed to these dynamics, and she learns to take advantage from them.

In the *Delirium* trilogy, however, intimacy and sexual awakening take on an additional meaning. As Sara K. Day argues, in YA dystopian novels with female protagonists, sexual awakening is often treated “as impetus for social resistance”<sup>145</sup>. Although I agree with Day as for the central role of sexual awakening in *The Hunger Games* as well<sup>146</sup>, I believe that in *Delirium* the issue is explored in more detail. As I have argued, in Oliver’s trilogy the interest for rebellion arises in Lena uniquely because of the involvement she has with Alex. Not only does she consider rebellious behaviours for the first time when she becomes more emotionally and physically involved with him; after they have become closer to one another, she also begins to doubt whether she truly belongs with the cured people or not, and she realises that she only feels comfortable with Alex: “My people – or at least, my old people. I don’t know who I am anymore, or where I belong. That’s not totally true. I know I belong with Alex.” In addition to this, when Lena explicitly addresses the issue of sex for the first time, she finds herself in the Wilds:

At the opposite end is a twin bed. My stomach does a tiny flip when I see it, and a thousand memories flood me at once – Carol sitting on my bed and telling me, in her measured voice, about the expectations of husband and wife; (...) Hana wondering out loud in the

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<sup>145</sup> Day, Sara K. “Docile Bodies, Dangerous Bodies: Sexual Awakening and Social Resistance in Young Adult Dystopian Novels”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 76

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*

locker room what sex feels like, while I hissed at her to be quiet, checking over my shoulder to make sure no one was listening. (Del, 349)

This is certainly due to the fact that, in the Wilds, she is free to express her attraction to Alex, which she cannot do in Portland; it is also proof of the fact that, as I have underlined elsewhere, under the control of the dystopian regime characters are not free to grow up and behave as adults. Finally, the link between sex and rebellion highlights what Day argues too: if it was not for Alex, Lena would never have become involved in the revolt. For this reason, I argue that Katniss's case is somewhat different: although Peeta has a prominent role in her involvement in the rebellion, Collins depicts her as a girl who is concerned about social injustice even before their romance. This, again, underlines the different degree of maturity that Katniss and Lena display at the beginning of the trilogy.

### ***3.1.2 Choice in Dystopia***

Amy L. Montz argues that “[t]he illusion of choice – taking away actual choice and limiting it – is (...) the foundation of life in a dystopian society”<sup>147</sup>. When we deal with the romance plot in a dystopian work, the choice of a partner is a crucial aspect. It is so for different reasons: first, even under the dystopian regimes I discuss, choice is limited, although the dynamics to limit it are different in Panem and in Portland; second, both

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<sup>147</sup> Montz, Amy L. “Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 109



girls have to choose between two possible partners, and they choose according to a different logic.

As for the social context the two girls live in, like I have said, Panem and Portland limit choice in different ways. In Oliver's trilogy, the controlling aspect is explicitly linked to the lack of choice, as far as romantic partners are concerned: because romantic love is illegal, it is the government that decides who each citizen can marry, as Lena explains:

In the coming months the evaluators will send me a list of four or five approved matches. One of them will become my husband after I graduate college (...). The evaluators will do their best to match me with people who received a similar score in the evaluations. As much as possible they try to avoid any huge disparities in intelligence, temperament, social background, and age. (Del, 10)

Because, as we have seen, at the beginning of Book I Lena does not have any awareness of the dystopia she lives in, this fake choice does not disturb her, and, even in this case, it is Hana who tries to draw Lena's attention to the matter, to which Lena replies "Every choice is limited (...) That's life." (Del, 24)

In Panem, on the contrary, the government does not explicitly deny the possibility to choose a partner. However, even in this case, two issues are at stake. First and foremost, we know that citizens are not free to travel from one country to the other; although this is not specifically aimed at limiting the choice of a partner, it does undoubtedly limit choice too. In *The Hunger Games*, however, Katniss's choice is limited because of her specific

situation, much more than because of laws that are valid for everyone. In her case, indeed, and in Book II in particular, she cannot choose Gale over Peeta because of President Snow's imposition. Realising this is terribly painful:

I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to. I will never be allowed to live alone.

I will have to be forever in love with Peeta. The Capitol will insist on it. I'll have a few years maybe, because I'm still only sixteen, to stay with my mother and Prim.

And then ... and then ... (...) I'll have to marry Peeta. (CF, 50)

The indecision between Gale and Peeta is the other main problem that regards choice; it is similar, at first glance, to Lena's situation with Alex and Julian. I say "at first glance" because, although in both series the main protagonist has feelings for two different boys, it is only in *The Hunger Games* that we actually have proof of whom Katniss chooses. Even in this case, the main difference is that, in Oliver's trilogy, Lena is not portrayed as an adult, as Katniss is in Collins's trilogy. Consequently, I will concentrate on Katniss, as in *Delirium* the theme of the protagonist's actual choice is only hinted at.

Before dealing with the choice that Katniss makes, I would like to focus on the symbolic meaning that each boy has in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. As Katherine R. Broad asserts, indeed, "each boy represents a different path out of dystopia"<sup>148</sup>. This is exemplified by

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<sup>148</sup> Broad, Katherine R. "The Dandelion in the Spring: Utopia as Romance in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games Trilogy*". In *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. Edited by Carrie Hintz, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 118

the events which take place at the end of Book III. While Gale's "final act of war (...) finally clarifies to Katniss the full cost of revolution"<sup>149</sup>, with the loss of her sister Prim as well as dozens of other kids, Peeta is among the ones who, unlike Katniss, votes against the introduction of new Hunger Games for Panem's kids. Katniss herself is aware of this fundamental difference between Gale and Peeta, and of the implications it has:

[W]hat I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that. (HG, 436)

