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"I live in a world where shadows have teeth"
Gothic Visions in YA Dystopian Fiction

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D

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“I live in a world where shadows have teeth” Gothic Visions in YA Dystopian Fiction

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Declaração de Honra

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Porto, 13 de Janeiro de 2026

Tânia Cerqueira

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Resumo

Na sequência da popularidade global da trilogia Jogos da Fome (2008-2010) de Suzanne Collins, foi observado um aumento na publicação de distopias para jovens adultos no contexto anglo-americano. A representação destes mundos futurísticos totalitários é caracterizada por uma atmosfera de terror, que advém do uso de temas com raízes no gótico. Nesta tese pretendo analisar o modo como o gótico se manifesta na ficção distópica para jovens adultos em língua inglesa. Através da leitura atenta e crítica do *corpus* selecionado, esta tese explora como o Gótico constrói uma atmosfera de medo e ansiedade, articula sistemas de poder e opressão e submete as protagonistas adolescentes a experiências traumáticas, que resultam na sua agência e rebelião. Mediante a exploração de três temas basilares do gótico (poder, a presença do passado e liminaridade), fundamentais para a formulação do conceito de "adolescência feminina gótica", é percetível que a ficção distópica para jovens adultos recorre às convenções do gótico para retratar sociedades caracterizadas pelo controlo autoritário, pela violência e pela manipulação do passado, ao mesmo tempo que cria espaços liminares, nos quais raparigas adolescentes desafiam estas estruturas e desestabilizam oposições binárias. As experiências traumáticas, resultantes da combinação destes elementos, que as adolescentes enfrentam são (re)configuradas como fontes de empoderamento, representadas como um catalisador para o desenvolvimento da consciência crítica e a mobilização política. Deste modo, as protagonistas adolescentes destas narrativas desafiam o monómito, realçando a importância da inclusão do cuidado e da colaboração na construção do conceito "heroísmo." Por fim, esta tese pretende defender que a presença do gótico na ficção distópica para jovens adultos possibilita horizontes utópicos, através da construção de novas formas de adolescência feminina que transcendem o mundo literário e incentivam a imaginação de futuros justos, tanto para as comunidades ficcionais como para os leitores adolescentes.

Palavras-chave: ficção distópica para jovens adultos, gótico, adolescência feminina, trauma, heroísmo

Abstract

Following the global popularity of Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games trilogy (2008-2010), there was an increase in the publication of young adult (YA) dystopian fiction in the Anglo-American context. The representation of these futuristic totalitarian worlds is characterised by an atmosphere of terror, stemming from the use of themes rooted in the Gothic. In this thesis, I intend to analyse how the Gothic manifests itself in contemporary English-language YA dystopian fiction. Through the process of close and critical reading of a selected corpus, this thesis explores how the Gothic constructs an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, articulates systems of power and oppression, and subjects teenage female protagonists to traumatic experiences, which result in their agency and rebellion. Focusing on the exploration of three key Gothic themes (power, the presence of the past, and liminality), which are essential to the conceptualisation of the concept of "Gothic girlhood," it is evident that YA dystopian fiction draws on Gothic conventions to portray societies characterised by authoritarian control, violence, and manipulation of the past, while creating liminal spaces in which teenage girls challenge these structures and destabilise binary oppositions. The traumatic experiences, resulting from the combination of these elements, that teenage girl adolescents endure are (re)configured as sources of empowerment, represented as a catalyst for the development of critical awareness and political agency. In this away, the female adolescent protagonists challenge the monomyth, emphasizing the importance of including care and collaboration in the concept of "heroism." Finally, this thesis aims to argue that the presence of the Gothic in YA dystopian fiction enables utopian possibilities through the construction of new forms of girlhood that transcend the literary world and foster the imagining equitable futures, both for fictional communities and for adolescent readers.

Key-words: YA dystopian fiction, Gothic, girlhood, trauma, heroism

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Introduction

The future is dark, with a darkness as much
of the womb as the grave.

Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in The Dark*

We live in shadowy times. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, we have witnessed countless violent acts that jeopardize life on the planet and the most basic human rights: vicious terrorist incidents and attacks carried out by fanatics; the rise of far-right extremist parties in European constitutional parliaments; women's reproductive rights being diminished or wholly taken away by governments; immigrant children separated from their parents and locked up in detention centres; military and police forces abusing power against Black and People of Colour; the insurgence of militias and the slaughtering of innocent civilians; an on-going religious intolerance and persecution; a pandemic outbreak caused by SARS-CoV-2 resulting in the death of nearly 110 billion individuals and significantly altered the social fabric; an escalation of the genocide in Palestine perpetuated by the Israeli government under the eyes of a complicit global political community that does nothing to stop it; wars breaking worldwide; and an accelerated anthropogenic climate change that is causing the rising sea surface temperatures and consequent sea-level rising, intense droughts and floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes. Looking at the current social-political atmosphere, we, humanity, are one step closer to living in the dystopian worlds forewarned over the last one hundred years. Humanity is approaching a critical moment on the Doomsday Clock.[1] In Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games (2008-2010), Wiress, another Tribute, repeatedly utters "tick, tock," revealing to Katniss Everdeen that the 75th Hunger Games arena functions as a clock, a different threat activated by the hour. Similarly, the human being is threatened by the Doomsday Clock, a symbol of how near humanity is to (self)

[1] The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists created the Doomsday Clock in 1947 as a symbol to represent how close humanity is to a global catastrophe. The clock's position is adjusted annually in accordance with the current state of global affairs.

destruction. After being moved one second forward at the beginning of 2025, the clock now stands eighty-nine seconds away from midnight – it is “the closest the clock [has] come to midnight in its nearly eight-decade history” (Treisman “The Doomsday Clock”). Humanity teeters on the brink of self-destruction.

Nevertheless, no matter how dire the world becomes, people are fighting back in a myriad of ways. In an act of defiance against Iran’s strict morality laws, Iranian women took to the streets and publicly cut their hair in public in protest following the death of 22-year-old Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini. In Myanmar, citizens regularly engage in protests against the military coup that took place in 2021, employing the symbolic gesture of raising the three middle fingers of their left hand in defiance, echoing the citizens of the fictional country Panem from The Hunger Games initial trilogy. In the United States of America, in the wake of the overrule of Roe by the U.S. Supreme Court, thousands of protesters gathered across the country to protest the end of the federal right to abortion, marching on the 50th anniversary of Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. Across the globe, university students and professors camp outside their universities, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and demanding the end of support for Israel. Adolescents, inspired by the activism of Greta Thunberg, Milou Albrecht, and Xiye Bastida, who were teenagers when they became climate activists, are increasingly vocal in asserting their right to live in a sustainable and environmentally balanced world. Worldwide, people put their lives in danger to fight against totalitarianism, warmongering, racial discrimination, genocide, misogyny, and environmental-destructive capitalism, demanding the right to live in a socially fair society.

We live in shadowy times. However, there exists an unwavering beacon of light that endures, illuminating the path forward and inspiring hope that the darkness will not triumph.

***

It is important to acknowledge that although the publication of YA novels has had exponential growth in the last few years, there is still a long path to follow regarding its acceptance in academia, which, more often than not, resists exploring these novels. Even though YA literature has a rich history it "has too often been marginalized and even demonized" (Thomas xi). This resistance can be interpreted as a failure to understand its value for its intended readership (YA fiction gives voice to a stage of life which is heavily marked by the search and construction of the self) as well as reflects an inability to acknowledge the critical merit of YA fiction, which arises from its capacity to develop analytical thinking, address the human condition, and initiate social commentary among its readers. Moreover, there is a critical tendency to regularly use the term "young adult" as a synonym for children's literature without an evident concern with making a distinction. A liminal body of literature, YA fiction occupies a unique space between children's and adult fiction, bridging characteristics of both literary categories within its structural and narrative frameworks. These views surrounding YA fiction, Leah Phillips states, offer "a unique set of problems — reinforces dominant binaries, degrades the literature, focuses on readers at the expense of the books, refuses depth and complexity [perpetuating] a cultural conversation that belittles YA and those who read it" ("Part 1: What is YA?"). Ultimately, the prevailing prejudices surrounding YA fiction translate into a limited number of academic investigations in the field, thereby creating significant gaps. In response to this scholarly neglect, with this PhD thesis, it is my intention to develop a critical study of YA literary fiction and fill an investigative gap in research at the intersection of Gothic and utopian studies. As an advocate of the importance of YA literature and its literary merit, I seek to help integrate it into academia and redefine how it is typically interpreted within scholarly contexts. As Michael Cart wisely notes, "[w]e cannot permit young adult literature to be silenced. Everyone who cares about literature and about young people has a dead-serious responsibility to focus attention on, support, and defend the very best, most courageously outspoken, and bluntly honest of young adult books" (278).

