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Disturbing the Gendered Universe in Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games Trilogy

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Letter of Recommendation

Ujina Rana has completed her MPhil thesis entitled “Disturbing the Gendered Universe in Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games Trilogy” under my supervision. She started her research work from November 2014. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva.

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Approval Letter

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Disturbing the Gendered Universe in Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games Trilogy” by Ujina Rana, submitted to the MPhil Program in English, Tribhuvan University has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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I dedicate this work to my three sisters who galvanized my love for reading; and to my parents. Bungy you are missed.

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And to every individual who dares to disturb the universe and in the process instills hope in many.

Abstract

Suzanne Collins, in Hunger Games trilogy, challenges the traditional gender roles by creating mavericks: characters that do not fit into just one gender box, but possess both masculine and feminine characteristics. Dystopian novels are all cautionary in nature — alarming us about the gloomy tomorrow — if we do not correct our behavior at present. Even though Collins has set her stage in a dystopian world, her gender politics find resonance in the contemporary world. Roberta S. Tries' concept on "Disturbing the universe" has been used as the primary theoretical lens in the dissertation along with gender theories by various mainstream gender theorists. Julia Kristeva's Abjection Theory, Bradford et al.'s Transformative Utopianism, and Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's theory on Liminality have also been discussed. The conclusion this paper draws at is that young adults must embark on the arduous journey to transform the present world state because the future world is for them to be had.

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Chapter I: Young Adult Literature and Dystopia

When the absolute authority of one of the largest religious institutions stresses on the need for youths to be dissidents, the episode demands review. Pope Francis, who has established himself as quite a rule-breaker or more appropriately ‘disturber of the traditional Catholic Church system’ — he has touched the feet of inmates, spoken ‘for’ LGBT community, stood against corruption rampant in the Church, advised youngsters to demand a more outward-looking Catholic Church (Hafiz “Pope Francis’ Defining Moments”) — had an atypical message for the youths during his 2015 visit to Paraguay. According to Pullella and Desantis, it was not the first time Francis had called on young people to “shake things up” (“Pope”). “We don’t want young weaklings. We do not want young people who tire quickly, who live life worn out with faces of boredom. We want youths with hope and strength” (Francis qtd. in Pullella and Desantis “Pope”). Evidently, it is not just us — the humble beings — who are chanting the ‘disturbing the universe’ slogan.

But what is it about adolescents that is making even the revered Pope Francis to address them as ‘agents of change’? The answer contains within; adolescents are a force to reckon with. Humans are threatened with a gamut of problems concerning global warming, world hunger, economic discrepancy, gender inequality, and many more. We are participating in a race to push the world towards abyss of darkness i.e. dystopia. The world necessitates young adults with their invigorating energy to appropriate power since presently the adults are running it irresponsibly. To avoid the unfortunate from happening, adolescents are summoned.

Dystopian young adult literature (henceforth DYAL) handles issues that are pertinent to the present failed state. DYAL has a young protagonist who faces problems planted by the adults but who takes it upon himself/herself to put a lid on

the prevailing perils. Young adults want to shake things up because the world the adults live in is not the same they want to inhabit as well. They want to change the structure of the society. And in that process to change — destabilize everything, disturb the universe.

1. DEFINING YOUNG ADULTS AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE (YAL)

Every attempt at defining young adult literature (henceforth YAL) meets failure halfway. P.B. Cole in *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century* shares the sentiment, “Over the last half century, experts have struggled to define young adult (YA) literature” (49). Throughout history, YAL has received variant names: “adolescent literature, juvenile literature, junior books, children’s literature, and books for teens. Given the negative connotations of the words *adolescents* and *teens*, most experts today agree upon *young adult literature*” (Cole 49). Fanning the flame, Michael Cart, the celebrated young adult literature critic, affirms the fluidity of YAL. “The term ‘young adult literature’ is inherently amorphous, for its constituent terms ‘young adult’ and ‘literature’ are dynamic, changing as culture and society — which provide their context — change” (Cart qtd. in Doll “What does ‘young adult’ mean?”). But scholars, critics, YAL readers, authors need a working definition. Many scholars working in the field of YAL extend hands. “By young adult literature, we mean anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments” (Nilsen & Donelson 2). (Interesting to note is that in Hunger Games trilogy, those eligible for the reaping — annual Hunger Games event, fall under 12-18 age group.) This definition, nevertheless, has generated many arguments. The Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), administered by the Educational Testing Service have conflicting notions on

the subject. The former defines that those between eighteen and twenty-two are fitting to be labeled as young adults; whereas the latter is resolute on “ages 21 through 25” (Nilsen & Donelson 23). Furthermore, by the look of the astronomical number of YA novels been sold every year, it is implausible to say that the conventionally considered teenagers are the genre’s only consumers. The term has become more charitable and incorporates people of as old as twenty-five. Since the word ‘young adult’ now embraces people of a broader age group, Cart writes:

In recent years, for example, the size of this population group has changed dramatically. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of persons between 12 and 19 soared to 32 million, a growth rate of seventeen percent that significantly outpaced the growth of the rest of the population. The size of this population segment has also increased as the conventional definition of ‘young adult’ has expanded to include those as young as ten and, since the late 1990s, as old as twenty-five. (“The Value”)

However, this is not to say that every argument in relation to young adult fiction has been put to rest. Another exhaustingly contested issue in the young adult literature world is: to call YA literature a genre or not? “Something people tend to forget is that YA is a category not a genre, and within it is every possible genre: fantasy, sci-fi, contemporary, non-fiction” (Tracy van Straaten, qtd. in Doll “What does ‘young adult’ mean?”). But Trites continues to call YAL a genre as she writes referring to it as, “Much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures (*Disturbing* 8). However, a third group of critics is least troubled by the discourse. Jim McCarthy, Vice President at Dystel & Goderich Literary Management, is an agent

whose authors include Richelle Mead of the *Vampire Academy* series and Jessica Spotswood, writer of *Born Wicked*, “I don’t know that there’s a real technical definition of what Y.A. is. Essentially, it’s just literature for and about teens, there to bridge the gap between children’s and adult’s books” (qtd. in Doll “What?”). McCarthy is apathetic to the round-table discussion. Being entangled in the war of definition will not yield anything. As long as the books sell that is all that matters.

Evidently, it is important to distinguish YAL from children’s literature because the two are, most often than not, used interchangeably. “From a philosophical perspective and for the purposes of critical analysis, ‘young adult literature’ can usefully be considered alongside, or even interchangeably with, ‘children’s literature’” (Nodelman qtd. in Eaton 5). Even if they do not fall on the opposite ends of the continuum, they, at least share some conspicuous differences, the most striking being “how social power is deployed during the course of the narrative” (Trites, *Disturbing* 2). Children’s literature is about “the child’s sense of Self and her or his personal power” whereas in the YA literature, “protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are” (2-3). The issue of ‘growth’ resounds in both but the treatment differs. “Virtually all children’s and adolescent novel” fall under ‘novels of development’ “Entwicklungromane” (Trites, *Disturbing* 10). Another identifiable characteristic of this kind is that it does not show the progression of the young protagonist into an adult. On the other hand, Bildungsromane comprises of ‘coming of age’ novels wherein the protagonist reaches adulthood by the end of the novel (11).

Indeed, it is an arduous task defining YAL. Nonetheless, the same predicament concerning YAL permits it heterogeneity. The new format is what Owen also gives space to in her paper. “It is now more diversified and dynamic than ever. It appears that YAL continues to keep pace with teen culture and is on the pulse of what

is happening in their lives and society in general” (Owen 16). Regardless of the format, the real life change and growth are the constant themes appearing in YA fiction. “It suggests, either directly or symbolically, the gaining of maturity (i.e., the loss of innocence as part of the passage from childhood to adulthood). The protagonists face the same kinds of challenges readers are experiencing” (Nilsen & Donelson 54-56). The fundamental element in young adult novels is its resonance with the young adults. The adaptability of YAL has secured it the prodigious readership.

Evolution of YAL

Despite the genre’s recent fanfare, if we dig deeper into history, it was only after the WWII that adolescents were identified as a separate social demographic. In fact, prior to that, they were either categorized as children or adults; the in-between period (between childhood and adulthood) was non-existent. Additionally, adulthood was marked by enlisting into the work force and before the 20th century, Liang writes “with children as young as 10 holding jobs to help support their families, few entertained the existence of an in-between stage of development” (6). In a CNN article, Cart is quoted as saying, “*Seventeenth Summer*, released by Maureen Daly in 1942, is considered to be the first book written and published explicitly for teenagers” (Strickland “A Brief History”). The novel was about ‘first love’ and targeted at young girls. However, the same article credits American Library Association’s decision to form, in 1957, a new division and to name it ‘The Young Adult Services Division.’ Libraries, thereafter, kept aside books for ‘young adult’ readers; books that talked to and of adolescence. Hitherto libraries did not have aisles serving exclusively to young adult readers. This dire condition was because “teenagers were often lumped with small children” (Liang 7).

When in the late 1960s the term ‘young adult literature’ procured its prominence, Cart explains it was synonymous with realistic fiction set in the real world. The rise of realism in YA literature was witnessed in 1960s. But apparently the prime time of YAL began in 70s and lasted till mid-80s. 80s is synonymous to Dark Age in YAL (Cart, “The Value”). “However, from the mid-1990s there has been a resurgence and reinvention of YAL,” (Owen 11-12). Party Campbell, a YA critic, attempts her hand at giving a crash course on the evolution of YA literature, “from the start, the mainstream of young adult literature has been perceived as realism” (66). The book shelves spent their days gleefully “in the magic years of 1967–1968” when *The Outsiders*, *The Contender*, and *The Pigman* ventured from the light formulaic setup into “bold new subjects that soon earned such novels the name of ‘the new realism’” (Campbell 66). Hence, the dawn of YAL was decreed.

This, however, is not to say that realism was well received by everyone. Before the publication of Robert Cormier’s first YA novel, *The Chocolate War*, in 1974, novels for young adults were closely guarded and even though these novels were labeled ‘realist novels’, the dark side of realism was only sparingly peppered. Referring to the new wave in literature targeted to young adults, Campbell acknowledges the contribution of Cormier. *The Chocolate War* raised eyebrows and became the object of literary scrutiny because the novel with young protagonist discussed “broader human condition” under the guise of insipid adolescence matters (66). YA fiction readers swear by the names of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967), Paul Zindel’s *The Pigman* (1968), and Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (1974) because these novels blatantly reflected adolescence. Young adult expert Connie Zitlow remarks, “Although not originally published as young adult literature, many of the classics have become

works that have been embraced by young readers” (51). The fact is agents and marketers promoted these books as ‘young adult literature’ since they saw great financial prospect catering to the ever expanding age bracket. Besides, their prognosis did not fall off the mark.

Allure of YAL

One thing is for certain, be it Salinger, Cormier or Hinton, the earlier books signal at the common denominator and that is they were called ‘problem novels’ behind their backs: realistic novels dealing in teenage concerns. On the other hand, ‘when realism became the vogue’, many critics grew wary since they reckoned that the frequent portrayal of the ‘cruel world’ would convert the young readers into faithful pessimists. “However, even in so-called downer books, authors created characters that readers could admire for the way they faced up to their challenges” (Nilsen & Donelson 4). Though the popularity of this literary genre was laid on the foundation of problem novels and that gave voice to the realistic struggles and issues of adolescence; the genre has since then spread its wings across “every genre imaginable” informs McGraw Hill (10). “From the mid-1990s there has been a resurgence and reinvention of YA literature. This is mainly due to authors and publishers challenging the traditional content, age limit and format of the teenage ‘problem’ novel” (Owen 11). In 1992 when the world experienced the baby boom, young adults resurrected the genre and the process was repeated in 2000, the period is considered the second golden age (11). The new millennium however was appropriated by fantasy and science fiction. According to Cole, this change was beckoned in 1966 by J. R. R. Tolkien’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* followed by *Harry Potter* 30 years later (67). Even though *Harry Potter* series were written and marketed as children’s literature, teenagers and adults alike buried their noses in the

series. J.K. Rowling was followed by Stephenie Meyer when she took the world by storm with her *Twilight* series and then the world ushered the first part of Hunger Games trilogy — *The Hunger Games*. “*The Hunger Games* was published in September 2008 and went on to spend 100 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list, where it was joined by *Catching Fire* the following year, and the final book of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*, in 2010” (Walker “Suzanne Collins”). Sean P. Connors in *The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres* presents discussion consolidating the commercial success of Hunger Games trilogy. His comment translates to millions devouring YA novels. In 2012, Hunger Games trilogy outperformed J. K. Rowling’s seven-volume Harry Potter series seizing the “all-time best-selling books on Amazon” position. The namesake movie adaptations of *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* broke the box office record, “grossing over \$800 million domestically. By any measure, the trilogy is a commercial success” (Connors 14). Teen readers are attracted to YAL like geeks to Comic Con. It has been rightfully coveted with the title of ‘Literature’s hottest genre’. “3,000 young adult novels were published in 1997. Twelve years later, that figure hit 30,000 titles — an increase of a full order of magnitude. In 2009, total sales exceeded \$3 billion” (Brown “How Young Adult Fiction Came of Age”). This clearly illustrates the popularity of Hunger Games trilogy and the area of its impact. YAL is growing every year with its diverse subject matter and recognition.

But one recurring question is: why is YAL so popular? Why are millions storming into bookstores and libraries to secure their copies of YA novels? One reason could be because teens are at the heart of the genre; thereby it talks to the adolescents in a way neither children nor adult novels do. Plenty of theories have been floated to explain YA's colossal circulation, but “one of the key features of young-

adult fiction is its currency, its absolute synchronicity with the concerns of the audience to whom it is marketed” (Coats, *Looking* 137). Owing to the failure of his time to produce young adult literature, Cart vowed to elude the dearth by turning himself into a reviewer, writer, editor and anthologist — dealing with the creation and promotion of books for young people. Cart explains,

Teenagers urgently need books that speak with relevance and immediacy to their real lives and to their unique emotional, intellectual, and developmental needs and that provide a place of commonality of experience and mutual understanding, for in so doing, they bring the outsiders out of the darkness and into the light of community. (qtd. in Nilsen & Donelson 25)

The aforementioned statement by Cart rings true because teenage is the time of self-discovery. Roberta S. Tries asserts, “Growth is possible in a postmodern world, especially if growth is defined as an increasing awareness of the institutions constructing the individual” (*Disturbing* 3). To be better situated in the world of the adults, the adolescents are imploded by existential questions: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Why does the world not make any sense? Does my existence serve any purpose in the grand scheme of things? “A dominant preoccupation of much adolescent fiction is with how notions of identity are formed within specific contexts and shaped by larger social structures and processes (Bradford et al. 24). Teenagers are constantly in a quest to find themselves. They search for their identity. They want to know themselves to know the world better. However the self-realization does not take place in isolation as in children literature. Adolescents identify themselves in relation to the societal forces that contribute to shape them. Cormier views adolescence as “the plight of the individual versus the system” (qtd. in Waters

“Do I dare”). Their being is overlapped with societal factors. A young protagonist is said to have accomplished adult identity when in “the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity” (Campbell 24). When the young adult, in hindsight, accumulates knowledge about the world after the conflict with it comes to a standstill, s/he is said to have matured.