The forementioned final acts of war of the two boys are precisely the reason why Katniss cannot choose Gale. Indeed, unlike Lena's, Katniss's choice has precise reasons. First, Katniss expects from Gale a higher level of understanding as well as loyalty, because of the amount of experiences they have shared since their fathers died. Moreover, as Abigail E. Myers explains, Katniss's choice is ethically motivated:

Finally, she chooses [Peeta] because the alternative, choosing Gale, would mean a betrayal of one of her highest values: the preservation of innocent life. For Katniss,

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<sup>149</sup> Broad, Katherine R. "The Dandelion in the Spring: Utopia as Romance in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games Trilogy*". In *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. Edited by Carrie Hintz, Balaka Basu, and Katherine R. Broad. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 125

choosing Gale would be an implicit endorsement of his plot with Coin that killed her sister and other innocent young people.<sup>150</sup>

So far, I have explored the reasons for which I consider Katniss's and Lena's romantic experiences significantly different from one another. As I have explained, I consider these differences to be primarily based on the fact that we cannot have a full picture of Lena's choice, as we do not see her as an adult character. However, their experiences can also be compared in earlier stages, before the choices of their are made.

### ***3.1.3 Traditional Relationships and Gendered Personalities within the Couple***

As several critics argue, YA dystopian works with a female protagonist often seem empowering for young girls readers. However, critics also underline that many of these series actually reinforce stereotypes about traditional romantic relationships.

With reference to *Delirium*, I would like to draw attention to Ann M. M. Childs's analysis.

In her essay "The Incompatibility of Female Friendship and Rebellion", she underlines how, although Lena says that all forms of public display of affection are prohibited by the government, the only form of love which is actually punished is romantic love:

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<sup>150</sup> Myers, Abigail E. "Why Katniss Chooses Peeta: Looking at Love through a Stoic Lens". In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 143

While the government uses the cure to destroy all relationships, romantic love is the true target and identified as the greatest threat to control. All other relationships, such as friendship, are secondary. It isn't love itself that threatens control; it is romantic love.<sup>151</sup>

Drawing on this hint, Childs insists on how what emerges from the *Delirium* trilogy is that Alex, the boy Lena has just met, immediately becomes more important than Hana, the girl she has been best friends with since she was a kid. Consequently, Childs argues, the fact that romantic love is more important than friendship or other forms of affection is not only the point that the government makes, but also the message that seems to emerge from the trilogy as a whole. Moreover, despite the fact that Oliver depicts Lena as an independent young woman, it is telling to note what happens at the illegal party she joins with Hana and Alex in Book I. Indeed, while Lena joins the party even though she is terribly frightened, she does so in order to save Hana, who wanted to go there in the first place. However, not only does Lena fail; the chapter actually ends with Alex who has to save her from the round-up. It seems natural, then, to classify *Delirium* as one of those YA series which are not as empowering as they might seem to be.

Apparently, in *The Hunger Games*, there is no room for these dynamics. Indeed, as many critics argue, Collins's narrative is structured in a way that aims at defying traditional gender conventions. Jennifer Mitchell, for instance, underlines that, in Katniss and

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<sup>151</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. "The Incompatibility of Female Friendship and Rebellion". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 194

Peeta's pair, roles are explicitly fluid: although, at the beginning of Book II, Katniss makes clear that she is the one who hunts, while Peeta is the one who bakes (CF, 17), when it is necessary, during the Games, she is also able to "play the girl"<sup>152</sup>, letting Peeta cuddle her and take care of her. This proves that it is not only Katniss's gender which is fluid, as I have already argued, but also her role within the couple. This, then, could support the argument according to which Collins's trilogy creates a new balance as far as gender traits are concerned. However, several critics agree that this is just a superficial analysis: indeed, despite the situations of empowerment and independence that the heroines experience during the series, at the end they are doomed to settle down and simply play the "mother and wife" role. As far as the two series I consider are concerned, this is obviously only valid for *The Hunger Games*. Jane Pulliam addresses the issue using the term "marriage plot", which she defines as a work "in which female characters become fully adult through matrimony and motherhood rather than through developing an identity that is not primarily located in the domestic sphere"<sup>153</sup>.

As we know, the rebellious, politically involved aspect of Katniss emerges throughout the series, but is completely erased in the ending. Although it happens in different ways in the two series, then, both trilogies display a hidden pattern of reinforcement of

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<sup>152</sup> Mitchell, Jennifer. "Of Queer Necessity: Panem's Hunger Games as Gender Games". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 134

<sup>153</sup> Pulliam, Jane. "Real or Not Real – Katniss Everdeen Loves Peeta Melark (*sic*): The Lingering Effects of Discipline in the "Hunger Games" Trilogy". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 171

gendered stereotypes. In both cases, this happens despite the fact that each protagonist appears to be a character who seems to be empowered from a feminist perspective.

As we have seen so far, performing as a girl is a prominent issue both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*. However, the discourse about gender can also regard each of the two boys for whom Katniss and Lena develop a romantic interest.