As a consumer of YA dystopian fiction – a consumption that began long before the planning of this dissertation or even my desire to become a scholar – I spotted during

my readings a recurring portrayal of themes and motifs that resonate with an older literary tradition, namely the Gothic. In general terms, Gothic fiction "depicts through story the deepest human dread" (Snodgrass 156). It, David Punter asserts in *The Gothic Condition: Terror, History and the Psyche* (2016), "has to do with the edges of the human, what happens when morality succumbs to addiction, obsession, apophenia, those features of our lives which appear to suggest that we are no longer in control, that our hopes for full subjectivity are always at the mercy of other imperatives, other dictates" (17-8). Without context, these definitions could perhaps be applied to the concept of "dystopia." YA dystopian fiction has its roots in the canonical dystopian narratives that became prominent in the twentieth century. Violence against humanity and the Earth is not a specific trait of the present century – humanity is constantly confronted with horrors perpetrated by powerful individuals, forcing society to question which kind of future it wishes to build.

The twentieth century has seen two vicious and brutal world wars that brought to the surface the worst in humanity, from the usage of deadly technological warfare to the imprisonment, torture, and genocide of Jews. Confronted by scenes of brutality and outraged by the immorality of their times, authors constructed narratives representing societies that mirror the most extreme consequences of human behaviour: totalitarian societies, caste system societies, isolated societies with no awareness of the world that surrounds them, societies devastated by climate change, patriarchal societies that reduce the female body to its reproductive function. The first dystopias are commonly understood as a reflection of a century "of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life" (Moylan xi). At their core, these narratives represent societies characterised by deprivation, oppression, and an unrelenting atmosphere of anxiety, terror, suffering, and fear, resulting from the morally reprehensible actions of individuals who find themselves in positions of power. The descriptions of forced isolation, violence and death, surveillance, tyranny and hypocrisy in high places echo the conventions of the Gothic mode. It is possible to identify characteristics intrinsically linked to the Gothic in the terror that stems from dystopian

fiction. Through its established language and aesthetic, the Gothic effectively resonates with the themes found in dystopian literature. However, research on the interconnection between these two literary forms has been limited.

While there are multiple studies critically addressing YA dystopias and their themes, there is a notable paucity of research exploring the relationship between YA literature and the Gothic mode, as well as a considerable gap in scholarship in YA Gothic fiction. This lack of studies is surprising since I believe there exists a close relationship between these two fields. (1) Adolescence has always been part of the literary Gothic tradition through the presence of female protagonists who are nothing more than young girls in their late teens. (2) There is a deeply rooted connection between the Gothic and adolescence. As Catherine Spooner suggests, adolescence is constructed as a time of great anxiety by Western culture and "Gothic narratives seem to offer one particular strategy for negotiating the terrors of the 'unknown'" (*Contemporary Gothic* 90-1). (3) Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005-2008), one of the book series that popularized this literary category, is a text with Gothic configurations – as a matter of fact, the many references to the franchise in literature and films have established the series, Hannah Priest affirms, "as the *locus classicus* of contemporary teen Gothic" ("Young Adults and the Contemporary Gothic" 281). The series includes Gothic elements such as "a female protagonist struggling against patriarchal institutions, the role of the supernatural and how it is explained, and the wonders of the supernatural world" (Moruzi 47). Additionally, it takes place in eerie and gloomy settings, such as the misty, rainy, perpetual dusk of the small town of Forks, surrounded by dark forests inhabited by monstrous beings, such as vampires and werewolves, that stand on liminal thresholds. The settings create an atmosphere of foreboding and dread as well as of isolation – an isolation Bella Swan experiences after leaving her mother and moving into a new town to live with her father. Most importantly, as Gina Wisker asserts, "[t]he *Twilight* series, like other Gothic fictions, articulates a sense of unease at a variety of social concerns [directing] a conservative unease at an America suffering broken homes, political rivalries and sex before marriage" (*Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 191). Despite

this connection, the analysis of the representation of the Gothic in YA romances has been neglected by critics.

Or, perhaps, it is not that surprising, as the lack of studies in the YA field has its roots in how most academia seems to judge it negatively (this can be perceived by the inclusion of YA fiction in the academic world; how many universities' curricula feature YA novels? How many seminar classes are dedicated to YA fiction?).[2] The overly negative criticism, Chris Crowe enlightens, is not a novelty. Parents, teachers, and librarians have been critical of books written for teenagers, he explains, their perception of YA books being bad because "[t]hey aren't the Classics" or "[t]hey corrupt the young" (146). Indeed, as I delve further ahead, Gothic fiction has historically faced similar reservations and criticism. This negative perspective, expressing that the "cultural expectations that have historically accompanied young adult literature—namely, that it must perform a didactic function—coupled with its status as a commodity, subject it to additional stigmas and mischaracterizations" (qtd. in Thomas xi). Such close-minded perceptions are in urgent need of change – and it is my aspiration that my research contributes to this necessary shift in opinion. After all, as Deborah Lindsay Williams suggests in *The Necessity of Young Adult Fiction* (2023), "the cultural work done by YA fiction needs to

[2] In Portugal, the field of YA Studies is still in an early stage. In the last decade, as far as my knowledge goes, ten dissertations (including my own, concluded in July of 2019, "'*Are you afraid of your own shadow*?': O Monstro e a Construção da Identidade em *Monsters* of *Verity*") have been completed: Cátia Santos's "Julgando um livro pela capa: tendências na literatura juvenil americana" (2014), Cátia Leite's "The Metamorphosis of the American Sublime: Nature, Technology and the Individual in Young Adult trilogy *The Hunger Games*" (2017), Maria Ana Lobo's "African-American Young Adult Fiction and the Fight for Rights" (2019), Ana Filipa Maciel's "YA Fiction: Destigmatising Mental Health and Gender" (2021), Lília Santos's "Bringing the Climate Crisis into the Classroom through Dystopian Cli-fi" (2021), Daniela Lopes' "The Dark Side of Oz: A *Bildung* de Dorothy Gale na Série *Dorothy Must Die* (2014-2017)" (2022), Ana Leite's "A publicação em Portugal e no Brasil dos romances Young Adult dos últimos cinco anos (2017-2021) dos Big Five norte-americanos" (2022), António Matos's "A arte de dizer não: a descoberta da identidade nas obras de Sarra Manning, Simon James Green e Danielle Jawando" (2023), and Maria Terenas's "Fiction Writing Amidst Today's Demand for Representation: 'Authenticity' in Young Adult (YA) Literature" (2024). Unfortunately, the online registration of dissertations and theses in RENATES (Registo Nacional de Teses e Dissertações) does not follow the same pattern. Although my dissertation includes the keyword "young adult fiction," if someone uses the term to search RENATES' database, they will not find it since the registration only included the following keywords: "Humanidades } Línguas e literaturas." Due to this, the extensive work I did to include an updated track of academic work in YA fiction in Portugal might be faulty. Nevertheless, in an attempt to bridge the gap, I have also looked into the repositories and databases of Portuguese universities. This data was consulted on January 17, 2025 at https://renates2.dgeec.mec.pt/.

be seen as a powerful tool that shapes readers' perceptions, making them receptive to—and invested in—the possibility of positive social change" (13). YA fiction fosters critical thinking, creating a space to discuss social-political issues that can construct new views of the surrounding world. YA fiction is necessary because, Williams brilliantly concludes her study, it "reflect[s] ourselves back to ourselves and, in so doing, give us new ways to see the world" (126). The significance of YA fiction cannot be overlooked or disregarded.

Of course, this dearth of studies can also be attributed, in part, to the relative novelty of the field. However, although the field of YA Studies can be considered relatively recent – from a general perspective, YA literature as a literary category emerged in full force in the sixties of the twentieth century[3] (Cart, *Young Adult Literature* 27) with the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) –, fiction written for adolescents is not a new development. After the release of G. Stanley Hall's seminal work *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religions, and Education* (1904), society recognised for the first time a new stage between childhood and adulthood, and with its acknowledgement, a youth culture emerged – a youth culture that invested on clothes, food, and media for teenagers. Books were no exception! Although the portrayal of adolescence did not immediately follow its identifiable psychological traces – as Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva contend, "the construction of adolescence in psychology as a time of internal turmoil, of storm and stress, at the turn of the twentieth century did not immediately result in its representation in fiction for the young" (2) – teenagers were discovering a literature they could identify with.