The most distinguishing quality of young adult literature is not merely the age of its target audience, but how it addresses these readers’ needs. While the self-centered nature of romanticism overflows in the children’s literature, in the YA, the theme revolves around the protagonist discovering oneself amidst social constraints. The protagonists in the YA novels realize that their being is interwoven with society. They need to find themselves within the existing societal make-up. “Students respond to the way these books raise questions about conformity, social pressures, justice, and other aspects of human frailties and strengths” (Nilsen & Donelson 36). As far as Trites is concerned, the most captivating aspect about adolescence is teenagers’ equation with society and adults (*Disturbing* 6). One of the arguments supporters of YA literature have been reiterating in defense of its popularity is that YA novels relate their characters to the readers ‘just like them’. So much so that “Even though in the Hunger Games trilogy there is nothing “just like them”, adolescents can relate to some of the striking factors” (Doll “What does ‘Young Adult’ mean?”); and by ‘some of the striking factors’ Doll is aiming at romance, society, authoritative power, and rebellion. Possibly YA novels do not provide any immediate solutions or the answers; but young readers are more importantly involved in the journey of the protagonist in finding the solutions (Owen 11). Furthermore, the narrative pace is swift, “dialogue is direct and confrontational, and the language is sparse” (Nilsen and Donelson 27). The

novel is written from the point of view of the young protagonist and therefore YAL is representative of the adolescents (27). “YAL is created especially for YAs, hoping to give them a more mature understanding of the self and the world” (Owen 13). The first person narration — “the preferred technique”— has been identified as one of the prominent aspects of YAL. Barber calls it as “an authentic voice that continues to illuminate their experiences and emotions, giving insight into their lives” (qtd. in Cadden 146). While that may be the case in many instances, Mike Cadden in “The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novels” comments that the authors of YA novels do not accurately represent the young adults they write for. The “authentic representation of young adults” with the young protagonist having the agency for self-representation is an erroneous concept according to Cadden.

The irony of the use of ‘authenticity’ is important to consider. While any novel is an ideal site for studying the different layers of narrative relationships, the young adult novel that features the consciousness of young characters is especially interesting because of the unique and ironic relationship between author and reader in this age-based genre.

(146)

The author knows that the protagonist’s first-person-narrative is observing the world through his/her fractured lens. The protagonist is an adolescent; therefore his/her perspective on life will be half baked. The young readers relishing young adult novels will not be suitably guided since the narration is coming from someone who has not yet attained the complete knowledge on life. This is what Cadden means by irony of narration in young adult literature. The young protagonist has an inadequate information of the world and life, and the author wants the readers to know of this irony — “the limits of the young adult consciousness in the text” (Cadden 146).

Authors leave tools necessary “for identifying and coping with that irony” and they do that with the help of “double-voiced discourse”. The tools in question assist the young readers to see the irony in the narration and to “see that any perspective is contingent” (147). The single reading of texts is discouraged and multiple interpretations are promoted. The reader might have concluded one perspective; however the author leaves ample cues for otherwise. “Though the reader may come to some decisions about the “rightness” of a particular perspective, the text has not clearly argued for that position and has provided other complete positions to consider” (147). That entails the irony of having an adolescent play the part of a narrator.

To add insult to injury, YAL is charged with other accusations — that it teaches teenagers the cult of violence and that YAL is not ‘literary enough’. But contrary to popular belief, young adult literature is not low art. Nilsen and Donelson argue for the legitimacy of books meant for young adults. They talk about the prodigious uphill journey of YAL, which is not only in regards to volume but reflects in quality as well. YAL should no more be treated as an oxymoron. There is no paradox in the usage of the term any longer. “Young adult literature has come of age, as literature” (Nilsen & Donelson 66). Despite the strenuous efforts on the part of the young adult literary critics to nullify the claims of the naysayers, YA novels are either lumped into ‘chick-flick’ or unceremoniously dumped as ‘light content’. “An alternative way of looking at these novels, and perhaps, a more engaging technique in a postmodern world, is an exploration through a critical literacy framework” (Kaplan 16). YA literature has its devoted defender in Cart. He sees great promise in the young adult fiction. He states, “The genre has come of age as literature...that welcomes artistic innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking” (Cart, *Young Adult* 20). Santoli and Wagner give strong evidences underpinning the legality of YA

literature — “Good-quality novels written for teenagers contain the elements of literature found in the classics: character and characterization, setting, conflict, theme, point of view, plot, style, crisis, climax, foreshadowing, flashback, figurative language, and so forth” (“Promoting”). It is time critics stop their acerbic comments on the legality of YAL.

The popularity of dystopian YA fiction is soaring high. Looks like, everyone wants to join the bandwagon. Evidently, sales figure reflect the popularity scale— “...trade sales, as it turns out, are up 2.8 percent this year. And—in a turn of events that should surprise no one—those trade sales were buoyed by a substantial increase in sales of Young Adult and Children’s books, up 22.4 percent over 2013” (Sturgeon “Are You”). YAL basically saved publishing in 2014. Sales translate to earnings of YA fiction authors. Even though Collins made a dwindling earning figure in 2014 compared to the earlier years, this is not to say that the impact of YAL and especially dystopia has dissipated. On the earning of Collins, Robehmed writes, “she earned a relatively paltry \$16 million – a 71% decrease from the \$55 million she pulled in between 2012 and 2013 – due to an 88% drop in book sales of her dystopian trilogy” (Robehmed “The World’s”). Hunger Games trilogy’s sales might have been affected because of the emergence of new dystopian YA novels. The torch has been passed from one successful dystopian young adult author to another.

Young adult author Veronica Roth ranks 6th on account of her “Divergent” trilogy which sold a combined 6.7 million copies in 2013, earning her around \$17 million from print and ebook sales between June 2013 and June 2014. She also benefited from the book’s 2014 film adaption, which grossed \$270 million at the global box office. At

just 26, Roth is the youngest newcomer on the ranking, and one of seven women on the 17-person list. (Robehmed “The World’s”)

Apparently, dystopian young adult novels are here to stay for a long time. One thing linking the two alleged opponents is that both Collins and Roth have contributed in the surge of readers to the book stores thereby assisting in book sales. With the sequels of *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* creating box office records, it is evident that dystopia will appreciate a long life and dystopian YA fiction with strong female protagonists is not an ephemeral trend.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF DYSTOPIAN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

(DYAL)

The whole paraphernalia regarding utopia/dystopia dialectic began with Thomas More; when he published *Utopia* in the sixteenth century. “The modern word ‘utopia’ derives from Ancient Greek, where ‘ou’ meant ‘no’ or ‘not’ and ‘topos’ meant ‘place’. The Greek ‘ou’ is similar to ‘eu’, the latter’s translation being ‘good’” (Suvin qtd. in Blidariu 54). “...the fact that ‘utopia’ can be read both as ‘eu-topia’ which means ‘the good place’ and as ‘ou-topia’, meaning ‘no-place’, suggests that More saw this ideal society as non-existent and even as unattainable” (Levitas qtd. in Desmet 7). Dystopia, on the other hand does not suffer from multiple personality disorder like utopia; it has just one identity. “A literal translation of ‘dystopia’ would simply mean ‘bad place’” (Vieira qtd. in Blidariu 54). Blidariu brings the disparate thoughts together, “A utopia is defined as a place both perfect and impossible. A dystopia refers to a world so imperfect that it annihilates all hope for the better” (53).

Theorizing Utopia and Dystopia

A dystopian society adopts fascism. It restricts its denizens from exercising free-will. The authority has a plan and it wants everyone to conform to it even though

it may not align with the collective voice. People are suppressed and they speak in muffled voices. Since dystopia is a subgenre of science fiction, (“Strictly and precisely speaking, utopia is not a genre but the sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction” (Suvin qtd. in Blidariu 53)) most often the storyline in dystopian YA novels comprises of scientific experiments gone awry or advanced technology applied to do more wrongs than right and wherein people die of poverty, inequality, overpopulation, no crops, and barren lands.

Because its settings are inevitably somewhere in the future, post-disaster fiction has consistently depicted the present as history and uses this temporal relationship as a strategy to foreground dystopian tendencies in present societies. One of the obvious challenges posed by such constructed historical perspectives, then, is to suggest that the ideological systems of the past (i.e. our present) have lost their explanatory force — in terms of their social (including gender), political, ethical, and religious institutions and practices. (Bradford et al. 20)

The present world has grave problems. It is not perfect. If the imperfections are not obliterated or addressed urgently, future might look relatively grim. And dystopian literature presents the similar formidable picture of the world. The world is being managed inappropriately or else what do we make out of violence against women, extreme inequalities in wealth, impenetrable power structures, cities sinking, global warming, drought, genocide, terrorism, and all the other devilish events amassed to project a catastrophic future to the young adults who are the caretakers of this present distorted world. Now is the time to revisit and reframe our ideologies. Apparently, we have been betting on losing horse.

“The last tribute alive receives a life of ease back home, and their district will be showered with prizes, largely consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning districts gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 17-18). Such is the picture of a future world painted in the primary text under discussion. Dystopian novels show the worst case scenario propelled by present-problem-gone-horridly-wrong fact. “The dystopia is presented as what has happened as a result of human behavior, of people messing up” (Claeys 18). The problems portrayed in the dystopian novels are not disconnected from reality because they resonate with the multitude of complications we are facing at present. The relatability factor is behind the popularity of dystopian young adult literature. What we can deduce is that the purpose of YA dystopia is to teach the teenagers about real world. “The benefit of providing a hopeless scenario is that it forces readers to “think about life differently ... outside the novel” (Childs 187). That is why, DYAL narrates cautionary tales. Looking at the present world state, dystopia does not appear to be a far-fetched concept. “...utopian narratives are, more than anything else, concerned with the present, and with the values, politics and social practices as desirable possibilities for a transformed world order” (Bradford et al. 8). Utopian society appears improbable. Inspiration for dystopia, on the other hand, is ubiquitous. With one world tragedy after next — “World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, the various revolutions both successful and suppressed, the struggles against colonialism that only succeeded after very high costs were paid, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., etc.” (Kumar 10) — it is not amiss to call the twentieth century “the dystopian century” (10). This is not to comment that things are any better in the twenty-first century. In fact, it is no less than its predecessor; premonitions have been

pervasive therefore the world appears more abysmally despondent now than ever before (10).

Hence, owing to the current reality, portrayal of dystopian society has become pervasive in YAL. “Under such harsh truths the dream of perfection seemed nothing more than a fantasy, an illusory desire for the better. Reality brought forth “a paralysis of Utopian thought and imagination” (Frye qtd in Blidariu 56). Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash support the idea. “Utopia and dystopia in practice tend to test the boundaries of reality: the former approaches an ideal but rarely reaches it—stopped by the real world— and the latter makes visible various breaking points and vulnerabilities” (6). It is easy imagining the worst because life gifts more tragedies than blessings. No wonder ‘when things go wrong’ list is quickly filled whereas ‘when things go right’ takes a considerably longer time. “...it appears that just as writing a eutopia may be harder than writing a dystopia, creating and maintaining a eutopia is harder than creating and maintaining a dystopia” (Kumar 12). Utopian society is difficult to maintain whereas we can easily handle dystopia — we have been, in fact, living in a version of the same.

But literature introduced utopia earlier than dystopia (though the statement is contested by many. The critics argue that *Utopia* by More is in fact a dystopian novel). How and when did utopia become a bastard child and dystopia usurped utopia’s place in literature is a matter of interest. “It is generally agreed that the literary genre of the utopia has been particularly influential during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, whereas the period following the 1950s is rather marked by the rise of the dystopian genre” (Baeten qtd. in Desmet 11). *The Giver* written by Lois Lowry (1993) is considered the first dystopian YAL. This is not to indicate that literature did not encounter dystopia earlier. *Brave New World* (1931), *1984*(1949),

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), are studied as avant-garde novels in the field of dystopia. Having said that, till *The Giver* was published, dystopia in fiction was marketed only for adults.

It is a notion contested heatedly but 'art depicts life'. When life is overwhelmingly affected by war, literature can but portray the ghastliness of the same. Modern Era, with its advancement in science and knowledge sanctioned humans to dream. But people's calculation went amiss and the two successive world wars ran over people's hope for a perfect world. By the time Postmodern Era came into existence, things had taken a speedy downhill. It was like people were lost in a reverie and reality hit them hard. The concept of a new world order was introduced as a lullaby to the scared people who feared the ghosts of wars. The new world order was utopic in its make-up. In the twentieth century, the rhetoric of a new world order promised of "various visions for a world shaped by tolerance, human rights, superpower cooperation, north-south alliance, and an end of military conflicts" (Bradford et al. 1). It is delusional to entertain utopian thoughts when one is standing on a graveyard. When things started getting bad, it got worse and people stripped themselves of any hopes for a better tomorrow because tomorrow appeared to be like today — hopeless, dark, and translucent — not allowing any ray of hope. "Hopes for the better and fears for the worst have always been connected to dreams and nightmares. Utopian authors have chosen to focus on the first while dystopian authors have chosen to focus on the latter" (Blidariu 56). Given the context, it is understandable that more authors are crafting narratives of dystopia.

In their book *New World Order: Transformative Utopianism*, Bradford et al, offer ample room to the concept of "Transformative Utopianism". To summarize their thought: Utopia must be transformative if it is to imagine a better world than the

flawed one that people currently know of. However, “utopian transformation doesn’t have to be located in the future, in a far-distant hope for a better place. Rather, it can be part of transformation in the now” (Levitas and Sargisson qtd. in Bradford et al. 4). If conflict is the deciding factor between utopia and dystopia, Masin says quoting Gray that conflict is the truth of life and its absence is a wishful thinking we take respite in. The narratives of mankind are embedded in ‘power struggles’ and ‘conflict’; whereas, hope for the annihilation of both is a sheer utopic thought. In the post-modern world, utopian thinking is said to be conceived from those seduced by the left (Masin “Make an historic overview”). Which brings us to the conclusion that dystopia is hell; utopia is heaven. The absence of one breeds the other. Or so has been the (mis)conception so far. “Dystopian literature is often defined as fiction that explores the opposite of utopia and presents an alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future” (Christina M. Kimsey 2).