In Collins's trilogy, as Whitney Elaine Jones argues, Gale and Peeta serve as projections of Katniss's identity and, in particular, of her relationship with masculinity. Indeed, according to Jones, "Collins's description of Gale is hyper-masculine"<sup>154</sup>, while "Peeta (...) enacts those traits (...) associated with popular representations of girls"<sup>155</sup>. Hence, she argues that Katniss's choice is not truly based on the boy itself, but rather on the "set of values and behaviors, masculine or feminine, she accepts as her own"<sup>156</sup>. Jones's conclusion is that the utopian energy in *The Hunger Games* is due to the fact that Katniss and Peeta's marriage guarantees a gender balance which, had Katniss chosen Gale, could not have been possible. Indeed, the moments in the trilogy when both Katniss and Peeta look more balanced as characters is when they behave as a couple, as Jennifer Mitchell notes<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>154</sup> Jones, Whitney Elaine. "Katniss and Her Boys: Male Readers, the Love Triangle and Identity Formation". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 63

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>157</sup> Mitchell, Jennifer. "Of Queer Necessity: Panem's Hunger Games as Gender Games". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 133

As far as gender and roles inside the couple are concerned, I would argue that the main difference between Katniss and Lena is that, as I have already underlined, Oliver does not depict her protagonist as explicitly masculine, as Collins does. This feature, I believe, has a prominent effect on the romantic relationship Lena has, as well as on her personality. Moreover, I find that, in the *Delirium* trilogy, even male characters are more balanced than Peeta and Gale, when it comes to gender. Apparently, Alex may seem the most clearly masculine character, similarly to Gale, while Julian, like Peeta, may seem the female-identified boy. However, in a number of instances, they prove that this is not accurate at all. Alex, for example, despite his “alpha male” attitude, shows to be extremely caring towards Lena since the very beginning of their relationship, in Book I: as Childs finds too, he is “prioritizing Lena over himself”<sup>158</sup>. Similarly, even though Julian is presented as a weak, vulnerable boy, he gives proof of his strength in a number of situations: for instance, he joins the revolt with Lena, although he knows that this means being disowned by his father, who is the founder of the DFA, the association for a Delirium Free America. Moreover, once he joins the rebels, he immediately becomes able to get the others to listen to him, to Lena’s great surprise: “«He’s right,» Julian pipes up. I turn to him, startled. He hardly ever speaks in the evenings around the campfire. I don’t think he feels comfortable yet.” (Pan, 52-53)

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<sup>158</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. “The Incompatibility of Female Friendship and Rebellion”. In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 198



In short, what Oliver creates is a more nuanced picture than Collins's, which allows the reader to reflect upon gender in different ways. The fact that characters in the *Delirium* trilogy are less extreme in their gendered representation can be useful to explore the other bonds Katniss and Lena develop: when I argue that Katniss is more masculine than Lena, I am not just referring to her personality. The difference regards their relationships as well: as Jones argues, Katniss's "most important relationships, outside of her relationship with her sister Prim, are with other men"<sup>159</sup>, and this juxtaposition will be the theme of the next sections.

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<sup>159</sup> Jones, Whitney Elaine. "Katniss and Her Boys: Male Readers, the Love Triangle and Identity Formation". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 70

## 3.2 Absent Mothers

### 3.2.1 Conventions about Motherhood in YAL

As I have anticipated, the relationships that the protagonists have with their mothers is a central theme in both of the series I am analysing. This should not surprise us: as Katie Arosteguy underlines in her contribution to *Space and Place in The Hunger Games*, one of the secondary storylines of YA dystopian novels usually focuses on the relationship that the main character has with his or her mother <sup>160</sup>. In addition to this convention, which many works for young readers share, Arosteguy also argues that *The Hunger Games* trilogy can be considered as a “matrilineal narrative”. In saying this, she uses Tess Cosslett’s definition, according to whom a matrilineal narrative “shows how the identity of a central character is crucially formed by a female ancestor” <sup>161</sup>. This is valid for *The Hunger Games* as well as for several other YA dystopian series, and, as I am going to discuss, it is certainly valid for the *Delirium* trilogy too: in both trilogies, indeed, the relationship with the mother is central to the development of the protagonist.

Analysing the mother-daughter bond in books for young adults, however, raises a number of issues. Often, Arosteguy argues, mothers in YA novels do not correspond to an attentive, caring, and generally positive character: “[i]n the narrative conventions of young adult literature, parental relationships wherein the adolescent protagonist finds that

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<sup>160</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. “I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 146

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*

s/he must break away from an overbearing, absent, or otherwise “bad” parent (often the mother) are common conflicts”<sup>162</sup>. Arosteguy also quotes Hillary Crew’s *Is it really Mommie Dearest*, defining it “the first-ever book length study of mother-daughter bonds in YA literature”<sup>163</sup>. Crew argues that the role of the mother is often to hinder the heroine’s achievement of autonomy; moreover, she underlines that the daughter needs to “fracture her identity with the mother”<sup>164</sup> in order to find her true identity. In addition to using Crew’s definition, Arosteguy highlights that matrilineal narratives focus on finding mothers, as opposed to conventional YA series, in which the focus is usually on losing mothers. Both *The Hunger Games* and *Delirium*, I argue, reimagine these dynamics, blurring the boundary between conventional novels and matrilineal narratives.

Arosteguy also focuses on other two key concepts. First, she defines *The Hunger Games* as a “meta-narrative of mothering”<sup>165</sup>, arguing that, although only a few of the main characters are actually mothers, motherhood is always present in the trilogy: not only as a “real life event”, but also (and much more) as a “constant thought” or “imaginary event”<sup>166</sup>. Secondly, she mentions “othermothering”, the process through which characters who

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<sup>162</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. “I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 150

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>164</sup> Crew, Hilary S. *Is It Really Mommie Dearest? Daughter-Mother Narratives in Young Adult Fiction*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000, p. 65

<sup>165</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. “I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 146

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*

are not biological mothers act as mothers <sup>167</sup>. While the second concept will prove useful in the next chapter, where I am going to deal with the theme of care taking, I find the first one to be particularly inherent to both series, when it comes to defining their focus. In their essay “Killer Katniss and Lover Boy Peeta”, Ellyn Lem and Holly Hassel argue that “the novel (...) centers on surrogate families” <sup>168</sup>; though this is certainly true, I agree with Arosteguy when she underlines that the focus of dystopian YA novels and series, especially the ones that deal with the bonds between relatives, is the “search for the maternal”, the willingness to understand what it means to be a mother in “difficult times, when the old rules cannot and do not apply” <sup>169</sup>.