With fictional works being written for teenagers, the concept of "young adult literature," a category that was first introduced as realistic fiction for teens (Cart, "From Insider to Outsider" 96), slowly began to be established in the following decades. Only in recent years has a minority in the academic circle begun exploring this literary category structurally, thematically, and critically, as well as only recently have emerged

[3] Some scholars consider Maureen Daly's 1942 novel *Seventeenth Summer* the first YA novel to be published (Cart, *Young Adult Literature* 11) due to its plot similarities with contemporary YA romance novels.

publishing sites dedicated to YA Studies, such as *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature* (2020-). For this reason, many critical contributions to the field of YA fiction are framed in anthologies of essays on children's literature. The term "children's literature" is used as an umbrella term encompassing picture books, early readers, middle-grade, and, finally, YA fiction. For instance, in *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011), Kimberley Reynolds uses "children's literature" as an umbrella term. In her observations, Reynolds talks about YA books, including Scott Westerfeld's Uglies (2004-2007) and Collins's The Hunger Games, as examples in her exploration of terrifying futures and ethics, respectively, using them to establish common themes between fiction written for very different age groups. "Children's literature" is also used as a blanket term in *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature* (2008) by Clare Bradford, Kerry Mallan, Robyn McCallum, and John Stephens, where one can find a range of book titles promoted to both children, tweens, and adolescents. This usage is confusing since "it should be readily apparent that YA literature is not the same thing as children's literature—in the same way that short fiction is not the same genre as the novel" (Daniels 78). Thematically, children's and YA literature diverge. For instance, death does not come to represent the same in children's novels and YA fiction, Roberta Seelinger Trites explains, as while "[i]n children's literature, learning about death symbolizes a degree of separation from one's parents [while in] adolescent literature, death is often depicted in terms of maturation when the protagonist accepts the permanence of mortality, when s/he accepts herself as Being-towards-death" (*Disturbing the Universe* 118-9).

My point is not to argue that this blend devalues YA fiction. The term "young adult" in YA fiction, as Cart points out, "is inherently slippery and amorphous" (*Young Adult Fiction* 3), raising questions and debates. Nevertheless, the constant convergence with children's fiction makes it difficult for YA fiction, as well as YA Studies, to establish themselves as a field of literary production and study on their own (this unproblematic common usage relegates YA fiction to a sub-genre of children's literature and does not take into consideration its own particularities) and receive full academic recognition. This blend does not come as a surprise since "[s]ome still believe that YA literature is

merely a secondary category of child-like storytelling—didactic in nature—and unworthy of serious literary evaluation" (Daniels 78), even though YA fiction has less in common with children's literature than it does with adult literature. Phillips articulates that YA fiction could never be children's literature:

> An outline of YA begins most usefully with what it isn't: children's literature. While the reasons behind this vacuous placement are many — and not least because children's literature is older and more established than YA — children's literature is part of a binary pair in a way that YA can never be and binaries play a pivotal role in mainstream Western culture. ("Part 1: What is YA?")

Philips argues that YA fiction stands in a liminal position. It stands on the in-between created by the oppositional binary pair "children" and "adult." Due to its distinctive positioning, YA fiction needs, as Allison Waller compels, "[a] separate critical methodology [to] theorise young adult literature's very in-between-ness or liminality" (14) instead of an appropriation of methodologies developed for children's literature.

In light of this lack of academic studies, my objective is to investigate the manifestation of Gothic visions within YA dystopian fiction, that is, to study YA dystopian narratives through the lens of Gothic Studies. To this end, I address the following main research question: what kind of Gothic visions are constituted, and how are they represented in English-language YA dystopian fiction? I want to clarify that my intention is not to contend that YA dystopian narratives are intrinsically Gothic in nature, that is, that YA dystopian fiction is Gothic. Rather, I propose that these narratives employ themes and tropes commonly linked to the Gothic to evoke a sense of terror in the narrative and subject the protagonists to traumatic experiences, which, consequently, instigate the building of new paradigms of girlhood that foster the need in the female protagonists to transform their community into a better place. The Gothic is essential for the eutopian dimension of YA dystopian fiction. The intersection between the Gothic mode and YA dystopian fiction, in which agency and transformation are crucial features of the plot, enables new perspectives to emerge.

In addition to addressing the main research question, this thesis seeks to engage, adjacently, in critical reflection on the following questions that arise from the main question: what patterns emerge in YA literary dystopias when analysed through the lens of Gothic Studies? Does YA dystopian fiction possess a utopian dimension? In what ways do teenage female protagonists in YA dystopian narratives contribute to the construction of a positive and transformative (hopefully, utopian) conception of girlhood?

The fulfilment of these objectives has entailed the following concerns:

1) To conduct a comprehensive review of the Gothic, examining its evolution and themes through existing academic studies, and assess the relationship between the Gothic and YA fiction;
2) To establish the position of YA dystopian fiction in the context of Utopian Studies;
3) To formulate criteria that permit the selection of a significant yet manageable number of YA dystopian novels to be included in the main corpus of the study;
4) To undertake a close reading of the main corpus and, subsequently, apply a set of questions developed from key themes of YA fiction and the Gothic mode;
5) To identify and explore how the selected key elements are represented in the main corpus;
6) To investigate and compare the construction of Gothic and YA dystopian girlhoods, taking into consideration the assimilations and ruptures, in order to develop positive conceptions of girlhood;
7) To develop a methodological-theoretical framework concerning the usage of Gothic themes in YA dystopian fiction.

To achieve my purpose, the body of this research project comprises three chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework, focusing on the existing scholarly investigation related to the main research fields that constitute this thesis:

Gothic studies (including an overview of the emerging field of YA Gothic), utopian studies (focusing on YA dystopian fiction), YA studies and girlhood studies, the latter with a focus on the topic of female heroism. This charting permitted to identify the scarcity of research that looks into the relationship between the Gothic and YA dystopian fiction; define the concept of YA dystopian fiction; select the main corpus (eighteen YA dystopian series were chosen out of one hundred and thirty-one); and pinpoint the main Gothic themes to be explored in the following chapter: power, the past, and liminality. I want to underscore that, to distinguish the book title from the series title, which often matches the first novel in the series, I have decided to italicise the book title when mentioned, while the series title will be presented in standard font.

Chapter Two, as its title indicates, explores the representation of Gothic visions in YA dystopian fiction, analysing the selected corpus textually. Each section of this chapter discusses the chosen themes individually – power (violence, surveillance, entrapment), the presence of the past, and liminality (spatial and bodily). First, I examine their representation in the Gothic mode and in dystopian fiction through theoretical considerations, and then I evaluate their representation in the selected texts. By analysing YA literary dystopias through the lens of Gothic studies, this thesis will offer a new theoretical take on these YA fiction works.

Chapter Three draws together how the use of the Gothic makes YA dystopian heroines experience Gothic girlhoods – an experience central to the teenage, female protagonists' journey into herohood. Additionally, I argue that the trauma resulting from the combination of the Gothic themes that these teenage girl protagonists endure is an empowering force, propelling the reconceptualisation of Joseph Campbell's monomyth to become more inclusive and constructing alternative models of girlhood. Trauma, as will be shown, is central to the (re)construction of eutopian communities.

The following academics and their works are highly relevant to the theoretical foundations of this thesis. The extensive research conducted by David Punter, Fred Botting, and Catherine Spooner on the Gothic is pivotal for a critical and theoretical exploration of the Gothic and its historical context. Spooner's *Contemporary Gothic* (2006) is particularly central to the assessment of the strand of teen Gothic and the

conceptualisation of the concept “Gothic girlhood.” Even though some of their works were published over two decades ago, their uniqueness and innovative perspectives continue to resonate in contemporary scholarship. *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Fiction* (2014), edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz and Sarah Hentges’s *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature* (2018) are hallmarks in the research fields of YA dystopian fiction and girlhood. Maria Tatar’s *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* (2021) offers valuable insight into narratives about heroines, challenging the traditional models of heroism presented by Campbell. Leah Phillips’s recently published monograph, *Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Reframing Myths of Adolescent Girlhood* (2023), is pertinent to the study of female heroes. Phillips’s reflections on liminality and its relationship to YA fiction are also relevant, presenting a better understanding of how oppositional binary systems operate in liminality.

1. Dark Worlds: From Bloodcurdling Mansions to Harrowing Societies

1.1. Two Hundred and Fifty Year of Gothic

An old castle, half of it ruinous.
A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secrets ones.
Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.
Assassins and desperadoes, *quant. suff*.
Noise, whispers and groans, threescore at least.

Anonymous, "Terrorist Novel Writing"

Gothic can perhaps be called the only true literary form. Or its stain.