However, Mohr alarms that utopia and dystopia do not exist in absence of the other. “Utopias are in fact still present in our culture, albeit ‘in the disguise of dystopias’. This means that the dystopian genre is indirectly built upon utopian narratives – more particularly by trying to formulate an alternative to these sometimes rather naive ideas...” (qtd. in Desmet 12-13). As opposed to popular notion “dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia” remark Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash. “A true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful” (qtd. in Trites, *Disturbing* 2). Dystopia is utopia ‘that has gone wrong’ or a utopia that only serves the interest of a handful. Utopia and dystopia are in fact not mutually exclusive. The same idea is borrowed by Ryan who states, “Many dystopian worlds are formulated with utopic ideologies that have seemingly perfect ways of living and running a society, but only

for the privileged few in charge” (3). According to Claeys there are more commonalities vis-à-vis “their aims and objectives” compared to differentiating factors between utopia and dystopia (18). Claeys further explains his argument, “but there are problems even with the idea of dystopia as the negative of ‘ideal’ societies” (15). One person’s idea of utopia might conflict with that of the others. When ideologies clash, humans are presented with disparate world views. Therefore making the same society utopia for some and dystopian for the rest. “Clearly just as one person’s freedom fighter is another’s terrorist, one person’s utopia is another’s dystopia” (Claeys 15). The distinction between the two, however, is not so easy. “Dystopia is not so much the opposite of utopia as its shadow” (Kumar 19). In fact, Kumar acknowledges that the two are spitting images of each other. “It emerged in the wake of utopia and has followed it ever since. So close are the genres that it is not always clear what is a utopia and what a dystopia” (19). If we turn history pages, Kumar further points out, we will extrapolate that “the earliest forms [of utopia] seem to have been satires on the rationalist and scientific utopias of More and Bacon” (qtd. in Vieira 3). Modernity busied itself with decrees of grand narratives- freedom, democracy, science, reason and it is the very centers dystopian novels hit at — people at power making a mockery of humanity by experimenting with human lives propagating the ‘for science’ and ‘freedom for all’ rhetoric. *The Maze Runner*, *Divergent* series, *Hunger Games* series, *The Giver* all corroborate the argument. That is why it was only in the twentieth century that dystopia truly comes into its own as “its targets, right from the beginning, have been the ‘grand narratives’ of modernity’ and most of these elements only really spread on a significant scale in the latter part of the nineteenth century” (Kumar qtd. in Vieira 3).

Dystopia functions with the assistance of utopia. Dystopia alone serves no purpose. It is on the pedestal of utopia that dystopia stands firm. “Dystopia is needed because it presents us a gloomy future we have definitely to avoid, but it really only works when it is assisted by its counterpart, eutopia, which ‘remind[s] us that better, while difficult, is possible’” (Kumar 4). Hope persists even in the darkest hour because it has to pull us out of the bleak picture of the future laid in front of us. If we are to avoid the hell, it can only be with the hope for heaven.

Relevance of Utopia and Dystopia in YAL

Amidst all the discussions on utopia/ dystopia and the correlation between the two, what appears to be the most intriguing is that when dystopia showcases a forbidding depiction of the world, why are dystopian novels palatable; and more baffling is why are these novels hungrily devoured by the young readers? The answer is with Cart along with Basu, Broad and Hintz. “Dystopian literature, then, is part of the category of speculative fiction that depicts a dystopia with hypothetical situations “to motivate a generation on the cusp of adulthood” (Basu, Broad and Hintz qtd. in Ryan 3). DYAL foregrounds a despondent society to titillate the adolescents for action. Gording, Tilley and Prakash join the discussion. “...dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now” (2). Dystopia is a subcategory under speculative fantasy wherein anxiety over the future germinates a setting in fiction prompting things to get abysmally grim. Kimsey defines, “Dystopian literature is often defined as fiction that explores the opposite of utopia and presents an alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future” (2). Mossner in her essay titled “Hope in Dark Times” quotes Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry wherein the duo anticipates the increasing popularity of dystopian genre owing to the

fact that the genre offers “a productive place to address the fears and questions that interest young adult readers” (69). Fears and questions of the young adults are echoed in the following lines in *Mockingjay* — the second part of the trilogy in discussion — “Frankly, our ancestors don't seem much to brag about. I mean, look at the state they left us in, with the wars and the broken planet. Clearly, they didn't care about what would happen to the people who came after them” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 45). W.B. Yeats unequivocally captures the dystopian essence in his *The Second Coming* in the couplet:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

When things break, it cannot hold anything within. Anarchy, war, fear, terrorism, surveillance, totalitarianism, viral diseases, destruction, and mass killing is rampant in the present world and such doings transmit a strong message to the teens — that the world they inhabit is not a safe place — the world they will be leading is fractured. It is difficult for them to comprehend the world when uncertainty looms large.

Therefore, the only genre that caters to their immediate need is dystopia—since *DYAL* is a strange concoction of bleakness and hope.

We are living in very troubled times. More than ever before, we need utopian and dystopian literature. Literature on utopia and dystopia, both develop from ‘a critique of ‘postmodern,’ advanced technological societies gone awry—and from a strong impulse for social change. We are in need of this literature, especially for young readers, to provide hope for a different and more humane world. (Hintz and Ostry ix)

Understandably, *DYAL* is a breeding ground for ‘tensions’ cohabiting the world.

“...one of the key tensions in new world order narratives, the tension between

individual subject position and the ideology of a society built on surveillance, conformity, and repression” (Fruitlands qtd. in Bradford et al. 26). Young adults react quickly to dystopian novels because they present narratives wherein young adults’ lives have been hijacked, which rings true to them. Dystopian world set in these novels act as harbinger of an impending world order approaching towards us in an accelerating speed. Compounded with wars, bombing, advanced weaponry, calamities led in by human actions, surveillance, fear of information and aging, and realities numbing life are trending in DYAL. Though insignificant and insipid in appearance — compared to pressing world affairs — adolescents’ concerns, nevertheless should not be silenced without due attention. “When these issues are heightened to the extreme”, the repercussion of ignoring adolescents’ issues and voices has taken the form of dystopian literature (Ryan 2). Utopian and dystopian novels are offshoots of the present world order which bears many complications. The adult dystopia extrapolates from aspects of the present to show readers how terrible things will become if our deplorable behavior continues unchecked. The more utterly the protagonist is crushed, the more urgent and forceful the message (Miller “Fresh Hell”). It’s not about persuading the reader to stop something terrible from happening—it’s about stating what’s happening, right this minute, “in the stormy psyche of the adolescent reader” (“Fresh Hell”). It is the social commentaries interwoven with the dramatic elements that make DYAL popular; the right balance of life and literature.

Despite much fanfare, dystopia is not a recent day literary discovery. And Suzanne Collins did not create a cult of young and loyal readers of dystopian novels. Hunger Games trilogy did not establish this raucous over the genre solely on its own standing. Nevertheless, Collins should be awarded for resurrecting the dystopian

genre. Dystopia is not a stranger to literature since it has been visiting literature with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and others that flagged the genre of dystopian literature (Ryan 3). "Disaster literature, originating as a cold-war phenomenon in children's literature, has changed its focus over the past decades from nuclear holocaust (1960s–1980s), to pollution, greenhouse gases, and global warming (1980s–1990s), to (post)apocalyptic scenarios (1990s–2000s)" (Bradford et al. 6-7). The new wave of dystopian novels is credited to the Sep 11, 2001 tragedy. What followed next mirrored the deteriorating state of the world politics. The before and after of the episode has been conspicuous as themes meant for the young adults in literature have radically changed. "... children's perceptions of the worlds in which they live, and the futures which they imagine" (Bradford et al. 6) has been affected and literature has mirrored the same concerns and angst. "When the looming fear of an overt attack to harm and dismantle the United States became more than just a threat, a quasi-dystopian world seemed to be the result" (Ames qtd. in Ryan 4). A few dystopias that surfaced post-World Trade Center attacks include M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005), and Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) (Basu, Broad, and Hintz qtd. in Ryan 5). And then emerged Hunger Games trilogy in 2008 equipped with dystopian elements highlighting the vulnerabilities of the present world.

In fact, every time something menacing happens in the world, authors get the first call; and subsequently dystopia reappears in literature. "Dystopia becomes a recurring theme during the Twentieth Century and Postmodernity: a painful plunge back into reality after the failure of utopia and the crisis of Modernity" (Masin "Make an historic overview"). Without discontent there is no utopia. Without projections of

utopia, our world would be a dismal place, and this is all the more reason why we need utopian and dystopian literature for the young.

So what is so different about YA dystopian literature? “In other genres of young adult literature, the protagonists’ decisions usually only affect a small sphere of people; protagonists of young adult dystopian fiction, however, make decisions that can potentially change how their society functions and subsequently the nature of their world” (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 158). Bradford et al. comment as if they grew weary with the brewing negativity regarding the world and dystopian representation of the present, “These are dangerous times, but they are also times of possibility” (14). Besides, dystopian novels are not all smeared with dismal elements. As Bauman puts it: “To measure the life ‘as it is’ by a life as it should be (that is, a life imagined to be different from the life known, and particularly a life that is better and would be preferable to the life known) is a defining, constitutive feature of humanity” (222). In a five-part Time Magazine Interview series, Suzanne Collins, the creator of the Hunger Games trilogy confessed that dystopian stories are a sort of “acting out anxieties that we have and fears that we have about the future”. She remarks, “I mean I think of dystopian literature as being cautionary tales, and it’s a way you can kind of frame it and try to make sense and kind of set it outside yourself but look at the issues involved” (Grossman “A Conversation”). Cart points out that though dystopian literature depicts an unpromising world order (Cart calls it “social commentary on current ways of living”), it is to ready the agents of change for the future when the world is for them to be had (qtd. in Ryan 6).

YAL dealing in utopia and dystopia places two options in front of us: if we change the present for the better, it will lead us towards utopian society; correspondingly, if we do not correct it, the present dire state will worsen and will

eventually push us towards dystopian society. There is no sugar-coating in dystopian fiction. Conversely, it shows the darkest hour of earth. Dystopian literature for young adults shakes the consciousness of its readers—brings them closer to the contemporary malpractices, wrongs, and misses.

Set amidst such dark world, Collins gave us a trilogy on young adult dystopia with a female protagonist and the world is raving about it. There are too many anomalies centering on the trilogy: dystopian novel for young adults with a female protagonist, written by a female author with male and female characters blurring the gender binaries. Interestingly, it is not just about having a female lead character that sets Collins apart from a bevy of other female young adult authors. She has transgressed gender lines and disturbed the gendered universe.

Chapter II: Young Adults' Position in DYAL

A fundamental aspect of adolescence is the desire to 'bring change' — to 'change the old guards' and to be able to see the world through different lens. Growth in adolescents sprout from the impassioned need to crush the dark underbelly of adult world and in the doing they 'disturb the universe'. But this is as much part of an internal disturbance as it is external. While a person embarks into adolescence, society interferes aggressively. An individual becomes more a part of a society as s/he progresses with age. "Importance is attached to this phase of life because many keys: social, economic, biological and demographic events occur during the period which set the stage for the future" (Peterson qtd. in Omotoso 1-2). Growth in adolescents and establishment of subjectivity is about becoming wherein many factors come into play and thereby contribute in shaping the being.

The subjectivity or the 'I' is a culmination of too many encounters an individual has with the outside world. The subjectivity that an individual has is given by the society and therefore it tries to mold the individual according to its requirements. "And indeed, adolescents do not achieve maturity in a ya novel until they have reconciled themselves to the power entailed in the social institutions with which they must interact to survive" (Trites, *Disturbing* 20). The power equation between an individual and the system is, in fact, quite baffling. Each tests the hold of the other in the relationship but both reckon that neither can underwrite the power of the other. In the process of growing up, adolescents learn the rule of the game and try bending some as well but sooner or later they realize that they can attain adulthood only by thoughtful negotiation with the societal forces.

Having said that, teenagers do not take the beatings without any confrontations. They are not thrown to latency in the interaction with the big, bad,

beguiling world. The interaction with the dominating societal forces does not result into 'development of the teenagers' without resistance on the part of the neophytes. Teenagers fight back. They are sparked off by stereotypes and conventions. They rebel because they do not endorse 'passivity to tyranny'. They rebel because things look bleak to them.

One is both influenced by the power structures around him/her and in a way s/he is powerful because of the institution s/he inhabits. In the context of power and subjectivity, Trites writes that the two are fundamentally connected (*Disturbing* 7). The 'I', an internal force, becomes a full functioning entity in the course of dealing with the external forces. "Such a definition of power acknowledges both the external and internal forces that compete to empower and repress individual power, but it also allows for the individual's acknowledgment of one's power as a necessary function of subjectivity" (7). Subjectivity refers to the ways that we end up viewing ourselves as individuals in the world. Besides, the young adults make use of the same subjectivity, given by the society, to resist its imposing authority. An individual is made aware of the power s/he holds when power is acted either against one's internal demons or those lurking outside. One's subjectivity is dictated by oneself. Subjectivity is reflective of the manifestation of the power one is bestowed with (7). Situations demand an individual to bring power rested in him/her to the fore. "One is always responsible for one's position as subject" (Lacan qtd. in Trites, *Disturbing* 7). Subjectivity is, therefore, linked with power.

The nonconformity displayed by female protagonists is yet another stimulating episode in the evolution of YAL. Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz introduce their concept on 'the new woman'. "...these New Women, both fictional and real, blurred the ostensibly clear distinctions between genders and spheres and, in the process,

illustrated the potential of liminality as a path to empowerment” (2). Such a portrayal of a female character destabilizes the literary canon. However, devotees of dystopian YAL decree that rebellion or ‘destabilizing endeavors’ spearheaded by the young adults is to bring back stability snatched from the public by the handful in power.

Young adults wearing the garb of revolutionaries is at the core of young adult literature; however, not all young adults must carry guns and not everyone should necessarily put themselves under the guillotine. ‘Disturbing the Universe’ can be an external or internal affair; it can be symbolic or real. It is up to the adult world to channelize the aggression and power rested on the young adults. But most importantly, young adults take up the mammoth project to disturb the universe only when the ruling institution fails to govern responsibly. Young adults take matters in their hands only when adults fail to right the wrong pervasive in the world.