In both series, the only parent with whom the two girls interact is the mother. In Katniss’s case, even though her father’s death takes place before the beginning of the series, he is decidedly present too, though he is only a ghostly, idealised figure. Despite being the parent with whom Katniss identifies the most, he is not the one with whom the reader watches her interact. In Lena’s case, not only is the father physically absent when the events narrated in the trilogy take place; he is seldom mentioned in the series, and, in fact, this is all the reader knows about him:

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<sup>167</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. “I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 147

<sup>168</sup> Lem, Hellyn, and Holly Hassel. “‘Killer’ Katniss and ‘Lover Boy’ Peeta: Suzanne Collins’s Defiance of Gender-Genred Reading”. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 125

<sup>169</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. “I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 150

I start thinking about my father, too. I don't remember him at all, though I have some dim, ancient impression of two warm, rough hands and a large looming face floating above mine, but I think that's just because my mother kept a framed portrait in her bedroom of my father and me. I was only a few months old and he was holding me, smiling, looking at the camera. But there's no way I'm remembering for real real. I wasn't even a year old when he died. Cancer. (Del, 137)

It is clear, I think, that the focus are not familiar bonds in general, but specifically the mother-daughter relationship: as I have already underlined, Katniss is not haunted by her dead father's eyes, but by her mother's "dead eyes" (HG, 33); as for Lena, although at the beginning of the trilogy she believes both her parents to be dead, she is hardly ever bothered by the thought of her father, while she is almost obsessed with that of her mother. Up to this point, we have seen how Katniss and Lena's relationships with their mothers follow some of the conventions of YA literature. However, Arosteguy argues that *The Hunger Games* does not always adhere to these conventions<sup>170</sup>. I believe that the *Delirium* trilogy, too, is somewhat different from works with traditional mother-daughter relationships. Let us see, then, how Collins and Oliver deal with the matter of absent mothers.

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<sup>170</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. "I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 150

### 3.2.2 *Kinds of Maternal Absence*

Katniss's and Lena's mothers, as I have discussed, share the feature of failing at mothering, as many mothers in YA literature do; however, they do so in significantly different ways. Katniss's mother, to begin with, is not absent in the true sense of the term.

As Arosteguy underlines,

*The Hunger Games* departs in interesting ways from both the traditional discourse of maternal absence and the depiction of the mother as angry, controlling, or invasive. Katniss's mother is far from absent; rather, she is very much present, and it is this presentness that Katniss must learn to navigate.<sup>171</sup>

Katniss's mother is far from being absent; in fact, she is the only character with whom she continues to interact from the beginning of the trilogy to the end, without deaths or fights to interrupt their interactions. And yet, especially at the beginning of the series, she does not take care of Katniss; quite the opposite, it is Katniss who takes care of her mother and younger sister. Not only does Katniss provide for her family, as we have seen; her behaviours make this clear, too. I am referring, for instance, to the way Katniss addresses her mother in Book I, when she is saying goodbye before the Games:

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibidem*

«Listen to me. Are you listening to me?» She nods, alarmed by my intensity. She must know what's coming. «You can't leave again (...) You can't clock out and leave Prim on her own. There's no me now to keep you both alive. It doesn't matter what happens. Whatever you see on the screen. You have to promise me you'll fight through it!»

(HG, 41)

Although what Katniss is feeling, along with anger, is the fear she “felt at [her mother's] abandonment” (HG, 41), the feelings of a neglected daughter, she behaves as an adult while her mother acts as a scolded child. Despite her mother's faults, however, Katniss recognises that she often fails at trying to make their relationship better. Significantly, she does so in Book II, when she thinks in hindsight of episodes from the past:

Since I've been home I've been trying hard to mend my relationship with my mother. Asking her to do things for me instead of brushing aside any offer of help, as I did for years out of anger. (...) My time in the arena made me realize how I needed to stop punishing her for something she couldn't help, specifically the crushing depression she fell into after my father's death. (CF, 36)

I am going to go back to Katniss's change of attitude towards her mother in the next section. For now, I would like to stress how, as Arosteguy underlines, Katniss's mother is not a clearly identified absent mother – or, at least, she is certainly less so than Lena's mother.

In *Delirium*, indeed, unlike in *The Hunger Games*, we truly have an absent mother. At the beginning of the trilogy, Lena believes her mother to be dead – even worse, to have taken her own life. As Lena and the readers discover at the end of Book I, Lena’s mother is not dead at all; on the contrary, she has escaped in order to avoid having yet another procedure done, after her body did not respond well to the first few ones. Her absence troubles young Lena for different reasons. Obviously, the main has emotional reasons, as we shall see; however, Lena suffers significantly due to the dishonour linked to her mother’s condition, both because she became infected with Delirium and because she committed suicide. In fact, the stigma is so strong that even her aunt’s house, where she has been living since her mother disappeared, is not perceived as a safe space by young Lena:

I’ve always been careful not to let myself give in to feelings of anger or irritation. I can’t afford to at Carol’s house. I owe her too much – and besides, after the few tantrums I threw as a child, I hated the way she looked at me sideways for days, as though analyzing me, measuring me. I knew she was thinking, Just like her mother. (Del, 163)

Lena, since the very beginning of the trilogy, is aware that her mother has never behaved like a mother approved by the Government. Not only because the Delirium (or, better, the several procedure attempts she underwent) made her feel poorly, but also, and more importantly, because she was able to be joyful and to show affection for her kids, unlike other mothers. For instance, Lena recalls more than once how her mother used to enjoy



singing and dancing, as opposed to “normal” mothers, who “do all the things that a mother is supposed to do, as outlined in the Parenting section of *The Book of Shhh*”, but, as Lena underlines again, “do not sing” (Del, 135). This awareness makes Lena waver between two feelings: the first is shame; the second is the fear at the thought that she could become infected, like her sister, or that the procedure could fail on her like it failed on her mother. Because she hardly remembers her mother, she comes to identify the Delirium with her: “The disease is what I know about her. It is the link. Otherwise, I have nothing.” (Del, 135).