Fred Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition*

"Gothic fiction began as a sophisticated joke," wrote John Mullan ("The origins of the Gothic"). On Christmas Eve 1764, Horace Walpole's (in)famous *The Castle of Otranto* was published in England. Succinctly, the novel narrates the story of Manfred and the fall of his household. After Conrad, his son, is crushed on his wedding day by a helmet that fell from the sky, Manfred decides to marry Isabella himself, claiming his wife did not give him a proper heir to continue his lineage. After persecuting Theodore and mistakenly murdering his daughter, Matilda, the sins of the past catch up with Manfred, who repents for his actions. Ultimately, Theodore takes his rightful place as prince of Otranto and marries Isabella, and order is restored. From the moment of Conrad's death, the narrative features supernatural events, such as the appearance of a giant armoured leg and visions of those long dead, ghostly visions, medieval castles, hidden

identities, subterranean passageways and mazes, shadowy forests, family secrets that come out to unveil the buried past, and virginal maidens in distress. As Maggie Kilgour summarises, Walpole's novel

> introduces some of the most basic gothic ingredients: characters – the Miltonically satanic hero or fallen angel, with his complementary selfless and passive female counterpart, the bland hero who will inevitably turn out to be the rightful heir, the selfless victimised heroine; setting – the castle with its secret buried in its past that will finally emerge to determine the direction of the future, the portrait and other works of art that mysteriously come to life; plot – a story of usurpation, concerned with the issues of succession and inheritance, which flirts with the possibility of incestuous relations, but ends with the rightful distribution of person and property. (18)

When the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* was published, Walpole did not reveal himself as the author. The text was initially introduced to its readership as a translation by William Marshal of an Italian novel written by Onofrio Muralto, which was "found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England" (Walpole 133). In the second edition of the novel, after disclosing his identity as the actual author of the text, Walpole added the subtitle "A *Gothic* Tale*"* (my emphasis), a term that would be employed to describe a set of novels (and, later, visual and virtual entertainment media) that revel in numerous key textual elements, themes, motifs, and plot devices introduced by the novel. Of course, Walpole did not coin the term given that the word "Gothic"[4] had been previously employed to describe a nomadic Germanic tribe[5] and later an architectural style popularised from the middle of the twelfth to the sixteenth

[4] The term Gothic "was coined by classicizing Italian writers of the Renaissance, who attributed the invention […] of medieval architecture to the barbarian Gothic tribes that had destroyed the Roman Empire and its classical culture in the 5th century CE" ("Gothic art"). The word had generally deprecatory tones, "[u]sed derogatively about art, architecture, and writing that failed to conform to the standards of neoclassical taste" and "signified the lack of reason, morality, and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs, and works" (Botting, "In Gothic Darkly" 13).

[5] The Goths were "the most visible, and influential, of the German tribes" (Miles 11). They are seen as responsible for the end of the Roman Empire, perceived as the acme of civilization by the West, due to their sack of Rome.

century, which is characterised by tabernacles and pinnacles.[6] However, in the second edition of the novel, Walpole devised what can be considered the first definition of literary Gothic: *The Castle of Otranto*, as Walpole explains, was "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability; in the latter, nature is always intended to be (and sometimes has been) copied with success" (137). A Gothic novel was subsequently interpreted as a text that merges what was considered the ancient romance, which encompassed the fantastic and the supernatural, and the modern romance, which focused on a mimetic representation of reality, reinstating the imagination at a time when the realistic novel prevailed.

Recognized by most critics and academics as the first Gothic novel*, The Castle of Otranto* was behind the emergence of the Gothic as a literary genre, influencing generations of Gothic narratives: Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820),[7] Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). Gothic literary texts published after *The Castle of Otranto* followed clear generic patterns (the reader often finds in these narratives a medieval castle, a Gothic hero-

[6] Gothic architecture is "the architecture of the pointed arch, pointed rib vaults, piers with clusters of shafts, deep buttresses (some of the flying type), elaborate window tracery, pinnacles, spires and spirelets, crenellations, and a pronounced vertical emphasis" (Curl, "Architecture, Gothic").

[7] The half-century after the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* was a proliferous time for Gothic narratives. Beyond the novels already mentioned, there is a panoply of Gothic texts published at this time, such as Robert Jephson's *The Count of Narbonne* (1781), Sophia Lee's *The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times* (1783-85), Charlotte Turner Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde, or The Recluse of the Lake* (1789), William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), Francis Lathom's *The Midnight Bell* (1798), Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya; or, the Moor: A Romance of the Fifteenth Century (1806*), Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), among many others.

villain, and a persecuted maiden, which have become the elements a classic Gothic tale cannot do without, along with themes of power, politics, identity, and inheritance). However, with the advent of new historical contexts (the emergence of new social, political, and cultural issues and the uncovering of uncharted territories by colonial enterprises urged the change), writers often built upon, developed, and adapted the key elements and themes that Walpole first introduced. As they flourished, the offspring of *The Castle of Otranto* added new layers to the Gothic literary tradition. For instance, Radcliffe moves to a literature of terror, creating a distinction between terror and horror and "infus[ing] scenes of terror and suspense with Romantic sensibility" ("Ann Radcliffe"); Lewis' *Monk* introduces graphic representations of violence and horror; Shelley's *Frankenstein* intertwines the Gothic mode with social-political fears of science and technology. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that the defining characteristics of the Gothic are the enthrallment with the past, archaic beliefs, and authority. Furthermore, literary Gothic "came studded with travelogues, interspersed with poetry, quivering with sensibility, dark with Romantic gloom, clad in fancy dress, dripping gore, embellished with piety or sensuality, and framed with assertions that it had been found on crumbling manuscripts" (Tracy 1). Due to the mixing of these elements, it is hardly surprising that when Gothic novels emerged in the eighteenth century, they became trendy among readers (many of these texts withstood the test of time and today are still exhibited on bookshelves everywhere and taught in classrooms). On the one hand, their popularity was "read as a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural force, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason" (Kilgour 3). On the other hand, it was attributed to the Gothic being a literary form that permitted its readership to indulge in excess and transgression.

Still, even though popular among the masses, Gothic literature was not accepted by book critics or scholars of the time. While "idealised meanings of Gothic were channelled into chivalry and architecture," the negative ones "were poured into the Gothic novels, so that it soon gained a reputation much like Lord Byron's, of being mad, bad, and dangerous to read" (Miles 17). Literary Gothic was critically denigrated,

branded as the “trash of the circulating libraries” (Townshend “An introduction to Ann Radcliffe”). Gothic romances were often censured because “its subject matter, its form, themes, mode of representation and its perceived effects on the readers, were seen as a ‘flood’, a ‘deluge’, an ever-encroaching sea eroding the rocks of good taste and decorum and leaving only a pernicious and depraved appetite for adventures, thrills and sensations in its wake” (Botting and Townshend 1). Nevertheless, such a reputation did not dissuade readers from plunging into the supernatural, frightening, and seemingly immoral worlds these books offer.

The reception of *The Castle of Otranto* at the time of publication was not without controversy, having experienced ferocious criticism. In *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature*, an anonymous reviewer stated that “[the] publication of any work, at this time, in England composed of such rotten materials, is a phoenomenon we cannot account for,” stressing the novel features absurdities and “other monstrosities” (51). In *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal*, another reviewer, who employs the term “Gothic fiction” in relation to *The Castle of Otranto* long before Walpole does, notes that anybody “who can digest the absurdities of Gothic fiction, and bear with the machinery of ghosts and goblins, may hope, at least, for considerable entertainment from the performance before us” (97). Additionally, the reviewer points out that the text’s main fault is the “unchristian doctrine of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children [since it] is certainly, under our present system, not only a very useless, but a very insupportable moral” (99). Although it received negative criticism, the *sins of the father motif,* considered an inappropriate and insufferable story moral, became central to literary Gothic. Twenty-first-century contemporary Gothic novels such as Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* (2001), Laura Purcell’s *The Silent Companions* (2017), Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s *Mexican Gothic* (2020), and C.E. McGill’s *Our Hideous Progeny* (2023), still feature this theme. However, amid the negativity offered in these reviews, the latter reviewer does commend the writing and the characters as the essence and property of the narrative: “for it is written with no common pen; the language is accurate and elegant; the characters are highly finished; and the disquisitions into human manners, passions, and pursuits, indicate the keenest penetration, and the most

perfect knowledge of mankind" (97). It seems that not everything about the Gothic novel was despicable.