1. Disturbing the ‘Stable’ Universe

On one hand, teenagers are young; while on the other, they are at the forefront of lobbying for paradigm shift. The equation almost sounds like an oxymoron. Their youth can be translated to inexperience and insufficient knowledge on the world system they want to change. There lies the predicament in having young adults to disturb the universe.

Authority has problem with heterodoxy and it also has problem with young adults. It is the young adults that practice heterodoxy freely therefore the pervasiveness of the problem. Adolescent rebellion is abhorred because the society demands stability and rebellion disrupts the supposedly ‘stable’ state of the otherwise ‘dysfunctional’ society. Adolescents are considered as the disturbing agents that violate the rules of the stable world. Society cannot allow teenagers to get adrift therefore it exerts power to keep them under control. “Adolescence is often so

disorganized that kids find themselves running in all directions at once. They need the organization, the structure of rules and standards to fall back on” (Wagemaker and Buchholz 71). Order is the currency of the adult world. Since adolescence is a process ‘to grow into maturity’, understandably, to enter into maturity, adolescents are asked to strip of ‘disturbing elements’ in them. YAL is marked by its “dedication to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures” (Trites, *Disturbing* 8). How does society deal with adolescents ‘with the tendency to cause trouble’ is at the core of young adult fiction. Adulthood is about “achieving the attitude and beliefs needed for effective participation in a society”, therefore young adults are strictly advised to cast off impurities (Rogers qtd. in Omotoso 1). Adulthood is tantamount to accepting the hegemonic norms without objections. Therefore adolescents should not act as mavericks. But a deafening voice also asserts that they should. In a ‘should they or should they not’ apprehension over teenagers acting out as revolutionaries, Julia Kristeva’s theory on ‘Abjection’ demands attention.

Protagonists who defy conventions are abject heroes because they “refuse to reintegrate into society under its terms but instead haunt and disrupt its borders” (Coats, “Abjection” 149). Society cannot allow acts of transgression from its young members. It wants to tame the wild so that they can be admitted to society. One needs to renounce impurities to bear moral responsibility. It is to do with membership in a society—inclusiveness in society — for the attainment of subjectivity. It is about accepting norms and laws and following order of the community, society, country. “Society needs the abject to constitute itself and to establish order and boundaries” (Coats, “Abjection” 151). Because our existence is intrinsically linked with the society, going against the diktats will not be well received. Moreover, such tendencies

will disavow an individual from his/her membership from the society. “Society does not require abject figures because in its social context, ‘abjection’ operates at the social rim. Such abject figures cannot sustain a position in a social group” (138). Society does not tolerate extremities in any form. In the name of stability, society will shun voices that hint of pushing the envelope or transgressing the border lines.

The protagonists of the YA novels are abject heroes because they endorse violence, aggression, and disorder. They stand for everything the society shows repugnance against. Young adults are considered impure because they are transgressors “Abjection occurs whenever set borders are crossed and transgression takes place” (Duschinsky 2). Abject beings are against order. They are threats to the society since they produce horror by diverging from the obvious ‘prescribed norms’; by violently shaking the seemingly balanced social order. Kristeva based her abjection theory on liminal beings “figures that are in a state of transition or transformation” (Pentony “How Kristeva’s theory”). The identity of young adults is closely linked to their transitory being — in the liminal phase — between childhood and adulthood; therefore they are treated as outsiders to the adult world, and any disruption on their part will be taken as a violation of the adult law. Therefore God, family, country, and society is summoned to circumscribe them from going astray. “The abject will be expelled/subdue or put under check by the Superego—LAW” (Coats, “Abjection” 138). Hence, adolescents are brushed off as ‘disruptive forces’ by the adults. The structure of the society is guarded by the adults and they will not let the young adults to disrupt it in the name of an uprising —packaged as a transformation.

According to Coats, there is something very wrong with the way society functions these days. Instead of repressing or displacing the penchant for violence prevalent in adolescents, the world nurtures exhibition of violence in them. It is,

“partly because we have lost the social and cultural supports for those processes needed to keep abjection at bay” (142). When society does not function responsibly, the ‘out of control’ adolescents — the “abject figure never gets to that point where drive energies are sublimated into the substitutive logic of the symbolic. Abjection is by definition an expelling of what cannot be contained” (142). The unsocial acts — defiance, violence, disobedience that adolescents perform — are the outcome of the culmination of anger, disapproval cumulating in them. Society can intervene and come up with creative ways thus paving ways to channelize the energy awaiting an outlet. But until then till situation akin to dystopia persists, it is the young adults who need to take the lead for transformation before it gets too late. By breaking stigma, taboo, and archaic conventions, teenagers can march towards transforming the present and ushering hope.

2. If not Them, Who? If not Now, When?

It is the young adults who, in the face of adversity, muster courage to bring hope back. It is the young adult fiction that invests in issues pertinent to adolescence. It is dystopian young adult literature like Hunger Games trilogy that endorses feminism to free young adults from being pigeonholed into gender binaries. Adolescents are the undercurrents of change. If not them, who? If not now, when?

YA Novels Exist to Disturb the Universe

YA novels essentially concentrate on issues raised by one single question — Do I dare disturb the universe? One can sniff a strong concoction of conceit, power, identity, ambiguity, and hope in that question, which underpins the correlation between ‘I’ and ‘Universe’, ‘self’ and ‘social force’. YA novels act as some of the first literature that speak to the emotions an individual experiences as a teenager. According to Trites, one distinguishing feature between children literature

and adult literature is that “Children’s literature often affirms the child’s sense of Self and her or his personal power. But in the adolescent novel, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are” (Trites, *Disturbing* 4). In between ‘I’ and ‘Universe’ rests the matter germane to ‘disturbance’— to unsettle the adult world. Since it is a question, it reflects the ambivalence of adolescents on their ability to cause change. YA novels are about adolescents who want to disrupt the social fabric. But society holds greater power than a young adult. Adolescents seek the charge to lead the revolution, but the adults appear reluctant. Since the relationship between an individual and social institution is shaped by power relation, there is constant negotiation between the two (5). The negotiation is for power between the authority and nonconformists who challenge the dogmas of the authority. Trites brings Foucault and Butler in the discussion to elucidate her theory on adolescents disturbing the universe. “Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books” (qtd. in Trites, *Disturbing* 8). Society gives power to adolescents and it is power that society exerts on adolescents and it is the same power that the adolescents exercise to reject societal authority. In YAL, characters learn to deal with institutional power that resides in schools, government, religion, family, etc.

Adolescents have the hunger to shake the universe because they want to change the status-quo; which is most often than not corrupt. In a world which has learnt to remain silent, voiceless, adolescents come as a breath of fresh air. They charge at inequality, they respond, they act because they care. To disturb the universe means to resist hegemony, power, to contradict, to be a non-conformist, to rebel, to act against the norms of the power structure. To disturb the universe means to be, to

assume responsibility for the role of rebel, to declare one's becoming. By disturbing the universe, one affects, inspires, influences, and provokes other people with the choices s/he has made. Trites centers her book *Disturbing the Universe* on Robert Cormier's path-breaking and polemical YA novel *Chocolate War*. In that novel, Jerry, the protagonist resists the goons in his school by defying their instruction to sell chocolates. However, he is defeated eventually. The following lines have been extracted in relation to the end of the novel when the battered Jerry advises his friend to not to disturb the universe or else he too will get punched in the gut like him. Cormier was harangued for producing a novel which was against the grain of YA literature, which is to shed hope onto its young readers. Because the protagonist utters despairing words, critics feared that it promulgates hopelessness amongst young readers.

Trites, however, thinks otherwise because YAL in pronounced or subtle manner induces positivity. "Although Jerry appears defeated and is even possibly dead by novel's end, the book still answers the question affirmatively: yes, he can disturb the universe. In fact, he should disturb the universe. Doing so may be painful, but Jerry has affected other people with the choices he has made" (*Disturbing* 2-3). Jerry may have been crushed but the idea he planted on others, through his defiance, thrived. A person dies, an idea perseveres. People seek to be inspired, influenced, and rattled to the core before extending hands to the solitary torchbearer. But for a revolution to transpire, it has to start from somewhere. Someone has to dare to shake things up. Someone has to revolt. Someone has to be the trailblazer for others to follow suit. "All it takes is one person to disturb that system...one person cannot be a revolution. But one person can start a revolution" (Waters "Do I Dare?"). When

people see an individual shaking things up, that very act has the potential to create a ripple effect thereby producing many rebels.

Echoing the same thoughts, Collins states that the world is in dire need of those who disturb it because their resistance can excite others to plunge in and participate in the paradigm shift, their resistance can give others a reason to live, their resistance can give others a leader who exudes hope by their sheer power of being. During the 74th hunger games, Katniss stirred up in Peeta the predilection to commit suicide by eating the poisonous berries thus killing them both; thus disallowing Capitol to have a victor. But like a boomerang, the act of defiance, which was instigated by Katniss, was coming back at her with Snow threatening to kill her family and loved ones since her seemingly innocuous act had ignited spark of rebellion amongst people across districts. The following is an excerpt from the second novel in the series when Katniss regrets to have ever gone against the system since she invited death threat upon people. Gale ignores her guilt-filled remark and asks her to open her eyes to look at people living like zombies resurrected to life because of her. It was her nonconformist act which breathed optimism into them. She was giving them a second-chance with life — to demand what is rightfully theirs — hope.

‘And it's my fault, Gale. Because of what I did in the arena. If I had just killed myself with those berries, none of this would've happened. Peeta could have come home and lived, and everyone else would have been safe, too.’ ‘Safe to do what?’ he says in a gentler tone. ‘Starve? Work like slaves? Send their kids to the reaping? You haven't hurt people—you've given them an opportunity.’ (Collins, *Catching Fire* 106)

Even though Chloë Sevigny, an actor who acted in *Kids*, a 1995 movie about adolescence, talks about coming-of-age movies, her statement holds true for coming-of-age novels as well. “Somehow it’s just become this timeless thing. It endures because kids love coming-of-age movies. There’s something captivating about rebels, and it’s shocking, appalling, titillating” (Detrick “‘Kids,’ Then and Now”). Is it indicative of the fact that teenagers wearing the bandana that reads ‘rebel’ should be treated as a rule and not as an anomaly? Should every teenager charge against the society? Should everyone revolt? However, Waters assert that rebelliousness could just be an imploding phenomenon, it may not necessarily explode; discontentment is not always to be associated with violence.

Perhaps these authors do not intend for all those who read their novels to become a Jerry or a Sal, but rather to further develop their skills of independent thinking, a skill which will last them a lifetime. If a teenager is intelligent and independent, then maybe he or she does not need to disturb the universe every day, just consider what is wrong with it, and think about working towards change. (Waters “Do I Dare?”)

Waters states that disturbing the universe must not ‘always’ be taken realistically. Its symbolic elements need to be explored in conjunction as well. Without raging a war against the adult world, adolescents can work towards changing it. Evolution is mostly introduced by revolution but that is not always the case. Young adults are constantly in struggle with the society, but conflict can manifest itself in multiple guises.

Figuratively or literally, however one comprehends the disturbing the universe concept, transformation is possible only when people start acting towards disturbing

the stability of the current failed system. "...a trend has emerged in the way ya novels rely on adolescent protagonists who strive to understand their own power by struggling with the various institutions in their lives. This trend seems to be one of the defining factors of the ya novel" (Trites, *Disturbing* 9). YA novels center on characters that shake up systems but according to Trites, the wisdom YAL readers prize the most is that the world is bigger than an individual (4). YA novels impart knowledge onto the readers and it is that humans are social beings shaped by societal institutions. Trites lays forth example of Jerry who charges against the system but fails miserably (4). In the system vs. individual challenge, it is the individual who gets off the boxing ring with bruises and a black eye. The societal forces are incessantly at work to clip wings of any individuals who dare to disturb the system. Having said that, even if the world does not receive a face-lift after the behemoth attempt, even if the struggle to disturb is announced as a debacle, it is premature to label the endeavor as 'defeat' because the mere attempt to fight against the system transmits hope onto multitudes and that is victory in its own right. Since they are the agents of change, so much depends on the young adults.

Young Adults Disturb the Universe for Transformation

After all said and done, it cannot be denied that adolescents are the change makers. If not now when? If not them who? Young adults seek to transform the hegemonic power structure that yields gender inequality, economic disparity, and racial differences. Adults sulk, yap, moan and protest in hushed voices but teenagers, they perform. The young adults are the torchbearers of 'rebellion'. "A transformative utopian vision will challenge hegemonic structures of political power and totalizing ideologies by revealing the ways in which human needs and agency are restrained by existing institutional, social, and cultural arrangements" (Bradford et al. 23). When

the teenagers are exposed to the adult world, the values and convictions of the adult world astound them. Because the young adults do not like the way the world is run, they want to change it. The tight hold of the corrupt social order from the present status quo needs to be uprooted if transformation is to be imagined. Literature which transfuses utopian and dystopian conceptions is intrinsically transformative in nature since it inspires readers to change the existing dysfunctional social, political and economic undertakings (Bradford et al. 13). The need of a “transformed world orders” is at the center of utopian and dystopian literature (13). “Utopia must be transformative if it is to imagine a better world than the one that readers/audiences currently know” (Bradford et al. 11). The only way the distasteful state can be exterminated is by substituting it with something worthy. However, the aspiration for a better world need not be situated in an unseen future — distant from the present. It can be brought to ‘here’ and ‘now’ (Sargisson qtd. in Bradford et al.11). Young adults expedite the transformation process for everyone to witness the forlorn present materializing into utopia in the present time itself.

The dilapidated system of the adult world repels the young adults. The distaste over the policies of the adults instigates adolescents to work towards transformation. What they want to be is not the same as that decreed in the scripts of the adult world. What puts the young adults at unease is the “rigid society” that dictates their course of life and the same “uneasy feeling” provokes them for rebellion, violence, and an attempt at usurping those in power (Lewis 3).

There is a growing distress against YA dystopian literature. Critics assert that DYAL glamorizes and glorifies violence — that it promotes rebellion in teenagers. Why the need to shake the world? Isn't it alright the way it is? But the world functions on the energy — anger, aggression, rebelliousness of the young adults. The

world is populated with people who do not question, who just submit. The world needs skeptics and rebels. It needs people who ‘raise voice’ and do not always adjust themselves to fit in. Adolescents are impatient and they accumulate the power to act from the same abhorrence to procrastination. They believe in ‘Now’ rather than to wait for things to happen because they believe that they can bring transformation now. If change has to be brought, let it be now. If anybody has to be the agents of change, let it be them.