Wavering between different emotions characterises Lena’s feelings even when she discovers that her mother may be alive, and the juxtaposition becomes stronger and stronger as the possibility becomes reality. On the one hand, Lena is filled with hope and joy: “My mother might be alive. My mother might be alive. That is the single idea in my mind, the one that has supplanted the possibility of all other rational thought” (Del, 405). On the other, though, she feels a deep anger, and she wonders why her mother never looked for her. She realises that being part of the Resistance was more important for her mother than to be with her; and, if from a certain point of view she is relieved at the thought that she shares this value with her mother, from another she feels abandoned and neglected.

Due to the utterly different kinds of absence Katniss and Lena have to face, even the role of their mothers in their development bears important differences.

### ***3.2.3 Comparing Needs: Independence or Maternal Love?***

I have argued that, in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, the development of the protagonist is dealt with in completely different terms. Indeed, I consider Katniss to be a character who, in most instances, proves to have reached a much higher degree of maturity than Lena. However, I consider the relationship of the heroines with their mothers to mark an exception, or, at least, to be more nuanced than many of the other aspects I have analysed so far.

At the beginning of the trilogy, as we have seen, Katniss shows an intense feeling of anger towards her mother. Although she has reasons to behave so, her behaviour is extremely similar to that of an angry teenager. Even if, at the beginning, Katniss shows to be already rather mature in most aspects of her life, her intolerance towards her mother can easily recall the attitude of the average teenager. Nonetheless, as we have seen, she also acts as the adult of the family, making the contrast even stronger. Towards the end of Book I, however, her attitude changes. This does not only mean that, as I have underlined, she tries to be kinder to her mother; it also means, as Arosteguy notes, that she understands how much she needs her mother: during the Games, when she is trying to save Peeta and to heal his infection, she finds herself thinking: “I am no good at this. I am not my mother” (HG, 301). I agree with Arosteguy when she considers this moment to be fundamental both in the bond Katniss has with her mother and in her development from teenager to young woman too: as she underlines,

Up until this point, Katniss has seen her mother as outside of herself, as unreachable, and as unnecessary. (...) Whereas in most YA literature the daughter breaks away from an absent, overbearing, or crazed mother, Collins suggests that recognizing the maternal and performing mothering afford one the most growth. In this moment, Katniss realizes that she needs her mother in order to heal her best friend.<sup>172</sup>

The relationship with their mothers is also the only instance in which Lena may seem more mature than Katniss. Lena's feeling of anger, indeed, is much less strong than Katniss's, at the beginning of the trilogy. Despite the fact that they are both teenagers, Lena does not show the same anger that characterises Katniss. Indeed, before she finds out that her mother is still alive and has fled with the rebels, Lena believes her to have committed suicide; and, although she never addresses it explicitly, it is evident that her mother struggled with depression: "(...) there were days she didn't get out of bed at all. She called those her black days" (Del, 397). Lena, however, unlike Katniss, deals with mental illness in an impressively mature way. Indeed, she never expresses anger towards her mother, before discovering that she is still alive: she is aware (or rather, believes) that her mother left her alone because of her condition, but she never blames her for this. As I pointed out, Lena shows all her anger when she realises that, to her mother, being part of the Resistance was more important than coming back to her. This situation has two

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<sup>172</sup> Arosteguy, Katie. "I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed: Transformative Motherhood and Maternal Influence". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 153

consequences. The first is that Lena continues to have these feelings throughout the whole trilogy: in Book III, when they are both very much involved in the rebellion against the government, she finds herself thinking: “It’s still hard for me to think of her as my mother when she acts like this, like a hardened member of the Resistance. For now, I am content to allow her to exist doubly: She is my mother sometimes, and sometimes, a leader and a fighter.” (Del, 360-361). The second consequence becomes evident if we compare the two situations: while Katniss, at the beginning of the series, believes that she does not need her mother, this conviction changes as she grows up. In *Delirium*, the opposite happens: when the series begins, Lena believes that having her mother by her side would change her life; however, after discovering that her mother is still alive and that their relationship is quite different from what she had imagined, she begins to rely on her fellow rebels much more than she does on her mother. As I said, this can be read in two ways: if we focus on the juxtaposition between being independent and needing a mother’s support, Katniss does, for once, emerge as a less mature character. However, I believe that it is important to focus on what Arosteguy underlines: mending the relationship with her mother is a way for Katniss to achieve growth; as a consequence, although Lena may seem more independent than Katniss, she is so only from a superficial point of view.

### 3.3 Caretaking in Dystopia

In this last section, I am going to deal with the bonds that Katniss and Lena develop with the other characters in the series. As we will see, what all these bonds have in common is the element of care. Depending on the situation, Katniss and Lena experience both the role of the caretaker and of the character who is being taken care of; moreover, throughout the series, each of the two protagonists has two younger characters to take care of. In order to deal with these two topics, I find it useful to first discuss the initial approach of each girl to caretaking, wondering whether it is an attitude they have had since the beginning of the trilogy or if they have learned it throughout the series.

#### 3.3.1 *Initial Approach to Caretaking*

As I have argued, in Book I Lena is yet to begin her process of growth, while Katniss is already undergoing it. The matter of caretaking is no exception: indeed, as Miranda A. Green-Barteet underlines, Katniss's identity is strongly shaped by her role of protector for her mother and sister since the very beginning of *The Hunger Games* series: "Katniss does possess a firm sense of self, but her identity is based primarily on her role as family protector, a role that she is very invested in but one that is born out of her position as a subjugated object of Panem"<sup>173</sup>.