Walpole's novel was not the only Gothic text vilified by critics. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the English poet, literary critic, philosopher and one of the founders of the Romantic movement, reviewed Lewis' *The Monk* and pinned it down as "a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee" (197). The perception that literary Gothic has the power to corrupt the "susceptible" mind of the young (and women, who were the primary readership of the Gothic romance) has persisted in societal discourse. Nevertheless, while most Gothic writers were slandered, Radcliffe received high praise for her work, being "singled out an exception, as the one writer who was deservedly exempt from the general condemnation of Gothic writing in Romantic-period culture" (Townshend "An introduction to Ann Radcliffe").[8] One of the reasons Radcliffe found herself and her works so welcomed was her stance that imagination should always be subordinated to reason. It was this view that propelled Radcliffe to introduce the distinction between horror and terror. In the essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," Radcliffe affirms that "[t]error and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (47). Terror manifests itself in blurring images, and the reader is left to imagine what might be hidden by the shadows – the scratching noise inside the wardrobe, the howling scream on a windy night. Terror is permeated by obscurity, an indistinctness, which "leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate" and is interpreted as a source of the sublime. Horror is the encounter with what is hidden in the shadows, such as a monster, a ghostly apparition, or a grotesque scene, giving no room for the reader, who is taken by a sense of chaos, to exercise the power of imagination. Horror is infused by confusion, which "by blurring one image into another,

[8] Although enjoying a comfortable status, Radcliffe was not without admonition. In the anonymous text "Terrorist Novel Writing," although her name is not mentioned, one can deduce that the text is referring to the author. Radcliffe is censured for "[t]he *system of terror* which she has adopted is not the only reproach to which she is liable. Besides the tedious monotony of her descriptions, she affects in the most disgusting manner a knowledge of languages, countries, customs and objects of art, of which she is lamentably ignorant" ("Terrorist Novel Writing" 227).

leaves only a chaos in which the mind can find nothing to be magnificent, nothing to nourish its fears or doubts, or to act upon in any way" (48), leaving despair in its wake. That is, "terror marks the uplifting thrill where horror distinguishes a contraction at the imminence and unavoidability of the threat" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 6). Employing Devendra P. Varma's description, the difference between terror and horror is the "awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against corpse" (130). Hence, Radcliffe's works, Dale Townshend remarks, "are characterised by an emphasis upon psychological suspense over bodily gore, by an omnipresent sense of mystery and obscurity over the certainties of fast-paced action, and by mere hints and suggestions of ghostly activity over fully realised manifestations of the supernatural" ("An introduction to Ann Radcliffe"). In Radcliffe's hands, the Gothic novel received a semblance of respect.

These negative reviews illustrate that when literary Gothic first emerged, a lack of "respectability" surrounded it, with most critics perceiving it as a lesser literary production.[9] As Fred Botting sums up, "[i]nvoking ideas and objects of displeasure, gothic texts were invariably considered to be of little artistic merit, crude, formulaic productions for vulgar, uncultivated tastes." Moreover, they were "considered anti-social in content and function, failing to encourage the acquisition of virtuous attitudes and corrupting readers' powers of discrimination with idle fantasies, seducing them from paths of filial obedience, respect, prudence, modesty and social duty" (*Gothic 2nd Edition* 2). The power to disrupt social norms and structures deemed Gothic novels improper and tasteless, causing them to be rejected from high culture.

This response to the Gothic novel should have been foreseeable. At its ascension, society was living in the Enlightenment era. A period intended to break with the primitive superstitious past, the Enlightenment replaced old belief systems and emphasised the importance of the human being's rational capability. Literature gave primacy to an educational, moral purpose, "one that was implicitly flouted by most

[9] The eighteenth-century romance had to confront prejudices at the time. As Dieter Schulz explains, eighteenth-century realistic fiction unfolded as a rupture with romance. Many novelists "constantly attacked the supernatural in fiction, extravagant notions of honor and love, [and] exalted rhetoric" (78).

Gothic texts" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 90). At the time, the Gothic was juxtaposed with what was considered the classical: "[w]here the classical was well-ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilised" (Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 1:5). There was very little rationality. Although this epoch of reason prioritised the advancement of knowledge, it did not answer all the questions that loomed in the human mind, seldom addressing, for instance, the dark mysteries of nature, uncanny events, and notions of "evil" and "malevolence." These are the exact topics the Gothic novel attempts to answer in the depths of its obscurity by putting into concrete terms abstract ideas. Indeed, the Gothic, like Romanticism,[10] emerged in reaction to the Enlightenment and its literary realism and "is especially a revolt against a mechanistic or atomistic view of the world and relations, in favour of recovering an earlier organic model" (Kilgour 11). As a reactionary mode to the restrictions imposed by the Enlightenment, the Gothic sought to reinstate a return to a cultural model in which imagination was an essential mechanism in creating literature. Naturally, one must consider the extent to which the Enlightenment and the Gothic diverge. It is accurate to assert that "Enlightenment values of the eighteenth century (reason, virtue, moderation) emerged on the basis of their difference from Gothic darkness (passion, vice, excess), in a move from feudal savagery and landed property to bourgeois exchange and commerce" (Botting, "Gothic Culture" 199). Nevertheless, both movements partly engage with the same topics albeit from different perspectives (for instance, both show an evident preoccupation with the past).

These opposing views were still being expressed, even two centuries after the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*. Virginia Woolf's review of Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (1921), an introduction to the origins of tales

[10] Gothic and Romanticism share a mutual concern "in subjectivity, the figure of the outsider, social sympathies, concepts of agency, will, the relation to the past, the nature of temporality, formal innovations, the divine" (McEvoy 20). Because in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Gothic was "the space where Romanticism's darker urges could be indulged, its repressions divulged" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 28), it has been described as Dark Romanticism.

of terror, which encompass Gothic texts, is a clear example. Woolf writes that the Gothic romance "is a parasite, an artificial commodity, produced half in joke in reaction against the current style, or in relief form," and claims "we shall smile at the absurdity of the visions they conjure up [and] perhaps, congratulate ourselves upon our improvement" ("Gothic Romance"). Paradoxically, Birkhead, in her effort to elevate the literary Gothic, ultimately undermines it. In her scholarly work, Birkhead aims to provide an account of the growth of supernatural fiction in English literature, focusing on the emergence of the Gothic romance and the tale of terror towards the close of the eighteenth century (v). To this end, Birkhead summarises the plot of numerous Gothic texts, emphasising the portrayal of Gothic themes and elements. However, Birkhead elevates the tale of terror at the expense of the Gothic itself, asserting that "[t]he Gothic Romance did not reflect real life, or reveal character, or display humour. Its aim was different. It was full of sentimentality, and it stirred the emotions of pity and fear," while the tale of terror employed terror "as a means to an end, not as an end in itself" (223-24). To illustrate her argument, Birkhead invokes the novels of the Brontë sisters, noting that the authors "do not trifle with emotion or use supernatural elements to increase the tension. Theirs are the terrors of actual life" (225). By framing terror as an emotional experience that distinguishes the tale of terror, Birkhead contends that it is above the Gothic romance as it sheds its excesses. This perception of literary Gothic as inferior persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century.

The shift of opinion came in 1980, "when David Punter brought out his original one-volume edition of *The Literature of Terror*, a book setting much of the agenda in Gothic criticism for a decade or more subsequently, impelling a rising tide of fascination in the Gothic" (Armitt, *History of the Gothic* 18). As researchers began critically exploring not only literary Gothic but the Gothic mode in general in a positive light, the number of ground-breaking academic works increased, building methodological and theoretical frameworks within a plurality of study fields[11] and enriching "our understanding of the

[11] The Gothic has been analysed through the lens of feminist studies, gender studies, trauma theory, history, and ecocriticism, among other theoretical frameworks,

way that writers in this period responded to each other's work and refigured the possibilities of the form" (Watts 126). The development of concise and transdisciplinary scholarship on the Gothic helped to position it in its rightful place within academia and reviewers, highlighting its rich cultural significance and intricacies that transcend literary boundaries. This shift of perspective will hopefully soon occur in the field of YA Studies as well.

As a result of a renewed appeal from critics, in the 1980s, literary Gothic was no longer interpreted as a genre about the absurd apparition of giant armoured legs or Machiavellian monks with the power to corrupt the younglings' minds. Scholars started reflecting intently on the socio-political and cultural aspects behind the conception of this mode, which increased the understanding of the "Gothic as an inherently social form [and] a narrative set on exploring recurring social problems conveyed through a distinctly Gothic imagery" (Więckowska vii). It materialised an understanding that the Gothic gives voice to socio-political and cultural concerns, "participat[ing] in the social, political, and philosophical discourses of the late eighteenth century" (Carson 271). The analysis of Gothic texts as reflections of social and cultural issues recontextualises them as instruments for examining the boundaries of the self and the socio-political anxieties of their eras. The Gothic

> reveals to us our greatest dreads and desires, joys and fears and, most deliciously and/or horrifying at a remove, our most sublime terrors. Indeed, it has always traded in cultural contradictions: at the core of a dream, the Gothic discloses a nightmare; at the heart of a rational modernity, irrational darkness; at the root of romantic intimacy, terror; at the heart of Enlightened liberty, slavery. (Davison 312-313)

Gothic aesthetics flourish in times of turmoil. Unsurprisingly, socio-political uprisings and religious restlessness are the backdrop for many Gothic narratives. Authors traverse both temporal and geographical boundaries to expose their concerns about the times they were living, thereby Gothicising politics and religion.