The present is smeared with dystopian elements; the only thing that can save from the abyss of darkness is optimism. Dystopian YA novels appoint young protagonists as the agents of change who can fetch hope. Even though the world appears dark and holds no hope, “books for younger readers might fall back on some sense of a humanistic propensity towards goodness and other-regardingness even within a permanently flawed world” (Bradford et al. 24). Even amidst despair and nothingness, utopian transformation can be imagined with young adults slashing the social orders that fortify hegemonic ideologies. Hope rests on young adults — both male and female.

Feminism in DAYL: A Sign of Disturbing the Universe

The rise of dystopian literature coincided with the rise of feminist voice in the Western socio-political domain. As the 19th century handed the torch over to the 20th century, the dawn of the new era for females had been cast (Cavanaugh “Feminism”). It is indeed the latter half of the twentieth century that witnessed the dominance of dystopian novel and concurrently “would be a Female phase characterized by a search for identity” (Desmet 37). Dystopia and feminism sprouted from the same place and for the same purpose — to provide commentary on the contemporary disgruntling state of the world. “Dystopias are almost inevitably characterized by a critique on the

social and political realities of their day and age, and it seems that more recent dystopian works have picked up on the growing interest in the position of women in society from the 1960s and 1970s onwards” (Desmet 5). The onset of prominence of women’s issues in literature was essentially from thereon and signals at the relatively new shift in the gender power play in dystopian fiction.

While we are at the crossroad where dystopia meets feminism, it is apt to ask if feminism holds the same meaning in the context of dystopia as elsewhere. “It is important to realize that the term 'feminism' has come to stand for different things as time progressed, as results were achieved and as life conditions for women gradually changed” (Desmet 32). To substantiate Desmet’s argument, Hentges in her article “Girls on Fire: Political Empowerment in Young Adult Dystopia” writes about female protagonists in YA dystopic books, “These girls are beaten and bruised, shot and burned, starved and oppressed, manipulated and used. But they do more than simply survive”. These girls exude power which provides impetus to their own survival; and if such an act was not heroic enough, those around them survive because of these strong, powerful, defiant, female young adults. Dystopian world is a picture of the darkest hour of mankind. Dystopian novels set their young female protagonists against extreme conditions but they thrive nevertheless. When it comes to dystopian novels, it is not just about survival, it is about hope in the face of despair; and in that role female protagonists are matchless. “Further, and perhaps most significantly, these young women also attempt to recreate the worlds in which they live, making their societies more egalitarian, more progressive, and, ultimately, more free” (Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 3). The transformation is not just limited to within, it extends without.

Besides, narratives of female protagonists in DYAL is garnering much attention. Hughes in her article “Feeding the Hunger” writes that precedence created by the commercial success of *Harry Potter*, Hunger Games trilogy and *Divergent*, augmented demand of female writers and subsequently put pressure upon publishers to demand manuscripts from them and especially in the fantasy fiction genre. “Fantasy, once seen as fiction’s last male enclave, is now host to an array of female-centric titles – a number of which look set to dominate the genre in 2015” (Hughes “Feeding”). This paper positions Hunger Games trilogy under fantasy science fiction category because it contains elements of both — that of fantasy and science fiction.

Gender identity or one's sense of masculinity and femininity has been generously discussed in Hunger Games trilogy. Gender, nevertheless, has been camouflaged as a subtext in the trilogy. When everyone is exhausting words over Katniss being the protagonist in a dystopian novel, on the other end of the continuum, strong voices on the opposition have been rising despite feminism scaling high in the popularity meter. The growing disgruntled voices also belong to feminists but their moaning is against the overly devotion to gender rhetoric every time a novel is released with a female protagonist in it. The sex and the gender identity of the female character overpower all the other themes; whereas when a novel with a male protagonist is published, the discourse is not over the sex or the gender but on something more profound. “...female protagonists are categorized entirely by the main character's gender while books with male protagonists are seen as universal. Why is Katniss' femininity more important to her narrative than Harry Potter's masculinity is to his?” (Vail “The Legacy of Katniss”). Vail is unmistakably accusing feminists of unnecessarily stretching gender issue. The argument grounds itself on the fact that feminist critics aggressively hunt for gender discourse in a text with a female

protagonist like a scavenger rummaging over a pile of garbage for valuables. It might not be an equally strong rhetoric but what we should not forget is the historic context of gender. Women have recently learnt to demand for equal treatment while men have always enjoyed the privilege position. Men need not seek for equal representation in life or fiction; whereas women must.

However a recurring question is: why do fans receive female protagonists in DYAL with much fanfare? Is it because the concept itself is outlandish? Feminist sensibilities in DYAL is about "...a feminist voice that, through dystopian critique of current normalizing systems, empowers the young adult reader to reevaluate cultural limitations" (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 147). The guiding question for the present and future society should not be "who we are, but what we want to become" (Braidotti qtd. in Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 147). Young adults are in the process of becoming and "becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes" (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 147). Identity formation is a process and changes and readjustments can be invited only through those who themselves are undergoing a process. Neil Burger, the director of the film adaptation of *Divergent* comments that having female protagonist in dystopian YA fiction "...is a natural evolution of the women's movement". Veronica Roth, the writer of *Divergent* emphasizes on the power of having female characters playing lead in such a godforsaken setting of dystopian genre. "There's something really powerful about setting up a destroyed, hopeless world and then having a character—a female character, no less—who has the agency to change it. That's more possible than it used to be ..., even if we're not there yet" (Burger and Roth qtd in Maloney "Dystopian Thrillers"). Therefore, feminism fits like a glove in dystopian YA fiction.

Agency to Female Protagonist: Defiance of Traditional Literary Norms

The rise of female voice does not infer the silence of men's. It is men as well women who suffer silent deaths in the hands of patriarchy. It is the system we should center our frustrations at. To rage war against higher authority, agency is pertinent. Since adolescents are the catalysts for change, it is imperative that they have the agency; and that they use their agency for the freedom of multitudes suffering under the boots of patriarchy.

One of the charges on fiction writers was their decision to rob off agency from female characters. Female voice had invariably been muffled, silenced and cut off from life; and fiction was no better. The story of a female was told by a male and from the perspective of a male. A female could never represent herself. She was introduced by a male as the male character thought appropriate. Conversely, contemporary novels with theme of dystopia facilitate agency to young female characters by portraying them as the protagonist—a position till very late had been heavily guarded and tirelessly defended by males. "...only since feminism has effected a permanent change in the way our culture defines femininity has the resourcefulness of female characters been used by the character to bolster her own self-image" (Trites, *Waking* ix). Paradigm shift was witnessed when feminism came as a forceful agent that necessitated change in the portrayal of female characters.

Hunger Games trilogy validated that along with young adults, the rest of the world is ready for dystopian novels (and movies) focused on female heroines. *Catching Fire*, the second book and movie in the Hunger Games series, became in 2013 "the first movie with a solo female lead since 1973's *The Exorcist* to become the top-grossing film of the year" (Barry qtd. in Smith 2). If anyone had doubts on the responsibility of the entire novel resting on the female protagonist, then the naysayers

can rest their argument now. The shift in the depiction of female characters originated when stories started having more female protagonists, who was “more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions...” (Trites, *Waking* 6). Attitudes, values, and beliefs of young female protagonists are vividly portrayed in YAL and they make life choices all by themselves without having to first consult with the men in their lives — attribute which was, in the past, only relished by men. Strong women characterization is supplemented with powerful storyline making the DYAL with female protagonist doubly absorbing. “There is much to back up the idea that young adult literature is the next big thing, and that it may be moving in a direction that empowers young women with strong female main characters and untraditional storylines” (Smith 2). Hunger Games trilogy meets both the criteria — it is narrated from the perspective of a strong female main character and covers unconventional storyline.

The voice raised for the emancipation of women eventually led to the emancipation of female characters in literature. “‘Taking the subject position’ generally refers to an individual's situating herself in the first person and recognizing herself as the agent of an action...” (Trites, *Waking* 28). YAL endorses ‘female agency’ as evident from the first person narration of its female protagonists. Trites allows her feminist side to surface when she writes, “The feminist character’s recognition of her agency and her voice invariably leads to some sort of transcendence, and usually taking the form of a triumph over whatever system or stricture was repressing her” (7). When a female realizes that she can, and that she has a voice, she rebels against the system that had been tormenting her till date. The system in question is the patriarchal system whose supremacy is depended on the subjugation of females. Once females get their voice, the hold of patriarchy will be

threatened. When the subjugated beings start to voice their thoughts, they will utter all the narratives of their torment and the secrets of the torturers will be exposed. The greatest threat of female agency is to patriarchal society because having agency is tantamount to having power. Assigning agency to female is defying societal norms and assigning agency to female protagonist is defying literary norms — both represent slipping of hold from the men. Hentges admits that many dystopian YA novels give room to female protagonist to have their say. “Instead of acting as bystanders or caretakers, they fight, investigate, infiltrate, rescue, protect, and lead” (“Girls on Fire”). However, Trites corrects any misunderstanding that might arise on the issue of females exerting power. According to Trites, the power the female protagonist holds is not to ‘practice power over others’ but to ‘empower oneself’ (*Waking* 8). Female power does not fortify retaliation; instead “feminist power is more about being aware of one's agency than it is about controlling other people” (8). Once power is with the female, she will not hunt for men to butcher them but use that power to elevate her position in the society, in the family and in her own eyes. Feminist power is therefore transformative in nature. “I most emphatically do not mean that by having power, the feminist protagonist enacts the age-old paradigms of power that have shaped too many societies. I use the term ‘power,’ then, to refer to positive forms of autonomy, self-expression, and self-awareness” (8). Once power is with females, they will not take revenge on the males to continue the tradition of powerful and powerless dichotomy. ‘When females get the power’ does not translate to ‘when females abuse power’. It is not just about euphemism. Females will use their agency to transform themselves, to better their position, to rise, and to represent themselves instead of being represented and spoken for. It is about self-transformation. It is for positivity. It

is about promulgation of hope not only for the females but for anybody who had been subjugated and marginalized — who did not have power of self-representation before.

Along with the feminist character's agency in dystopian YAL, some light should be shed onto the agency of feminist writers. The representation of women by women in the dystopian genre is an enthralling topic proper for a discussion. Dystopia and utopia are subgenres under science fiction; and science fiction is considered to be “a subversive and oppositional strategy against hegemonic ideology” (Baccolini qtd. in Desmet 45). According to Baccolini, many female authors choose science fiction since they consider it to be the best genre to display political defiance. “Women's science fiction novels have contributed to the exploration and subsequent breakdown of certainties and Universalist assumptions – those damaging stereotypes – about gendered identities” (Baccolini qtd. in Desmet 45). Female authors have used literature and particularly science fiction as the preferred genre to sabotage the age old tradition of dehumanizing women.

Young adults disturb the universe with the agency they procure from the climb in the social rung. Since they are no longer children, they enjoy more power and agency. The power of agency they exercise is given to them by the social institutions. Nonetheless, since it is the adult world that hands agency to the young adults, there is every possibility that the same source can take back the agency as well leaving the young adults castrated. In true sense, young adults encounter their vulnerabilities and margins once they participate in the adult world. “...as young people stand up and fight the system, they also learn their own limitations” (Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 4). Though Katniss subliminally initiated the uprising, she was later made to enroll in the cause as its poster girl by the adults, who had their own agendas cloaked from Katniss. And once the objectives were met, Katniss became unwanted like a

service dog that has outlived its usage. “What do you mean, I’m not going to the Capitol? I have to go! I’m the Mockingjay!” I say. Coin barely looks up from her screen. ‘And as the Mockingjay, your primary goal of unifying the districts against the Capitol has been achieved. Don’t worry--if it goes well, we’ll fly you in for the surrender” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 108). The negotiation for power and agency is therefore a constant affair between young adults and adult world. The power struggle between the two shape each other: “But the larger question for me is an investigation of the fluid ways that the individual negotiates with her or his society, with the ways adolescents’ power is simultaneously acknowledged and denied, engaged and disengaged” (Trites, *Disturbing* 7). At the core of adolescence is the equation adolescents share with the society and its institutions. And it is not an easy and lucid association; rather it is opaque and multifaceted. Katniss knows how to make the adults (Plutarch and Cain) agree to her demands to spare Peeta’s life (Collins, *Mockingjay* 26) because they know that the agency that Katniss has is very powerful: she is the Mockingjay, the symbol of their uprising. Likewise the adults also get things done from Katniss since power is concentrated on them. It is the recognition of her agency that makes Katniss more powerful to even negotiate with the adult world in the first place. She exercises the same agency to destroy Snow, Capitol, and ultimately Cain. But she also undergoes trial for the same. There is law and power to keep dissidents under check.

Adolescence is the perfect time to be a rule-breaker. But ‘breaking the rules’ should not be understood as ‘hating the world per se’ but breaking the rules to be accepted as s/he is. Katniss knows that the agency she has is not meant to bring down the adult world. She has a cause and exhausts her agency for the attainment of the same. Agency can be exercised to transform the outer world or inside; Katniss

however performs both. “Even as these young women actively resist and rebel, then, they also tend to accept that they cannot change every aspect of their societies’ controlling frameworks” (Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 4). However, the mannerism of their surrender to the insurmountable elements of the society typifies them as powerful characters rather than defeated beings. Possibly the most revolting aspect about female protagonists in dystopian YA novels is that they do not give up without a good fight — a characteristic unlike women in male-centric novels. These female protagonists in DYAL are not ardent supporters of “acting out societal expectations” a phrase borrowed from Trites (*Waking* 22). It is the availability of agency that facilitates an opportunity to the female main characters to revolt and rebel, to provide a confirmation of one’s existence, to channelize the power of agency towards emancipation.

Chapter III: Manifestation of Disturbing Elements in Hunger Games

Trilogy

One of the issues that problematizes the understanding that the young adults have of the world is gender. It is cumbersome to the adolescents to comprehend the gender politics because patriarchal society associates maleness with aggression, courage, independence and violence; while femaleness is acknowledged as docile, marginalized, dependent and subservient to men. The decree is not followed by logic or else patriarchy would not have received copious ‘complaint emails’ all directed at issues such as: Is ‘gender fixity’ a reality or a myth? Can a male be expressive? Can a female be strong? If being expressive and strong are upright attributes, can an individual have both? Can one cross established gender identities? Can s/he reject gender stereotypes?