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<sup>173</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. "I'm beginning to know who I am": The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, p. 38

In *The Hunger Games*, indeed, the whole plot revolves around Katniss's decision to volunteer in the Games in order to save Prim. As Anne M. Canavan and Sarah N. Petrovic note, the whole *tribute narrative*, as they call it <sup>174</sup>, begins because of Katniss's urge to protect Prim. Even though this analysis is undoubtedly precise, I find Andre Guy Risko's point of view even more complete: indeed, he underlines how, when Katniss volunteers to take Prim's place, she does so for two reasons. She is not only thinking of her sister; she is thinking of herself, too:

When Katniss decides to take her sister's place, she acknowledges the sphere of potentiality both subjects reside in. At the moment her sister is chosen, Katniss sees two different possibilities. For her sister, Prim, Katniss sees the potential for at least one more year of life before the next lottery. For herself, Katniss sees a lifetime – long or short – without her sister. <sup>175</sup>

Katniss's concern for her family, and for Prim in particular, is not limited to the reaping scene. Indeed, concern for her family characterises Katniss even before the beginning of the series, as Abigail E. Myers notes: "Before her participation in the Hunger Games, *love*

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<sup>174</sup> Canavan, Anne M., and Sarah N. Petrovic: "Tipping the Odds Ever in Her Favor: An Exploration of Narrative Control and Agency in the Novel and Film". In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 51

<sup>175</sup> Risko, Andre Guy. "Katniss Everdeen's Liminal Choiches and the Foundation of Revolutionarty Ethics". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 86

to Katniss means protecting her mother and her sister”<sup>176</sup>. Not only is their protection her main goal; but the bond she develops with them, based on caretaking, is also the strongest kind of love she experiences throughout the series. As Myers notes again, even when Katniss finds other kinds of affections, the love for Prim remains the strongest bond she has: so much so that, when it becomes necessary for her to choose between her sister and Gale, she has no doubts: “Prim’s death disturbs Katniss to the point that she turns her back on Gale once and for all”<sup>177</sup>. Even Katniss’s involvement in the revolt is influenced by her relationship with Prim: indeed, in all of the instances in which she rebels, her first thought is always her sister. Katniss’s constant concern is that her rebellious attitude might endanger Prim. The best example is perhaps the scene in which Katniss throws the knife at the Gamemakers: after impulsively doing so, although she does not regret what she has done, she immediately thinks of home:

Who cares what they do to me? What really scares me is what they might do to my mother and Prim, how my family might suffer now because of my impulsiveness. Will they take their few belongings, or send my mother to prison and Prim to the community home, or kill them? They wouldn’t kill them, would they? Why not? What do they care? (HG, 120)

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<sup>176</sup> Myers, Abigail E. “Why Katniss Chooses Peeta: Looking at Love through a Stoic Lens”. In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 134

<sup>177</sup> Myers, Abigail E. “Why Katniss Chooses Peeta: Looking at Love through a Stoic Lens”. In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 138

The protective attitude towards her family interferes with all the rebellious acts Katniss would like to perform, not just with the actively aggressive ones, such as the scene I have just mentioned. For instance, as Lindsey Issow Averill underlines, the constant thought of her family is also what prevents Katniss from running away:

When her friend Gale Hawthorne suggests running away from the oppressive heel of the Capitol and living in the woods, free of responsibility and the horrors of the Hunger Games, Katniss responds with disgust because she can't even consider the idea of leaving her family to fend for itself.<sup>178</sup>

The fact that taking care of her family is a priority for Katniss is clear since the very first page of the trilogy. Indeed, although the series begins with the reaping, Katniss's concern is not the reaping itself, as Jessica Miller underlines: "When we first meet Katniss Everdeen, she's just waking up on the day of the reaping (...). But Katniss isn't thinking about the reaping just now. She has to provide food for her family"<sup>179</sup>.

I find all of these aspects to prove that, even in this instance, Katniss's process of growth starts well before the narrative begins. What about Lena?

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<sup>178</sup> Issow Averill, Lindsey: "Sometimes the World Is Hungry for People Who Care: Katniss and the Feminist Care Ethic". In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 162

<sup>179</sup> Miller, Jessica. "She has no idea. The effect she can have. Katniss and the Politics of Gender". In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, p. 145



Like Katniss, when the series begins, Lena lives with a younger character of whom she takes care: it is her cousin Grace, who, like her, has lost her parents due to Delirium. Lena's attitude towards little Grace, however, is initially quite different from Katniss's attitude towards Prim. I believe this difference has two explanations: while it is certainly true that, when the *Delirium* series begins, Lena is not as mature as Katniss is at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, I also think that Lena's attitude towards the regime plays an important role. Indeed, Lena's bond with Grace is strongly influenced by her fear of the Delirium: while they are decidedly close to one another since the beginning of Book I, Lena's attitude initially resembles that of a sister; it is when she starts fearing the Delirium that she begins to show a maternal, and thus more caring, attitude:

Gracie is in summer school – she's only in first grade and they're already talking about holding her back – and every night I pull her onto my lap and help her sludge through her work, whispering in her ear, begging her to speak, to focus, to listen, cajoling her, finally, into writing at least half of the answers down in her workbook. (Del, 212)

When we analyse Lena's initial attitude, I believe it is crucial to remember what is considered a normal parental approach in the dystopian society that Oliver imagines: as we have seen, good parents do not indulge in public display of affection, and, as Ann M. M. Childs underlines, “the cure destroys other connections between individuals, such as

the mother-child bond”<sup>180</sup>. When Lena begins to display a more maternal attitude towards Grace, she stresses that her goal is to be as different as possible from her mother, as she states just a few lines before talking about Grace: “I take precautions, determined not to make one false step, determined to prove to myself that I’m not like my mother” (Del, 210).