The political ramifications of the Gothic have taken a scholarly interest – ramifications literalised in these narratives but also intrinsically associated with political institutions. The term "Gothic" was brought into "many political debates, signifying, for a range of political positions, revolutionary mobs, enlightened radicals and irrational adherence to tyrannical and superstitious feudal values" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 3). Robert Miles detects the connection between these two and states that the "Gothic rose on the nationalist tide," and both in "architecture and the arts [sic] the Gothic style was increasingly identified with Englishness, an association that reached its apogee […] when the burnt-down Houses of Parliament were rebuilt in the high Gothic style" (15). Spooner contends the Gothic was appropriated to represent a British cultural tradition settled on the Middle Ages practises of political freedom and progressivism. As a result, the "anti-Classical associations of Gothic were reinterpreted as a source of pride; they represented the indigenous identity of Britain that had resisted Roman colonization." The Gothic established and strengthened national British myths and values, consequently being "secularized and imbued with Whiggish politics" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 13-4). Due to politics appropriating the Gothic,

> two quite distinct sets of meanings attached to Gothic began to develop. On the one hand, Gothic represented a mythical medieval Britain, where chivalry held sway, social order prevailed and religious belief was unchallenged. On the other, it represented a time of barbarity and feudalism before the blessed arrival of the Enlightenment and the benefits of science and reason that it bestowed. These two separate urges were politicized: reactionary and progressive, Tory and Whig, nostalgic and proto-modernist. (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 14).

Even politics has come to exhibit the intrinsic duality characteristic of the Gothic mode.

Regarding still the connection between the political sphere and the Gothic, Kilgour claims that the French Revolution made the Gothic "an appropriate vehicle for embodying relevant political and aesthetic questions" (23). In the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution unsettled the political order, breaching the old structures by dethroning the monarchy and implementing a new political and social

order. One such example, as Edmund Burke notes in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), is the defence of the separation from the past:

> But one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it among their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of an habitation—and teaching these successors as little to respect their contrivances, as they had themselves respected the institutions of their forefathers. (81)

To Burke, this separation and consequent erasure of the past would undoubtedly lead them to return to barbarianism. In other words, it would lead society to a Gothic past. In its recounting and representations, the French Revolution was Gothicised, revealing the Gothic as an appropriate mode to reflect upon political matters. Predictably, the decade of the French Revolution "was the period when the Gothic novel was its most popular" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 3). Besides, as Marie Mulvey-Roberts accounts, the French Revolution brought new imagery and tropes into the Gothic, such as the inclusion of secret societies. As she explains, "[i]n the wake of the French Revolution, the secret societies were the dark spectres haunting the mass-movements of Europe [and] Gothic novelists had seized upon them as metaphors of terror" (*Gothic Immortals* 59). Nothing better than a good old revolution to produce new hauntings into Gothic tales.

Concerning religious ramifications, the depiction of monasteries, churches, priests, and nuns in the Gothic mode is interpreted as a critique of religion and the Catholic Church, represented "as an establishment based upon depravity and avarice [where] [s]exual perversion is masked by the trappings of holiness" (Armitt, *History of the Gothic* 149). Gothic novels produced "in northern European Protestant countries often had an anti-Catholic subtext" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 3). The parody of Catholicism asserted that religious corruption and perversity could not happen within

the boundaries of Protestant England. The Gothic became a medium to criticise religion, especially the Catholic Church, "inflating the horrors of the inquisition in service of anti-Catholic rhetoric, comparing the strength of Christian piety to demonic temptation, and questioning the role of religion in education" (Fall "Religion"). In these Gothic narratives, "the wicked abbess, the unchaste or pregnant nun, and the lascivious monk are manifestations of the naked anti-Catholic projects of the Gothic" and "[t]he monastery, convent, cloister, and burial crypt are [used as settings] to portray Catholics in an unholy light" (Fall, "Anti-Catholic"). These representations reflect the tension between the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church and a pervasive anti-Catholic sentiment ingrained in British society.

In the eighteenth century, the Gothic novel gave women writers power and respect, but most importantly, it gave them the potential to subvert social roles and expose patriarchal power. In the hands of female writers, Jarlath Killeen explains, the Gothic "acts as a means by which spaces controlled by the dictates of a patriarchal culture are exposed as ideological rather than natural, and allow the woman writer, for a brief period, to destroy that space" (238). Likewise, it gave them the freedom to "explore otherwise taboo subject matter in stylized and exotic ways" (Scrivener 55).

Within female writers publishing Gothic romance, Ann Radcliffe, the most popular author of her time, played a significant role in founding the Gothic novel in its classic form alongside Walpole. She introduced Gothic tropes and themes still associated with the mode today. Indeed, for the period of her writing career, Radcliffe made significant contributions not only to the Gothic mode but to the literature as a whole.[12] Her novels "established the narrative trajectory that has persisted into contemporary female gothics: a persecuted heroine trapped in a crumbling castle diffused with manic oedipal anxieties and assaulted by the forces of socioeconomic power (often disguised as religion) run amok" (Hoeveler 1). Radcliffe's heroine would live on and be the protagonist of the female Gothic – in reality, Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith argue,

[12] Besides *Udolpho*, Radcliffe produced five other Gothic novels: *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Italian* (1797), and *Gaston de Blondeville* (1826), published posthumously.

"[i]t is Radcliffe's novels with their heroines in flight from male tyrants across fantastical landscapes and in search of lost mothers entombed in womb-like dungeons beneath patriarchal castles which we now tend to characterise as the beginnings of 'Female Gothic'" (2). The authors explain that the plot of the female Gothic "centralised the imprisoned and pursued heroine threatened by a tyrannical male figure, it explained the supernatural, and ended in the closure of marriage" (3).

The term "female Gothic" was coined by Ellen Moers, who defined it as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode […] since the eighteenth century" (90). This term can be tricky since it universalises the female writing tradition since the eighteenth century as Gothic and brings forth a gender division that often evokes the superiority of male Gothic.[13] Moers's study permits reading female Gothic "as a politically subversive genre articulating women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body" (Wallace and Smith 2). In her considerations on female Gothic, Kilgour ascertains that "[i]n the female gothic, the private world is turned temporally into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison, the castle, in which men imprison helpless passive females, angels in the house, whose spirituality may be pushed, as in the case of Walpole's Matilda, to an extreme" (38). Additionally, familiar images of domesticity are described using Gothic language, which enables "to see that the home *is* a prison, in which helpless female is at the mercy of ominous patriarchal authorities" (9).

All things considered, the first Gothic novels had a myriad of original tropes that most Gothic authors would embrace (and many authors writing on the Gothic today still do) in their narratives, which have come to include

[13] The existence of two Gothic traditions reinforced gender roles. As Kilgour details, "[w]hile the male moves through the standard *Bildungsroman* towards personhood and individuation, the female is never independent, and achieves her goal by entering into a new relation through marriage" (37). Moreover, "[t]he male hero achieves what is commonly seen as the goal of male development: autonomy; the female heroine what is commonly seen as her lot: relationship" (38).

> moving from familiar and safer territory into foreign and therefore dangerous lands […], wicked aristocrats, castles, dark passages, dungeons and cellars, wild mountain landscapes and forests graveyards, bats and moonlight, lightening [sic] and thunder, threatened virgins, dark curses and dire warnings, occult practices and livid monsters or the undead which stalk battlement and chapel alike [which] are still the tropes we have in contemporary versions of the genre. (Bloom, "Introduction to the Gothic Handbook Series" 20)

After a hiatus period marked by fewer Gothic productions (or at least, a period which was not as productive in Gothic works as when the mode was first introduced),[14] the nineteenth century, a century marked by several socio-political and ideological changes and the occult revival,[15] brought by industrialisation and the Victorian Era, offered a new age for the Gothic to prosper. Gothic narratives published at this time are often designated Victorian "Gothic revival" novels. The revival was not a replica. With new historical contexts, Gothic authors faced fears and anxieties that came with the progress of times and put those on paper. Of course, this does not mean everything changed. For instance, Carol Margaret Davison highlights, "[f]ollowing in the tradition of Ann Radcliffe, Victorian Female Gothic writers deploy the supernatural for psychological and political ends to advance a gender-aware commentary on women's roles and the dreaded husbands, guardians and institutions that threaten to control them" (311).

[14] Carson defends that "[a]fter Mary Shelley and Charles Robert Maturin the Gothic novel declines, or undergoes transformation into such genres as ghost stories, vampire tales, sensation novels, historical romances, and detective fiction" (257).