Young adults about to enter the doorstep of adulthood are taken aback by such troubling issues. When it comes to gender binaries, adult world fails to charm them. Literature can play a key role at such testing times since it is narratives that can either underpin gender stereotypes or liberate people from imbibing them. The case is not exclusive of just one gender. As much as the females, males are chained by customs of patriarchal society which prevents “young adults from reaching their full potential as human beings by depriving them of suitable role models and reinforcing age-old gender constraints in society” (Jacobs 20). Literature has colossal responsibility since it can imagine a world with mavericks that make orthodoxy obsolete. The power of books cannot be underestimated since stories of characters that defy constraints and spread wings and fly ultimately liberate hundreds reading those narratives. But, according to Annie Yon, even if authors brave to reject the gender binaries they shall leave traces which will give away secrets of their failure — “...the typical stereotypes

and generalizations that distinguish a male from a female seem to linger” (Yon “The Stereotypes”). On reading habit and the power of fiction, Kathryn Jacobs states that books are crucial in the transfer of culture to the teenagers. And by culture, Jacobs underlines the gender roles (19). Ironically, the portrayal of gendered identity of females in books, movies, music, and advertising is not emancipatory. Since young adults are exposed to all forms of media, they see, hear, read and therefore learn to accept the behaviors prescribed by patriarchy as absolute. “Every form of media from film to advertising to popular music has been criticized for presenting insidious messages about femininity to society” (Jacobs 20). With so much history and stereotypes ingrained in us, it is difficult letting go of gender bigotry from life and in literature.

Stereotypes are hard to annihilate but Yon promulgates positivity with her observation about authors who are “trying to debunk the socially constructed characteristics assigned to each gender” (“The Stereotypes”). Many contemporary YAL authors are keen on breaking gender orthodoxy. In such a dire situation as painted by Jacobs, Collins’ trilogy comes as sumptuous rain in the desert. Hunger Games trilogy triumphantly deconstructs gender roles and presents gendering in a different light. The celebrated trilogy perceives the world through a young girl who repeatedly switches between her gender identities and fittingly the lesson Collins lends to her readers has been interpreted by Risman — “...gender structure is not static. Young people today, especially girls, are much freer to develop their potentials beyond the cage of traditional femininity than in the past” (83). The roles of Katniss and Peeta basically reshuffle the distribution of gender attributes and thereby stand against gender binaries. The trilogy rejects such dichotomy and allows men to embrace characteristics hitherto considered ‘unmanly’ and likewise a female to

bravely adopt 'the traditional masculine characteristics'. Sociologist Allan G. Johnson writes in his book *The Gender Knot*, "A society is patriarchal to the extent that it promotes male privilege by being male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its aspects the oppression of women" (5). Patriarchal society develops a hierarchy where men sit above women. This is not to mean that all men have it easy. "Another aspect of male identification is the cultural description of masculinity and the ideal man in terms that closely resemble the core values of society as a whole" (Johnson 6). What Johnson fails to give a name to, R.W. Connell calls it 'hegemonic masculinity'. Sarah Seltzer sheds light into masculinity vis-à-vis Peeta's character — "Peeta's centrality to the story—and eventually, his precedence over the more traditionally masculine Gale—is a crucial part of the way *The Hunger Games*' larger existence flips traditional gender roles" ("The Hunger"). And Seltzer couldn't have been more precise with her conclusion. Through the portrayal of Peeta and Katniss, Collins has made public her antipathy towards gender stereotyping. Collins has violated traditional gender strictures in her dystopian YA novel.

Helene Cixous puts forth that subversive feminist protagonist should not startle critics since all writing by feminist writers retain the power to destabilize system. Hence, one should only expect disrupting elements in texts written by writers endorsing feminism. "A feminine text ... brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. . . . it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous qtd in Trites, *Waking* 7). *Hunger Games* trilogy blithely rides high in the popularity contest because the narrative is smartly peppered with political messages. The success of the trilogy might be transitory, it might be

replaced by another one in the best dystopian YA novels section, but what is so unique about Hunger Games trilogy is its political ingredients (Bitoun “The Political Message”). While Bitoun discusses multiple facets of politics, the one this paper centers around is the gender politics. Possibly, the ultimate and the most powerful stroke applied by Collins that can be recognized as the pinnacle of ‘disturbing the universe’ element is the blurring of gender binaries in Katniss and Peeta.

Between ‘Purely Feminine’ and ‘Unfeminine’

If we were to test femininity in Katniss based on the rules set by the patriarchal society, she does not come across as a purely feminine character. She can be comfortably labeled as ‘unfeminine’. “The shoes are the worst part. I’ve never worn high heels and can’t get used to essentially wobbling around on the balls of my feet” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 114). Body decoration and cosmetic beauty do not fall in the ‘must do’ list of Katniss; therefore it is not outrageous to state that she fails to meet the societal feminine expectations. However, her lack of femininity is not only limited to abhorrence to application of cosmetics, it seeps in other conventional femininity areas as well. But it would be premature to call her unfeminine either. If being unfeminine is ‘being manly’ and if being manly means endorsing hegemonic masculinity characteristics like violence and aggression, she falls short meeting the traditional masculine expectations as well. “I want everyone in that mountain dead. Am about to say so. But then...I’m also a girl from District 12. Not President Snow. I can’t help it. I can’t condemn someone to the death he’s suggesting (Collins, *Mockingjay* 97). Does it infer that Katniss is devoid of intrinsic masculine and feminine characteristics? Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane think so as evident in their statement: “It is within this role that Katniss is most imperfect – she struggles against traditional feminine expectations while simultaneously refusing to participate in

hegemonically masculine acts of violence” (157). Katniss does not make anyone happy –neither the frontrunners of maleness nor those of femaleness. So, where does she fit in? It is very comforting for the world when females and males follow their prescribed gender identity. Females exhibiting femininity and males exhibiting masculinity fall under normalcy. But the moment the world encounters iconoclasts, it invites bafflement. An alarm is set on ‘what is this?’ mode. A strong female is either labeled as ‘unfeminine’ or ‘manly’. Such a female does not represent institutionalized femininity. She is considered an outcast and therefore ostracized. Trites writes that powerful women invariably find themselves under the guillotine for confounding the gatekeepers of gender and sexuality with their ‘hard to place’ identity. Anything that is not conventional is degraded and scorned. “One set of critics...even imply that Nancy's resourcefulness makes her almost transsexual when they maintain that ‘for all practical purposes’ Nancy Drew is male because, among her other talents, she can drive cars, boats, and airplanes and ‘stun a would-be kidnapper with a single blow’” (Trites, *Waking* 10). Anything out of ordinary and critics are quick to shout ‘unfeminine’. It won’t be surprising if they have a similar thought on Katniss; after all Collins’ protagonist can fight, shoot arrows, reignite a dormant uprising, defy authority, and remain apathetic to romance.

‘Objectification of women’ will not see an early demise as long as patriarchy is there to salvage it. However, women can play femininity to their advantage; thus rubbing gender binaries in patriarchy’s face. The marginalized feminine characteristics can be reintroduced as a winning attribute. Trites champions the ‘embrace and celebrate femininity’ campaign because according to her it is one way to transcend gender roles. However, her femininity should not be her only defining

attribute. A female should not be defined by her sex or gender. To further explain her point, she writes,

Instead of completely rejecting femininity..., feminist protagonists recognize and rely on traits that gave their literary foremothers strength: compassion, interconnectedness, and communication. ...she may even adopt some stereotypical practices herself, but she is herself never imprisoned by them; she succeeds despite them and sometimes even because of them. (Trites, *Waking* 5-6)

What Trites is trying to say is feminist novels present the earlier discarded and tarnished characteristics — associated with women — in the positive light. Katniss embraces her femininity: the traits categorized as feminine. This is emphasized in her relationships, primarily, with Prim and Rue. “And now I’m running, knowing this may be a trap, knowing the three Careers may be poised to attack me, but I can’t help myself. There’s another high-pitched cry, this time my name. “Katniss! Katniss!” “Rue!” I shout back, so she knows I’m near” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 228). Encouraged by her affection for Rue, Katniss gathers courage to defy conventions. Even though Rue is a contender who belongs to a different district, she extends a helping hand. Katniss even risks her own life to protect Rue. Katniss’s defiance of the rules of Hunger Games ignites a spark of defiance across the people of the districts. “This loving and defiant gesture becomes the ignition switch for the revolution to come. Katniss’s sisterly love has unwittingly sparked the war against The Capital” (Oliver 678).

Furthermore, Katniss draws strength from her love for her sister Prim. In fact, it is not wrong to say that the same sisterly love assisted in her survival in the 74th and 75th Hunger Games. It was the affection for Prim that helped her pick pieces and put

on a brave countenance even when she thought of throwing the towel many-a-times when in the battlefield. “As usual, it’s the thought of Prim’s anxious face as she watches me on the screens back home that breaks me from my lethargy” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 236). Attributed with and acceptance of the ‘feminine’ characteristics nevertheless assisted her to win hearts and eventually the uprising. By ascribing the female protagonist’s success, to a large extent, to ‘what is pigeonholed as femininity’, Trites is saluting the attributes associated with femaleness. Trites is not only releasing females, but she is also liberating males who are decorated with attributes considered as feminine (*Waking* 6). If a feature is not ridiculed, then anyone can freely embrace it and the one who possesses it will not be lampooned.

The brandishing of Katniss is the high point of Hunger Games trilogy. Apparently, her character was conceived to rattle gender dynamics. She is an embodiment of a character that rejects to be branded as masculine or feminine. Violence is not agreeable to her nor is smearing her face with make-up. Katniss represents today’s women who rather than wait to be helped, help themselves, rather than wait for the men to save them, save themselves and in that course save the men as well. And they do not do it to prove a point. They do it because they can save themselves and others and will not be prudish about it. “These female characters gain their strength by rejecting stereotypical expectations that girls must be submissive and by exploring their own choices. And in their decision making, each of them confronts a central truth about her gender: being female can give her strength” (Trites, *Waking* 24). Katniss displays some of the traditionally considered masculine characteristics but that does not make her unfeminine. She rejects some of the traditionally considered masculine characteristics but that does not make her purely feminine. She does not endorse what is traditionally considered emphasized femininity but that does

not make her unfeminine. She does not reject all the 'traditionally held as feminine characteristics' but that does not make her purely feminine. She picks a middle ground and entertains characteristics like love, devotion, strength, camaraderie that establish her as humane. Katniss disturbs the societal structure. She is a nonconformist. Patriarchy belittles feminine behaviors but crediting the same for a major battlefield success is opening doors to androgyny.

Androgyny in Katniss and Peeta

Portrayal of females as protagonists in *DYAL* is not just about usurping male roles; it is as much about embracing femaleness as it is about adopting maleness. In Bitoun's view, Katniss is the epitome of *DYAL* protagonist for the same reason. "It seems feminine qualities are praised alongside masculine ones, Katniss possessing both makes her strong enough to carry her burden but also strong enough to defeat anyone on her way to Snow..." (Bitoun "The Political"). Katniss is an epitome of androgynous character which celebrates the ownership of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Nevertheless, having such characters in literature is an established trend writes Trites, "Over twenty years ago, Carolyn Heilbrun celebrated literary androgyny as a force with liberating potential" (*Waking* 24). Trites, however, expresses discontentment over Heilbrun's definition of androgyny and the redistribution of characteristics. "Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom" (Heilbrun qtd in *Waking* 24). The statement is erroneous because it tends to widen the existing rift between the sexes. "Heilbrun is aware, as am I, that calls for androgyny tend to cast traditional masculine values as negative and feminine ones as

positive...”(Trites, *Waking* 25). Heilbrun’s presentation of androgyny is undoubtedly problematic because that further consolidates the traditional views on feminine and masculine characteristics. “...for most feminist children’s novelists, both genders have good and bad traits. Successful feminist characters are those who adopt the best traits of both genders to strengthen themselves personally and within their communities” (25). Amalgamation of positive traits in an individual — be it male or female — launches him/her as a well-crafted feminist character and the profile holds true in real life as well.

If we consider Trites’ opinion on the requirement of a ‘successful feminist character’, then Katniss and Peeta both pass the test with flying colors since both espouse the best traits of both genders. She further asserts the ultimate benefitting aspect of ‘embracing both masculine and feminine characteristics’, “...in the process of maintaining her personal strength, she often subverts traditional gender roles, playing on stereotypes and stretching their limits by incorporating characteristics that are typically associated with both genders into her actions” (Trites, *Waking* 11). The subversive behavior that Trites is giving room to is the transgression of a female protagonist to move back and forth by drawing strength from both gender roles. A feminist character is inherently androgynous in essence. But what androgyny is not is — it is not anti-male. Feminism does not vilify males; it disparages patriarchy. Seltzer explains the feminist lesson we can take home, “The enemy is a system that pits people against each other, not the people you are pitted against. Turn your anger away from your competitors to the powers that be. This is a feminist message if there ever was one and a collectivist one” (“The Hunger Games”). Feminism liberates both females and males and androgyny does the same. Androgyny undercuts gender binary. Gender identity is not fixed, there can be cross-over between the two

supposedly opposite features. Intellectual and emotional growth is evident in an individual blessed with a balance of masculinity and femininity. Further account on androgyny is provided by Stets and Burke:

Androgyny is a combination or balance of masculinity and femininity. It allows for the possibility that individuals can express both masculinity and femininity. Instead of conceptualizing masculinity and femininity as opposite ends of a continuum where masculinity on one end precludes one from being feminine on the other end, in androgyny, masculinity and femininity are separate dimensions that can be combined. People can be masculine, feminine, or both (androgynous).
(7-8)

Besides, androgyny gives ambiguity a respectable name. The concept of androgyny if explored offers respite to those who are straining over to finding the right term to defining themselves or to those who do not wish to be boxed in one definite category. Our identity is in flux. Our gender identity is in flux. Gender is fluid. It is changing; not constant, therefore it would be wrong to endorse 'gender fixity'. Situations dictate the way we unleash our personality. No woman can be submissive or sensitive all her life. No man can be assertive or objective all the time. As per the situation, a woman has to be assertive or docile. "It feels like when you see human beings and you see femininities and masculinities in everyone. That should be celebrated" (Eddie Redmayne qtd. in Paul Flynn "Eddie Redmayne: An Education"). Redmayne plays the role of Lili Elbe, the transgender pioneer in the upcoming movie *The Danish Girl*. Who are we to admit that assertiveness ranks higher than submissiveness? Even men display submissiveness at events. It is the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal society's diktats that has made life a hell. As if there were

not enough problems in the world already, the complexities of gender identity have manufactured more demons to fight with.