Even if we look at Katniss’s and Lena’s characters focusing on caretaking, then, they adhere to Seelinger Trites’s definition of *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*. The different attitude of the two characters also gives us the possibility to reflect on another prominent aspect: are they always the subject of caretaking, or are they the object, too?

### ***3.3.2 Active and Passive Caretaking***

So far, I have limited my analysis to Katniss and Lena’s relationship with the first person of which they take care. Initially, in both cases, it is the protagonist who takes care of a younger character, as we have seen; however, the protagonist can also become, in certain instances, the object of care. In this case, I am going to start from *Delirium*: because Lena is initially less inclined to caretaking than Katniss, I believe the instances in which she is the one who is being taken care of are more evident.

The clearest example of the bidirectional attitude of care in Oliver’s series is, again, the bond between Lena and Grace: indeed, although Grace is only six, she is given a great

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<sup>180</sup> Childs, Ann M. M. “The Privileged Reader as Capitol and Leaning Sympathy through Narrative”. In *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Readings of the Novels*. Edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Whitney Elaine Jones and Julie Elizabeth Tyler. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014, p. 104

deal of agency. For instance, in Book I, when Lena decides to escape in order to join the illegal party her friend Hana is participating to, Grace wakes up. She is only a child, and we would not expect her to understand what is going on; still, she has huge power. By giving little Grace so much agency, in this instance, Oliver makes her Lena's protector:

Just as I'm about to crack open the bedroom door I hear a small noise behind me (...). If Grace makes a noise, or gets out of bed, or does anything, she's bound to wake Jenny, and then I'm done, finished, kaput. I'm trying to think of what I can say to reassure her, trying to fabricate a lie, but then, miracle of miracles, she just lies back down in bed and closes her eyes. And even though it's very dark, I would swear that there's the smallest smile on her face. I feel a quick rush of relief. One good thing about the fact that Gracie refuses to speak? I know she won't tell on me. (Del, 246)

From that night on, Grace becomes Lena's silent protector: even the first night Lena spends in the Wilds, for instance, Grace hears her getting up and, when Lena begs her to be quiet, touching her finger to her lip, Grace "does the same, an unconscious mimic" (Del, 385).

Lena's reference to the fact that Grace, despite being six, does not speak, is crucial. Indeed, at the end of Book I, Grace's role becomes even more important, as she determines how the narrative will evolve in the following volumes: indeed, on Lena's last night before the Procedure, she suddenly wakes up to find Grace "perched at the head of [Lena's] bed, working at the cords binding [her] to the headboard" and "pulling and

untwisting and bending forward, occasionally, to chew at the nylon with her teeth, giving the impression of a quiet and industrious animal gnawing its way through a fence ” (Del, 502-503). When Lena’s family wakes up and tries to prevent her from running away, Grace finally says her very first word, distracting their relatives and allowing Lena to escape: “«Stop her!» Carol is yelling (...). Then Gracie yells, «Wait!» Everyone freezes just for a second. It is the first and only time Gracie has ever spoken aloud to them” (Del, 507-508).

As I have said, I consider this reciprocity in the bond between Lena and Grace to be linked to the fact that Lena does not identify herself as a protector. In Katniss’s case, on the contrary, and especially at the beginning of Book I, her whole identity is based on protecting her loved ones and taking care of them. As a consequence, she finds it hard to accept that roles can change: in Book III, for instance, she has trouble accepting that her little sister, of whom she has always been taking care of, has grown into a woman whose job is exactly to take care of others:

She’s really gone, then. The little girl with the back of her shirt sticking out like a duck tail, the one who needed help reaching the dishes, and who begged to see the frosted cakes in the bakery window. Time and tragedy have forced her to grow too quickly, at least for my taste, into a young woman who stitches bleeding wounds and knows our mother can hear only so much. (MJ, 37-38)

Katniss's attitude is the same even when other characters – such as her mother, Peeta, or Haymitch – try to be caring towards her. The same cannot be said about Lena: in her case, care is often reciprocated, not only by Grace; for instance, in Book II, when Lena joins the rebels, it is not just romantic love that she experiments for the first time; she also begins to be surrounded by people to whom she shows her affection. It is exactly one of the rebels, Sarah, who makes Lena reflect about the relationship between love and care:

«Zombies?»

Sarah grins. «That's what we call the cures, after they've had the procedure. Raven says they might as well be zombies. She says the cure turns people stupid.» «That's not true,»

I say instinctively (...)

Sarah shrugs. «If you're smart, you care. And if you care, you love.» (Pan, 43-44)

The strong juxtaposition between the Wilds and the rest of the world is here, for the first time, not only dealt with in terms of romantic love, but also in terms of affection in general: indeed, care is here mentioned for the first time. Loving gestures among other rebels are frequent; obviously, they do not make Lena think of Portland: they make her “think of [her] mother” (Pan, 77).

My suggestion, then, is that Lena is much more capable of accepting that someone is taking care of her precisely because she is not as mature as Katniss: indeed, unlike Katniss, her identity is not based on being a caretaker. This is evident if we analyse the parallelism that both characters draw between the young girl they used to take care of

(Prim in Katniss's case, Grace in Lena's) and the bonds of care they develop with Rue and Blue.