[15] Despite being a time of industrialisation and technological progress, the Victorian Era was also marked by a fascination with the occult, resulting in the emergence of fringe sciences such as spiritualism, mesmerism and phrenology. While many viewed these as irrational, occultism and science walked hand in hand. After all, the Victorian Era "was a marriage of knowledge and superstition; invention and intuition; discovery and tradition; technology and myth. Many Victorians saw no clear delineation between science and spiritualism, and most Victorian spiritualists were quick to adopt the very latest technologies" (Douris "Introduction"). Scientific discourses were developed around practices like spiritualism and phrenology. The appeal of Victorian practices of spiritualism and mediumship – Victorians gathered privately to observe mediums conduct séances, conjuring the spirits of the departed – was provoked by exaggerated rational times. It is important to stress that Victorian mediumship permitted women the possibility to act beyond the confines of traditional Victorian structures (S. Rogers 118). The impact of Victorian enthusiasm and curiosity for the supernatural is perceived in the literature of the time, particularly through the proliferation of the penny dreadful and ghost stories. For more on Victorian occultism and the relationship between women and the occult, see *Women and the Victorian Occult* (2011), edited by Tatiana Kontou, and Lisa Morton's *Calling the Spirits: A History of Séances* (2020).

Nevertheless, in the hands of nineteenth-century authors, literary Gothic moves from outlandish, far-off, isolated settings, finding itself positioned in the midst of modernity, focusing now on the social-political intricacies of its readership without subterfuges.

Kathleen L. Spencer explains that authors "insist on the modernity of the setting – not on the distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader, but on their *identity*" (200). The modernity of the setting became significant to the Gothic in the nineteenth century since, as Spencer further explains,

> A modern setting means, most profoundly, an urban setting, as by the end of the nineteenth century well over half the population of the British Isles lived in cities. To be modern also means that science is the metaphor that rules human interactions with the universe, so the new fantastic adopts the discourse of empiricism even to describe and manipulate supernatural phenomena. (200)

A modern setting allows the Gothic to expand its coils, from completely embracing science and technology to occupying previously forbidden spaces, increasing its sense of terror. Urban London becomes central to Gothic novels of the nineteenth century. From Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray to* Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) and Stoker's *Dracula*, "[i]mages of gaslit, fog-enshrouded streets in Victorian London, and the killers and demons which haunt them, have become iconic, if not cliché in the signification of Gothic fiction" (Ridenhour *In Darkest London*). Like other modern cities, London "combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 2). To increase the terror of the Gothic city, the streets were inhabited by a panoply of monsters that terrified city-dwellers: vampires, werewolves, ghosts, mummies, demonic entities, and shape-shifters, to name a few. The representation of these beings is majorly influenced by the prototypes of modern monstrosity (cf. Claeys, *Dystopia* 76): Frankenstein's Creature (*Frankenstein*), Count Dracula (*Dracula*), and Mr

Hyde (*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*), the latter two emerging in the late-Victorian period.

Gothic literature is a distinctive site where authors can create worlds dominated by the monster. Notably, the proliferation of the figure of the monster in literature occurred during the nineteenth century, a period that coincided with the predominance of Gothic literature in Europe. Indeed, the modern monster is in debt to Gothic literature, as it shaped its construction in today's media. Within this context, the monster emerges as "a creative rebellion of Romanticism against the regularity and predictability of the 18th-century neoclassic conventions." This rebellion "disturb[s] universal harmony by appearing gnarled, deformed, and oversized or out of proportion" (Snodgrass237). With the power to generate a repulsion-attraction effect, the monster's functionality within a cultural framework represents the fears and worries that permeate the Gothic mode. Monstrous creatures illustrate how anxieties are embedded in Gothic literature, thus generally interpreted as allegorical figures. In the Gothic novel, the monster is "versatile enough to represent fears about race, nation, and sexuality, [combining] in one body fears of the foreign and perverse" (Halberstam 14). Consequently, the Gothic monster can be understood as a projection of human anxieties, reflecting an individual's anxieties regarding their sociohistorical times as well as their humanity and identity. The monster, as a representation of cultural anxieties common to all human beings, such as childhood fears, phobias, and traumas, plays a significant role in shaping both collective identity and personal identity – after all, by externalizing one's fears and traumas into a monstrous being, a fragment of the self is revealed to the outside world.

Additionally, the Gothic monster often symbolises moral transgressions, reflecting the character's misdeeds or fears, as well as the historical wrongdoings of the community to which they belong. The prototypes of modern monstrosity, Frankenstein's Creature, Count Dracula and Mr Hyde, exemplify this perspective. Victor Frankenstein becomes obsessed with the desire to master death, creating the Creature from the body parts of dead individuals, only later to abandon it. The Creature reveals Victor's obsession with conquering death and his moral transgressions, including

collecting body parts to generate a new being and neglecting the being he brought to life. Collectively, Count Dracula embodies societal anxieties regarding the Other, waves of emigrants, sexual transgression and diseases that were often difficult to treat with the contemporary medical practices. Mr Hyde represents Dr Jekyll's most profound fear: he has a dormant evil inside him, tainted by immoral vices and wickedness. Monsters are entrenched in meaning: "[t]he body of the monster is a text expressing human fear and desire" (Weinstock, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory" 20); the monster is a cultural, social, and political construction. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts, "culture gives birth to a Monster before our eyes" (9).

Literary Gothic becomes more disturbing by featuring places close to home. The shifting of settings insinuates that transgressions are not only bound to happen in remote countries and isolated locations from society, in the liminal places featured in Gothic novels since *The Castle of Otranto*, but also in the midst of the educated and civilised society. This new generation of Gothic novels imparted the fear of the urban – urban areas can be as malevolent and dreadful as old-time crumbling castles and secluded countryside mansions. By "[e]scaping from the tomb and the castle, the monastery and the mansion, the gothic arguably becomes more potentially terrifying because of its ability to manifest itself and variations of itself anywhere" (Wolfreys 9). The knowledge that wickedness is closer to civilization has the power to instil a deep-rooted fear within society. The urban space "is seen as a jungle, a chaos of buildings, streets, and fast-moving vehicles that disorient and alarm newcomers. But the greatest single threat in the city is other people" (Tuan 9). After all, malevolence and wickedness are often attributed to human beings. The shift from isolated landscapes to urban settings made way for the emergence of the Urban Gothic, "[a] form in which the windings of the labyrinthine city substitute for the castle dungeons or monastery crypts of earlier Gothic" (Lloyd-Smith 176). The setting strongly influences a Gothic novel. For this reason, literary Gothic develops regional strands, which take into consideration the specific characteristics of the place where the narrative is set.

After its inception, the Gothic mode travelled from England to Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; it sailed across the Channel and the Atlantic. Literary Gothic found

expression throughout Europe and across the ocean, reaching the shores of the New World, where it was sown and grew in the imagination of what is known today as the United States of America. Different national and geographical regions allow authors to mould literary Gothic to local specificities and historical-social-cultural contexts, thus emerging, among other strands, the Irish Gothic, Scottish Gothic, American Gothic, Australian Gothic, Aboriginal Gothic and Indigenous Gothic. Since most of the YA dystopian narratives under study are set in a futuristic and/or post-apocalyptic landscape located in the United States of America, it is useful to take a moment at this stage to explore its development and specificities. First and foremost, American literature and the Gothic are intrinsically interconnected – "the American novel," Leslie Fiedler declares, "is almost essentially a gothic one" (142). Although the landscape of the New World was not haunted "by a medieval past with its castles and the Inquisition," Allan Lloyd-Smith explains, there were "certain unique cultural pressures [that] led Americans to the Gothic as an expression of their very different conditions." The distinctive cultural pressures the author refers to are

> the frontier experience, with its inherent solitude and potential violence; the Puritan inheritance; fear of European subversion and anxieties about popular democracy which was then a new experiment; the relative absence of developed 'society'; and very significantly, racial issues concerning both slavery and the Native Americans. (4)

Focusing too on the cultural contexts that gave birth to American Gothic, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock contends that "the American Gothic tradition arguably clusters around four interconnected primary loci, each with its particular boundaries: religion, geography, racial and sexual otherness, and rationality" ("Introduction: The American Gothic" 6). While Lloyd-Smith emphasises specific historical and societal factors distinctive to the American landscape, Weinstock articulates a more structured framework of interconnected characteristics that collectively illuminate the underlying anxieties

defining the American Gothic. Furthermore, American Gothic narratives,[16] Eric Savoy states, express "a profound anxiety about historical crimes and perverse human desires that cast their shadow over what many would like to be the sunny American republic" (168). Emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a distinct variant of the British Gothic tradition, the American Gothic reflects specific anxieties and traumas deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the United States, particularly those rooted in Puritanism, the wilderness, and the legacy of slavery.