Utopian and dystopian fiction is encouraged by the thought to instill in young reader knowledge about “governance, the possibility of improving society, the role of the individual and the limits of freedom” (Hintz and Ostry 1). These works of fiction targeted for adolescents convert them into skeptics since they analyze “the roots of social behavior and encourages the child to question his or her own society. It often sets up a confrontation between the child and the adult world” (1). Utopian and dystopian societies in YA fiction bring them closer to social institutions, therefore bringing them closer to the workings of the social institutions whereby they are indoctrinated with the ‘disturbing element’ to improve the state of the society. That is also when adolescents are initiated into the knowledge of ‘limits of freedom’. Young adults in dystopian novels are doers, pathfinders and thereby introduce change and hope. The duo noticeably elucidate that it would be inaccurate to indict dystopian YA novels of disseminating pessimism amongst its young readers.

The thrust of androgyny is that: masculinity and femininity are not mutually exclusive. Or for that matter, what constitutes as ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’? What is ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’? Is there even such a thing as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ characteristics when according to Butler being a woman or man is akin to multiplicity? Is there such an attribute that binds all the women together? Must all the women across the whole wide world exhibit the same behavior to be qualified as a woman? Rejecting singularity of thoughts and ideas on gender, Butler propounds the concept of multiplicity.

Because language and the institutions it represents are so fluid, any given individual can occupy simultaneously a number of

subject *positions*, some of which can seem at times even contradictory...As Judith Butler reminds us, being female constitutes an entire range of subject positions that can never be stable or uniformly defined: "there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. (Trites, *Waking* 27)

Hunger Games trilogy subtly but firmly presents the ramification when the society clouds an adolescent's perception of the self with the societal gender requirements. Evidently, in Hunger Games trilogy, Katniss does not recognize nor celebrates the full impact of her blessed being — attributed with the best of masculinity and the best of femininity. A failure to accept and celebrate the duality prompts Katniss to question her identity throughout the trilogy. If society had allowed her to be her, she would have enjoyed herself more and not be gnawed by internal turmoil. An individual wrestles with the self perpetually if society shuns ambiguous characters. Peeta also has an ambiguous character but the society apparently is lenient with him therefore the internal struggle is not as evident as that in case of Katniss. Peeta has found himself. He has come to accept his androgynous personality but it is Katniss who the world is not ready to accept as 'a female not embracing femininity in its entirety'. Woloshyn, Taber and Lane underscore the androgyny rampant in Katniss but according to them, that makes her a flawed character since "she is neither sufficiently feminine nor masculine" (157). But the "Games of the Capitol" that the trio refer to which they conclude "forced her to question her identity and her actions; in the context of the Games and the rebellion," can unmistakably be replaced with patriarchy. It was Capitol headed by Snow which is held responsible for Katniss' doubts about "her own strengths and the complex nature" (Woloshyn, Taber, and

Lane 157). Similarly it is patriarchy which restricts young adults from exploring the full potential of their identity by emphasizing on 'gender fixity'.

In my opinion, the confusion that is apparent in Katniss throughout the trilogy is an essence accompanied by her age. She is, after all, a young adult who is still searching for her real self. She is not able to properly gauge if she is to act completely masculine or feminine. Though she is braced with the best of both gender identities, the 'institutionalized femininity' that is forced upon her perplexes her. I think any female reacts in the same way when at that age. The more a female interacts with societal elements, the more femininity is demanded of her.

Conversely, according to Oliver, the ambiguity explicit in Katniss does not need an apology. What might be considered a flaw in Katniss is interpreted as a bravery badge by Oliver. "The ambiguity of Katniss's identity and the ambivalence of her desires open up possibilities traditionally unavailable" (Oliver 685). In fact, the ambiguity is cherished by Oliver since it adds layer in Katniss' character making her more complex and intriguing. Her character is cryptic yet alluring. The portrayal of Katniss "offers a 'both-and' rather than an 'either-or' approach to gender roles, they allow us to imagine an in-between space of ambiguity" (685) thereby Oliver lends his support to the 'androgyny' theory.

An analysis of Katniss' character concludes that she demonstrates both vulnerability and power. She is confused and decisive. She is not only individualistic but also practices conformity. She is caring and heartless. She is strong and weak. She takes on an active role and remains passive at other situations. Katniss is therefore not a quintessential heroine because an ideal hero or a heroine is perfect and we have enough evidences to corroborate that she is not. An ideal protagonist does not swing

to and from between two binaries; whereas Katniss does. Does that make her an anomaly?

Young adult literature of the past thirty years departs from the classic hero, who is unfailingly admired, a member of the dominant culture, male, and a brave battler...However, contemporary readers are much less likely to identify with this hero in an increasingly multicultural and global society, and a postmodern hero with weaknesses, an antihero, or an unlikely hero may well be more satisfying than the classic hero. (Tasillo 116)

That definition by Tasillo makes Katniss an ideal postmodern hero since she fulfills all the set criteria. According to Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz, the liminality evident in Katniss is the characteristic of “young women in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century dystopian fiction” (4). Young adults are at the juncture of life wherein they are still discovering themselves. They do not yet know where they belong. “Liminal entities are ‘between this and that’, they are ‘neither here nor there’” (Turner qtd. in Jaskulska 96). “They are “not ‘here’ anymore, but they are not ‘there’ yet, either” (96). Doughty calls young adults the “inhabitants of liminal space” who oscillate and negotiate the space between childhood and adulthood “trying out identities to see what does and does not fit” (155). Conversely, both liminality and adolescence are passing phases towards a more lasting and stable phase (157). The effervescence of adolescence and therefore the characteristics attained during this phase is expected to be shed off by the time a young adult becomes an adult.

According to Van Gennep, liminal phase is “a period of preparation to accept a new role”, the subsequent phase – the postliminal phase is ‘incorporation’ which, in case of the young adults, means assimilating in the adult world and “gain a new status

and, together with it, rights, duties and rules that they submit to” (Jaskulska 95-97). The process is not all black and white though. There are also individuals who do not adopt the collective thoughts that liminality represents and such a subversive state is called ‘liminoidality’. The purpose of liminal experiences is to bind us together, “liminoidality is linked to notions such as criticism and even revolution” (Maxwel qtd. in Jaskulska 98). Liminoidality drains its transformative power and energy to destabilize “it becomes an instrument of subversion that stimulates the ways of thinking, feeling and actions that are alternative to the binding order” (Godlewski qtd. in Jaskulska 98). The anomaly with Katniss and Peeta upon their adulthood is that they retain some of the attributes collected during their liminal phase. It can be inferred that Katniss and Peeta were experimenting with their identities, gauging if a behavior fits them or not; and they prefer the androgynous characteristics and want to retain it throughout life. The diversion demonstrated by Katniss and Peeta can be decoded as ‘permanent liminality’. Jaskulska names it “a prolonged liminal phase” – something attuned to – “remaining in the transitory state observed in contemporary societies” (100). The liminal beings connect “the lines of childhood and adulthood, of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity. They may also be understood as representations of contradictions, of strength and weakness, of resistance and acquiescence, and, perhaps especially, of hope and despair” (Day, green-Barteet, and Montz 4). Instead of identifying with ‘either masculinity or femininity’ option, young adults want to imbibe the best attributes of ‘both maleness and femaleness’ thus making their life wholesome.

Emancipation of Adolescents

One of the subtexts of Hunger Games trilogy is gender role reversal; however in this dissertation, the topic topples off everything and becomes the most pronounced

theme. “Collins has proved that to write against the grain of gender expectations is not only possible but also necessary” (Pharr & Clark 120). In the trilogy, Collins has stirred up the gender realm and presented an alternate realm where people can survive even without conceding to gender norms. My objective with this dissertation is not just to check if the female gender has been portrayed in the positive light. Peeta, the male character and his defiance of masculine hegemonies find space as well. Men and women should be freed simultaneously. And feminism extols the same philosophy.

It has been brought to light, though belatedly, that it is not just girls who take cues from TV, movies, and books, but boys also form their notions on life, friends, and more particularly on themselves, blithely trusting these sources. In this context, popular literature, which finds its way to young adults, need to be closely studied. Such an exhibition of gender defiance in pop culture text not only liberates females but males as well. Jacobs in her paper “Gender Issues” states that YA literary genre is a fitting genre for adolescent boys since it has almost all the ingredients ‘supposedly’ favored by the gender—imagination, adventure, risk, death and saving lives (19). Pharr & Clark provide further evidences to the argument. They argue that the trilogy has triumphed at many fronts but the most decorated one is that it speaks to both the sexes. It moves beyond being categorized as a ‘girl’ book or a ‘boy’ book and in doing so engages both males and females and discreetly promulgates thought-provoking message (120). Collins has exorcised hegemonic masculinity as the ideal form of masculinity through her portrayal of Peeta.

Patriarchal society puts impracticable standards of the ‘ideal man’ and every male is expected to be decorated with all those qualities society perceives as maleness. A society run by masculine ideals places attributes such as strength, competitiveness, toughness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over

any emotion higher in rank. The opposite of these qualities have been assigned as feminine therefore they are depreciated. To be a man, every male has to have all those qualities that a hegemonic masculinity ascribes to a man (Johnson 6-7). It is a thought widely believed that masculinity and femininity are situated at the opposite ends of a continuum; but the trilogy is resolute to prove it wrong. Katniss Everdeen is a 16 year old female who is strong, intelligent, and confident, and skilled at hunting, archery, and caring for her younger sister. Peeta Mellark, the male counterpart of Katniss, is a physically strong, emotionally expressive, and a baker and cake decorator. Katniss and Peeta reject gender binaries. They cross over gender identities. They do not conform to governance. The two are, without a strand of doubt, two of the most remarkable dystopian characters of late. They embody ‘stereotype defying’ characters. It is not only Katniss who discards “traditional gender roles that mandate female submissiveness” (Trites, *Waking* 12), but Peeta also infringes the traditional gender roles that mandate male superiority.

Men are assumed (and expected) to be in control at all times, to be unemotional (except for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in command of every situation, especially those involving women. These qualities, it is assumed, mark them as superior and justify their privilege. Women, in contrast, are assumed (and expected) to be just the opposite, especially in relation to men. (Johnson 14)

In fact, Katniss and Peeta are nothing short of radical figures for ‘undoing gender’. They disturb the gender binaries by going against hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. “Perhaps a criterion for identifying undoing gender might be

when the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged” (Risman 83). Rebels are born when they “do not follow traditional scripts, when they undo gender” (Risman 83). When we dissect the trilogy, Peeta and Katniss stand tall as characters that shake up the stereotypical gender roles. “The main characters in ‘The Hunger Games’ refuse to play the roles written for them. Almost all YA dystopians at least touch on this theme—refusing to let anyone define you” (Claudia Gray qtd. in Donston-Miller “Why”). The subjectivity, power, and agency that the young protagonists have are used to carve identity and individuality is attained by the exercise of all three. Since DYAL is targeted and marketed at the young readers, subjectivity shaped by the external and internal forces is at the core.

“I’ve been right not to cry. I’ve had a lot of practice at wiping my face clean of emotions and I do this now. Peeta Mellark, on the other hand, has obviously been crying and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 40). What this extract tells us about Katniss and Peeta is that Peeta wears his emotions on his sleeve and Katniss has practiced hiding it under a stern countenance. Both are not devoid of emotions though. Outwardly, it clearly exemplifies that Katniss is ‘masculine’ and Peeta is ‘feminine’. Nevertheless, even when Katniss spills venom placing her tough exterior on display, we know that though the ‘unforgiving’ quality falls under ‘masculine’ box, she is not trying to act like a man. Katniss not being able to forgive is just her individual trait which is associated with her identity owing to her past events. “I try to forgive her for my father’s sake. But to be honest, I’m not the forgiving type” (8). “At eleven years old, with Prim just seven, I took over as head of the family. There was no choice” (27). When her ‘unforgiving’ aspect of her personality is placed against Katniss acting

as a caretaker of the family, we reckon that an individual can exhibit 'masculine' traits or 'feminine' traits given the circumstance.

In her relationship with Peeta, she is more adept at survival and at being brutal when the situation seems to require it. She is constantly rescuing Peeta. And in some ways, gender roles are reversed in that she is a hunter and he is a baker. Certainly, Peeta is the softer and more loving of the two. And yet, it is the combination of masculinity and femininity in each character that makes them such good compliments. (Oliver 680)

The wedding between Katniss and Peeta, the embodiment of 'marginalized masculinity', and not Katniss and Gale, embodying 'hegemonic masculinity', in the last part of the trilogy is a slap to patriarchal society that places unattainable and needless demands on males to become 'ideal men'. The lesson to take home is: the alpha-male or "hypermasculinity" is not the ideal requirement; in fact there is no such thing as ideal. Both Katniss and Peeta contribute to creating balance in the relationship. Everyone needs sanity in life which is given by sanity in relationship. Both generate energy from each other. Both rescue each other.

I'm glad now I have Peeta to clutch for balance, he is so steady, solid as a rock. I look down at our linked fingers as I loosen my grasp, but he regains his grip on me. "No, don't let go of me," he says. "Please. I might fall out of this thing. Thanks for keeping hold of me. I was getting a little shaky there," says Peeta. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 69-71)

The extract illustrates the equation Peeta and Katniss share. Moreover, both have the best qualities of masculinity and femininity. "'Tomorrow's a hunting day,' I say. 'I

won't be much help with that,' Peeta says. 'I've never hunted before.' 'I'll kill and you cook,' I say. 'And you can always gather'" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 290).

Katniss and Peeta strike as an unconventional pair given their oddity. The underlying fact is that each complements the other. "...as men move beyond traditional gendered scripts (e.g., the sturdy, silent, nonexpressive, hegemonic male), wives are happier.

When men undo gender, marriages thrive" (Risman 82). When men undo gender, it is not just wives who are happier but undoing gender, undoing what has been scripted in the 'hegemonic masculinity' chapter could liberate and ultimately make men happier as well. It cannot go without saying that Katniss chose Peeta to be in her life because he is not confined by patriarchal hegemonic masculinity ideals. Peeta comes across as a character that is not dictated by the verdict of the society. The Hunger Games trilogy offers ample evidences to posit Katniss and Peeta as mavericks that discard gender binaries. It is not just Katniss who is a divergent. Peeta too identifies himself as nonconformist by not obliging to the gender norms set by the patriarchal society. Both are disturbing agents. Both participate to bring change in the gendered universe.