### ***3.3.3 Substituting the Object of Care***

Both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Delirium*, the protagonists must leave the place where they grew up. In both cases, they find a new character in the new place who substitutes the one they used to take care of at home. In Katniss's case, the new character is Rue, a twelve-year-old tribute from District 11, who becomes her ally. In Lena's case, it is Blue, a little girl, "probably six or seven" (Pan, 21), who was adopted by Raven, one of the rebels, just before her escape to the Wilds. Just like Rue reminds Katniss of Prim, Blue reminds Lena of Grace. Not only are the new little girls the same age as the old ones: they also resemble them in their attitudes and gestures. Katniss explicitly states that Rue reminds her of her sister: "«I think her name's Rue,» [Peeta] says softly. I bite my lip. Rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow. Rue. Primrose. Neither of them could tip the scale at seventy pounds soaking wet" (HG, 114). The resemblance between little Blue and Grace immediately strikes Lena, too:

Blue has never quite opened to me. She answers my questions with simple nods or shakes of her head. Her smallness, her shyness, the thinness of her bones: When I'm with Blue, I can't help but think of Grace. That's why I avoid her as much as possible. (Pan, 109)

The aspect of guilt, however, is obviously something which only regards Lena. Indeed, while Katniss joins the Hunger Games in order to save her sister, Lena's goal while running away is simple to be able to live freely and happily with Alex. However, she feels terribly guilty for abandoning Grace, and this influences her relationship with Blue:

(...) and I'm anxious to get away from Blue. «Can you finish up here?» I ask Blue, and she nods, chewing on her lower lip. Grace used to do that too, when she was nervous. I feel a sharp pang of guilt. It's not Blue's fault that she reminds me of Grace. It's not Blue's fault I left Grace behind. (Pan, 110)

While both Rue and Blue play important roles in Katniss's and Lena's growth and development, they do so in extremely different ways.

As I have said, Lena's maternal instinct and caring attitude are not particularly developed before she leaves Portland. While she is in the Wilds, however, she gains a whole new perspective. As a consequence, her bond with Grace changes and becomes more mature while they are apart: while it is true that the only moment in which the reader sees Lena actively taking care of Grace in an adult way is at the ending of the trilogy, her concern for Grace improves and changes over the time they spend away from one another. Lena's attitude is not that of the older cousin anymore; the final scene is, in my opinion, a perfect instance of othermothering:

«I'm going to keep you safe now.» I push the words out past the thickness in my throat.  
«Do you believe me?» She nods again. I pull her to me, squeezing. She feels so thin, so fragile. But I know that she is strong. She always has been. She will be ready for whatever comes next. «Take my hand,» I tell her. I'm not certain where to go (...) but I have to stay calm for Grace's sake. (Req, 463)

Grace's role, then, is fundamental to Lena's development as an individual. In *The Hunger Games*, on the contrary, Rue takes on a much bigger meaning: indeed, she does not only influence Katniss's interiority; her character influences the revolution and, ultimately, the fate of the whole country. Indeed, the death of Rue is the first instance in which Katniss's attitude begins to change. To begin with, the first time Katniss kills somebody during the Games she does so to avenge Rue's death, as Jennifer Mitchell underlines<sup>181</sup>: her loyalty to Rue is much stronger than her initial reluctance to kill other tributes.

More importantly, as Green Barteet argues, Katniss's first true rebellious action occurs after Rue is killed:

Rue's death, coupled with her belief that she is likely to be killed soon, compels Katniss to act, "to do something" (...) Thus, Katniss covers Rue's body with wildflowers, both to bury and to honor her. As the Games are televised and the viewers expect to see when the body of each dead tribute is collected, Katniss knows all of Panem will see Rue's body,

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<sup>181</sup> Mitchell, Jennifer. "Of Queer Necessity: Panem's Hunger Games as Gender Games". In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games. Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, pp. 130



and her touching gesture serves as an indictment of the Capitol's brutal dehumanization of Panem's children.<sup>182</sup>

The berries scene is not the first instance in which Katniss rebels: the shift in her behaviour happens much earlier, when she realises that she must avenge Rue's death.

Rue's role remains fundamental in Katniss's political involvement throughout the whole series. As Lindsey Issow Averill argues, even at the end of Book III, when Katniss kills President Coin after her proposal of holding new Hunger Games for the Capitol's children, she does so with her sister and Rue in mind:

Having been a child drawn into the horror of the Hunger Games, [Katniss] appreciates the need to care for children, even the children of the oppressors. She know that children like Prim and Rue suffer and die when people like Coin hold power (...). Only this time she's caring for all the future Prims and Rues, by trying to ensure that they will live in a world where we no longer "sacrifice children's lives to settle" our differences.<sup>183</sup>

Even in this instance, Katniss shows to be a much more adult character than Lena. Her strongly caring attitude is not only significant to herself and the people she is taking care of; rather, it has a fundamental role in the new society that she is contributing to create.

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<sup>182</sup> Green Barteet, Miranda A. "I'm beginning to know who I am": The Rebellious Subjectivities of Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior". In *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green Barteet, and Amy L. Montz. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, pp. 38

<sup>183</sup> Issow Averill, Lindsey: "Sometimes the World Is Hungry for People Who Care: Katniss and the Feminist Care Ethic". In *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*. Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012, pp. 175

## ***Conclusion***

This thesis had two goals.

The first was to prove that the two YA dystopian series I was going to analyse, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*, were examples of critical dystopias, according to Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini's definition. In particular, my focus was on one specific feature of critical dystopias: the mixture of genres.

Thus, my second goal was to show how Roberta Seelinger Trites's distinction between *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman* was useful to determine how the mixture of genres affected the two YA trilogies I was working on. My analysis had two main focuses: first, each protagonist's interiority; second, their relationships and bonds, both romantic and affective.

My conclusion is that *The Hunger Games* and *Delirium* can indeed be considered critical dystopias; in addition to this I argue that, in almost all aspects of the protagonists' characterisation, it is clear that Collins's *The Hunger Games* can be considered a *Bildungsroman*: not only does Katniss reach adulthood at the end of the series; she also shows a great deal of maturity throughout the trilogy. Oliver's *Delirium*, on the contrary, is a good example of *Entwicklungsroman*: the focus is always on Lena's development itself, not on her achievement of adulthood.

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