Suzanne Collins as an Agent of Change

Other than both being revered YA authors, there is another conspicuous connection between Suzanne Collins and Robert Cormier. Collins is an undisputed fan of Cormier's *Chocolate War* or else what do we make out of the pervasiveness of Cormier's 'disturbing the universe' element in Collins' Hunger Games trilogy? Cormier had established his dissident identity in 1974 by creating a character (Jerry) who defied the norms of his educational institution. "Cormier had disturbed the universe of young adult literature with his dark vision and complex ambiguities, and the stunned critical reception of the book led to the realization that fiction for teens could be great literature" (Campbell 66). Collins too tried her hand at 'disturbing the

universe of young adult literature' in 2008 with the publication of her first part of the trilogy by creating characters who defied the gender norms. The intention of both of the authors must have been different but each acted as an agent of change in the universe of young adult literature.

In an interview for Scholastic magazine, Collins answers to the inquisition made on the popularity of a female protagonist in a dystopian subgenre. "Whenever I write a story, I hope it appeals to both boys and girls. But maybe in its simplest form, it's having a female protagonist in a gladiator story, which traditionally features a male. It's an unexpected choice" (Hudson "Q&A"). By casting a female in a gladiator story, Collins broke the first rule. In conjunction with it, Collins has created outlandish main characters who 'disturb the gendered universe' by not following traditional gender customs. Restrictions from blossoming to their fullest potential does not go well with teenagers; likewise, restrictions in display of gender identities does not go well with Collins and therefore she takes on the role of a subversive writer.

Corresponding with adolescents disturbing the universe in the DYAL with their rebellious nature, Collins has imitated the same dissidence by not bowing down in the characterization of Peeta and Katniss. She is a crusader of gender equality therefore created characters that disobey stereotypes and renounce gender binaries. Like young protagonists who "flex their youth power and change the world" (Shoaff "Young People"), Collins too is flexing her muscles and changing the world. Collins epitomizes non-conformity. She is no less than her iconoclastic characters who dare to be different and still thrive.

Connell, who spearheaded masculinity studies, got inspired for his research because of feminist-socialist debates on power and oppression (Wedgwood 332). This

piece of information is germane here because the analysis of Peeta's character can be possible because of Connell's study on men and masculinity. Feminism incorporates masculinity and in the similar fashion, masculinity studies decidedly includes feminism, without the other, each offers only a partial picture of the whole situation. The traditional view on feminism only focused on women. However, the other yet equally important component of the discourse — the men — were decidedly absent. That is when Connell turned "the sociological spotlight onto men, the other half of the gender relations equation" (Wedgwood 332). Connell's contribution to the gender theory is therefore highly lauded "given that 'masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition'" (Connell qtd. in Wedgwood 332). That is the reason why this dissertation, along with putting the spotlight on Katniss also pays attention to the character of Peeta — to study masculinity and femininity in relation to both male and female.

What the Hunger Games trilogy is trying to do is teach young adults to embrace everything that they are — not confining to any gender rubrics. And that is how they will disturb the universe — by defying the gender norms, gender conventions, and by transcending the gender norms. Katniss's disdain to conform to patriarchal norms of 'female beauty' can be perceived as an invitation to the reader "to question the necessity of those rules and the patriarchal State that enforces them" (Hager qtd. in Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane 157). Katniss is teaching young adults to question and not succumb to the decrees of the patriarchal society. Katniss is teaching young adults to be like her – nonconformists.

Interestingly it is not just the characters in Hunger Games trilogy that defy conventions. In dystopian fiction, it is the female writers who are crossing over genre

borders. Dystopia, as it appears is a male domain. “The dystopian genre is not only characterized by ‘a male bias’ but is also underpinned by ‘a cultural and political male hegemony’” (Sarah Lefanu qtd. in Desmet 31). Then, it should be doubly satisfying for the female authors penetrating into male-dominated genre. “Male domination, they argued, is a dynamic system constantly reproduced and re-constituted through gender relations under changing conditions, including resistance by subordinate groups” (Carrigan et al. qtd in Wedgwood 332). The subordinate group – the female authors are venturing into the otherwise male genre thereby challenging male domination. Desmet states that the allure of dystopia for female writers rests also on the fact that “it presents them with the opportunity to oppose and undermine the dominant ideology outlined by men” (31). Female writers are proving themselves as transgressors by defying genre norms. ‘Don’t cross the genre border’ reads the memo to the female writers who want to enter into dystopian fiction. But these feminist writers are not to listen to nor follow the rules. “As a result, this literature written by women is often “subversive, satirical and iconoclastic” (Lefanu qtd. in Desmet 31). The uprising by the female writers gave the literary world some of the best dystopian YA books. The same critics who forbade women’s entry into ‘men’s only genre’ secretly send ‘thank you’ notes to Collins for resurrecting the dystopian genre and making it a money-making genre. “Collins’s trilogy is only the most visible example of a recent boom in dystopian fiction for young people” (Miller “Fresh Hell”). Miller hints that there are many out there marching towards male-only genre to usurp it.

It is not wrong to say that feminist literary critics and scholars want female protagonists to be perfect. “Her awakening is not bestowed on her by a male awakener; instead, she wakes herself and discovers herself to be a strong, independent, and articulate person” (Trites, *Waking* 8). However, Katniss’ case is

different. Even her awakening is bestowed to the rebellious talks Gale and Peeta each have with her.

Gale's voice is in my head. His ravings against the Capitol no longer pointless, no longer to be ignored... Then I remember Peeta's words on the roof... And for the first time, I understand what he means. I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 232-233)

Clearly Katniss' contempt for Capitol manifests after Gale and Peeta express their discontentment and disapproval of the authority exercised by the Capitol. Very proficiently does Collins prove that she is not a 'radical feminist' — that she believes in male and female living in harmony, encouraging and supporting each other. Therefore, Collins had no shame in portraying a character who extracts the drive for resistance from the males in her life. She is constantly helped and motivated by a bevy of men — Gale, Peeta, Haymitch, Plutarch. Gale and Peeta induce the sense of rebellion onto her. They feed rebellion in her. She then acts upon it. But it is Katniss who materializes the uprising and not those who only harbor rebellion in them. She braves to go against the all-powerful Snow and later Cain. She is the doer — the active entity. She wills revolution to transpire.

There is one other topic Trites and Collins do not see eye-to-eye on. It is the 'thriving of female protagonist' issue at the end of the feminist fiction. "Feminism's most obvious contribution to children's literature lies in the ways that female protagonists have been liberated from inevitably growing into passivity" (Trites, *Waking* 11). There is every possibility that Trites thinks of Katniss as a female

protagonist 'growing into passivity' and Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane join hands with Trites in this argument.

She has children at Peeta's insistence, 'it took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly' (*Mockingjay*, p. 389). In her life, she had been a hunter and provider, a tribute, a victor, a symbol of hope as a rebel, and an assassin. And yet, the book ends with her becoming a somewhat passive mother in an isolated community defined by her domestic role in a heteronormative family. (156-57)

What the trio forgets is that passivity in regards to Katniss does not mean that she has hung her boots; it rather infers that she now chooses her own revolution. The fire in her is still on but she fans it in a different direction — as hinted by the final words of the trilogy: "We learn to keep busy again. Peeta bakes. I hunt" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 172). Together adolescents and DYAL cause a stir. Together Katniss and Peeta cause a stir. Together Hunger Games trilogy and Suzanne Collins cause a stir. Dystopia is a fertile ground for authors and adolescents to defy old traditions, push rules to the boundary, facilitate alternatives to conventions — to liberate marginalized entities.

Young adults need role models. Young adults require guidance so that they do not get lost. When there is dearth of one in real life, they seek find refuge in literature. "Literature needs to reflect the sincerity of the mission that adolescents embark upon in this stage" (Nowak 5). The complexity of life introduced by adolescence can be simplified by reading about characters young readers can relate to. Hunger Games trilogy speak to the young readers who wrestle with the conundrum induced by gender. "They react strongly to models which successfully defy ratified society, which dare to reinvent themselves and follow their own ideals, thus putting to the test

if the society they were born into will sustain them or not. Literature will only be attractive to these people if it reflects this uncompromising starting position” (Nowak 5). Katniss resists when emphasized feminine attributes are imposed upon her. This sends out a message to the young female readers that it is acceptable to not to agree to everything that comes with being a female. Society necessitates females to act in certain ways, however, individuality should be maintained and one should question the society before accepting any diktats. Male readers need to question authority which positions them superior to females on the grounds of their sex and gender. Rules are for males as well, so before silently obeying the rules to force power on females and/or other ‘lowly beings’, they need to question because questioning the authority about male superiority frees males from the compulsion to exercising superiority over every being. Egalitarianism needs to be sought for. When young male readers encounter Peeta’s character, the portrayal of Peeta confounds them because Peeta is unlike the ‘alpha male’ society expects of males. The desire to comprehend Peeta’s character is an accomplishment in itself since that is the way to understanding un-gendering. Peeta communicates to the young male readers as a role model, who is defying hegemonic masculinity yet his manhood is not questioned nor has it been tarnished.

Chapter IV: Fighting Gender Stereotypes: A Dystopian Model from YAL

Young adult dystopian literature is invariably born out of the need to shed light on the prevailing perils. It underscores the likelihood of a disastrous future. However, the inherent characteristic of utopian and dystopian literature is to present discourse about hope. Hope for a better future as opposed to the terrible present propels dystopian writers to pen narratives with grim realities. When too many rules shackle the growing beings, they revolt. Encounter with malpractices like gender inequality in fiction force us to see eye-to-eye with the real world in its most heinous state; thereby sending us a warning sign to correct our behavior or forever remain doomed. DYAL is, in that regards, cautionary in nature.

Young adults want to shake things up because the present world is like a ticking bomb. The possibility of a disastrous future ignites in them the desire to change the structure of the society. And in that process to change, destabilize everything — disturb the universe. The present world is not an ideal place to live. To make it better, youths are needed. Adults are the ones who dragged the world to the present grim state therefore they cannot come to the rescue. If they had taken their responsibility properly, youths would not have to embark upon this cumbersome journey to disturb the present to shepherd it to a better place.

On her part, Suzanne Collins has disturbed the universe with the way Cormier did when his *Chocolate War* was published. Cormier did so with the portrayal of a protagonist who dares to question and act against authority. Collins did it with the portrayal of main characters that are not shaped or defined by the gender roles imposed upon them; thereby daring to disturb the gendered universe, which interprets everything in binaries. Societies have codes of behavior which the iconoclasts dismiss because these restrict in their growth. Fresh from liminal phase, on their incorporation

into the adult world, they want to take that dissidence along. Societies disapprove of it and want young adults to submit to their codes of behavior to enter into adulthood. It is the 'suspended liminality' that facilitate some adolescents to import 'this' and 'that' attitude into maturity as well. Katniss could shake the authority of Panem because she is decorated with qualities of a male and a female. Not only Katniss but Peeta also break barriers, walk freely in restricted territory, and discover themselves.

When Pope Francis advised youths in Paraguay to 'mess things', he did so because the future he envisions can be steered to only by the adolescents. Francis' call for rebellion had a purpose – it was to stir things up for the larger good; for the good of humanity. Rebellion needs a cause and Katniss's was for the survival of her family, friends and innocent people of Panem. Likewise, Collins' rebelliousness, evident in her freeing the male and female characters from patriarchy's tight hold, was necessitated by the urgency to ease people's survival unchained by gender norms.

Even though the trilogy conforms to heteronormativity by bowing down to heterosexuality, even though domesticity is endorsed, even though critics are not content with the ending of the trilogy, I think the trilogy departs exuding a glimmer of hope — the hope that Katniss does not become a stereotypical wife and/or a mother. The trilogy also ends with Katniss coming to terms with the 'way of the world'. The possible reason for the waning of rebelliousness in Katniss that she harbored against society earlier on can be attributed to her growth. Hunger Games trilogy is unequivocally *Entwinkromane* in its makeup. Katniss has come-of-age and society demands harmony from its members as a ticket to the adult world and Katniss is only complying with the requirement. Her identity has not been changed. She is still hunting and Peeta is still baking. The fire within Katniss has not died; she is only veering it to some other direction – probably motherhood and marriage. Possibly, she

and Peeta will rear their children into being dissidents; not submitting to societal gender tenets. Though Collins does not say it explicitly, the paper concludes that Katniss and Peeta will continue being themselves — bringing fore attributes of femininity and masculinity required of the occasion — prompted by their individual characteristics without confining to any gender mandates. The two leading characters discard the social norms by being themselves, not defined by their gender identities.

Suzanne Collins disturbed the gender binaries in her trilogy because she asserts that if gender equality is not attained we might be led into dystopian world. Gender identities need to be discussed, deconstructed and redefined. The power relationship that exists between masculinity and femininity is not equal. Moreover, the two should be stopped being perceived as polar opposites. The world is not a fitting place to inhabit the way it is run at the moment with chasm running deep between gender identities. By endorsing feminism, Collins attempts to intervene into the lives of the young adults and save them from falling into the dystopia of gender stereotypes. Both DYAL and Feminism strike at the blemishes of the society and caution people to correct them or else dystopia will loom large.

Young people starting revolution, either pronounced or subtle, is not just limited on paper and is not confined to fiction. The present world has been shaken more than once by young people who defiantly fight the war of injustice. They scratch their head when it itches profusely. 22-year-old Hardik Patel leading the unrest centered on 'Caste Quota' in Gujrat, India has become a burgeoning concern to Narendra Modi and his BJP government. Kiran Gandhi running the London Marathon 2015 openly bleeding during her period without wearing sanitary pads or tampons was an attempt at making people come face-to-face to a natural bodily discharge process which is otherwise shamed. It was her attempt at shaming the menstruation-

shamers. The floodgate of Arab Spring was opened after the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a young man in Tunisia. The revolution in Syria began when a group of teenagers were arrested after they allegedly painted a graffiti art with a message for their President, Bashar al-Assad.

Young adults respond to injustice, inequality, and discrimination rather passionately. They do not mere spectators; they do something about it — either it be by being the agents of change by initiating a dialogue or instigating a revolution. Young adults carry the responsibility of changing the status-quo from ‘what it is’ to ‘what it should be’ and since adults are not doing anything substantial about the present dystopian-esque state, they take it upon themselves to usher a transformed hopeful future.

Possible research area in the field of young adult literature could be a comparative study on ‘young protagonist shaking things up’ as evident in the earlier and modern novels; also another captivating subject could be the surge of female protagonists as witnessed in the contemporary dystopian young adult novels like *Blood Red Road*, *Article 5*, *Divergent*, *Uglies*, and *Matched*. Analysis of young adult literature through the binoculars of dystopia is a fertile ground with generous study subjects for future researchers.

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