Charles L. Crow observes that the

> American Gothic is no longer defined as a narrow tradition bound by certain props (ruined castles, usually in foreign lands, and imperilled maidens). It is now usually seen as a tradition of oppositional literature, presenting in disturbing, usually frightening ways of sceptical, ambiguous view of human nature and of history. (2)

Without the medieval European past and its settings, American Gothic expresses these anxieties in "cursed or 'haunted´ mansions (both in the eastern seaboard as well as southern states), lonely roads, dense forests, tumbledown shacks and degenerate bayous and swamps" (Bloom, "Introduction to the Gothic Handbook Series" 15). The American Gothic originated several new sub-genres, as each region and state have their particularities, such as Southern Gothic, Louisiana Gothic, New England Gothic, and California noir. However, in this geographical context, "New England and the South have the deepest Gothic heritage." As Crow explains, this happens because "[e]ach, for its own historical and demographic reasons, seems to cherish or brood over its past, and in each, traditionally, one finds a rich oral tradition" (89). In conclusion, the American Gothic emerges from unique national anxieties that continue to shape the nation's literary imagination. This literary strand critically reflects on the more sinister aspects of

[16] In its inception, the American Gothic novel was most notably disseminated by Charles Brockden Brown (the founder of the American Gothic novel), Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Fitz James O'Brien, Harriet Prescott Spofford, and Henry James, to highlight a few.

American identity and history. Its legacy of haunted landscapes and unresolved historical violence provides a fertile backdrop for contemporary YA dystopias, which often echo its themes of societal decay, moral ambiguity, and repressed history.

Returning to Victorian Gothic novels and the streets of London, the narratives move from the protagonists experiencing the sublime to them being subjected to the uncanny. It is in the eighteenth century that Burke firstly explores the idea of the beautiful and the sublime, an aesthetic that triggers strong passions in the human being, forcing him to confront the predicament of finitude. The philosopher describes the sublime as a power that transcends human individuality: "whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and arc, in a manner, annihilated before him" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 63). The sublime has multiple sources, which interrelate to inner fears and terrors and the fear of being crushed by the surrounding vastness and strangeness and the unknown. Since the "[s]ublime response is induced by conditions of 'darkness', 'privation' and 'solitude'" (Trott 87), it rejects Enlightenment clarity. Nature becomes a crucial vehicle for this "feeling," where the human being gets to experience awe, terror, and danger, that is, emotions that are traditionally related to the sublime. As Burke asserts, "[t]he passion caused by the great and the sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 53). The sublime nature signifies that nature embodies terror and beauty in its landscapes. In the Gothic, the sublime is present in the Gothic novels published in the eighteenth century: "[w]hile gothic narratives move towards the revelation of the mystery, they also defer it, taking a narrative scenic route in which one has time to admire the impressively sublime scenery along the way" (Kilgour 32). For instance, in *Frankenstein*, when Victor travels into Nature to find a moment of reprieve from his troubles, he is entangled by the magnificence of the landscape that surrounds him: "From the side where I now stood Montanvert was exactly opposite, at the distance of a league; and above it rose Mont Blanc, in awful majesty. I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and

stupendous scene" (Shelley 114). Mountains are the topographical core of the Romantic sublime – as a matter of fact, "the sublime had essential sites [and the] Grande Chartreuse was one, Mont Blanc and Chamonix another" (Trott 85). Long before, "[t]o Europeans of an earlier age and to peoples of other traditions, mountains and sprawling forests were landscapes of fear." A mountain seemed "an active power; by its commanding and ominous presence it was able to induce dread in the people of subjacent valleys" (Tuan 7).

The uncanny, as suggested by David Punter, "is occasioned when an event in the present reminds us of something in the (psychological) past, but something which cannot be fully remembered, a past event, or situation, or feeling, which should have been locked away or buried but which has emerged to haunt the current scene" ("The Uncanny" 130). The uncanny arises from the within, when repressed desires or fears, childhood beliefs, or deep-buried internal conflict resurface to haunt an individual. Hence, the terror moves from a source external and with no relation to the self to one in which the terror is triggered by an internal source that has everything to do with the self. As a result, Gothic terror is "represented as more of a mental, internal, experience, often provoked by uncannily familiar objects and agents, as opposed to a response to sublime, external phenomena" (Armitt, *History of the Gothic* 246). The importance of human psychology for Gothic texts (writing and interpretation) takes on prominence from this moment on, adding new layers to the Gothic mode.

As a result of this influence, both the asylum and the figure of the madwoman become common features in Gothic novels. Madness, a key theme of the Gothic, is one particular manifestation of trauma in Gothic fiction. For Valerie Padler, "[t]o those writers whose literary imagination was fired by the desire to arouse horror and terror, madness presented a ready-made locus of the horrible and the terrifying in human existence" (18). Explorations of mental illness in literary Gothic "are consistent with the slippery nature of Gothic meaning, in that some affected characters are viewed with sympathy, while others, such as the mad scientists, are viewed as a special type of villain" (Fall "Madness"). Although men also experience mental illness, the feminization of madness is evident, revealing a prejudicial interconnection between womanhood and

madness. Behind this prejudice was the presupposition that females were more sensible and weaker than men, making them prone to mental illness, such as hysteria and nerves**.** Moreover, females who dared to behave or rebel against patriarchy were declared mad. Female madness was hidden from the public eye – the madwoman locked up in claustrophobic spaces, such as the turret, the convent, the attic, or the sanitorium.[17] In their ground-breaking work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, first published in 1979, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the complexities faced by female authors navigating a predominantly male literary tradition. Nineteenth-century female authors used the motif of the madwoman, a monstrous figure epitomised by Bertha Mason, the madwoman in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, whose captivity in the attic inspired the title of Gilbert's and Gubar's study. The madwoman is understood as the double of both the characters created by female writers and the writers themselves. As Gilbert and Gubar convey, "the maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors" (xvii). Furthermore, by channelling

> their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them. All the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary women who evoke the female monster in their novels and poems alter her meaning by virtue of their own identification with her. For it is usually because she is in some sense imbued with interiority that the witch-monster-madwoman becomes so crucial an avatar of the writer's own self. From a male point of view, women who reject the submissive silences of domesticity have been seen as terrible objects-Gorgons, Sirens, Scyllas, serpent-Lamias, Mothers of Death or Goddesses of Night. But from a female point of view the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation, and therefore, like Mary Shelley giving the first-person story of a monster who seemed to his creator to be merely a "filthy mass that moves and talks," she presents this figure for the first time from the inside out. (79)

[17] The mental institution was also incorporated into Gothic fiction since "it stands as a threat, a place for the removal of unwanted members of society, or those who had transgressed social codes" (Pedlar 18).

The “monster in the house,” embodied by the maddened double, serves as a symbolic figure through which women writers articulate their rage, repression, and resistance within a patriarchal literary tradition. Although there are “numerous examples of locked-up women, the trope of the madwoman in the attic is perhaps one of the most potent images of Gothic fiction.” The madwoman is “confined in the attic uncannily hovering between the Good and the Evil woman, the literal and the figurative, and vigorously participating in the construction of fear – and horror” (Talairach-Vielmas 32). Hidden from society, the madwoman is neither dead nor alive, occupying a liminal state. She is the double of the Gothic novel’s heroine – the heroine’s encounter “with female doubles, both mad and locked up, offers the reader a bleak vision of women’s fate in a male-dominated world” (33). With this mode, the madwoman ends up being used

> to foreground the contradictory construction of woman as both ethereal and corporeal, anaemic and bloody, virginal and sexual […], a being defined and confined by medical science, and a potent and threatening image of fear, especially when the woman resisted being imprisoned in the attic, madhouse or coffin, and came back to haunt or bleed her tormentors. (42)

The swaps and additions during the Victorian Era were not detrimental to the Gothic, enriching the mode and exposing it as an ever-evolving form. The shift in the Gothic novel from pastoral to urban settings and the developments it entails “had a profound effect on fiction throughout the rest of the century, and even twenty-first century Gothic novels continue to make use of the tropes established during the Victorian era” (Ridenhour *In Darkest London*). Moreover, later Gothicism, Clive Bloom claims, “allow writers to produce villains who might not be supernatural but criminal, heroes whose honour was a result of moral fibre and who did not have to be aristocrats disguised as peasants, locked-room mysteries which no longer required the room to be either a dungeon or a monk’s cell” (*Gothic Histories* 63).

Gothic literature experienced another revival in the 1970s, with the publication of titles such as Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1974), Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974), *Salem's Lot* (1975) and *The Shining* (1977), Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), Anne Rivers Siddons' *The House Next Door* (1976), and Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976), to name a few. Part of the increasing growth and popularity of the Gothic in the twentieth century, Kilgour asserts, "stems from our increasing distrust of Enlightenment myths that we have suspiciously inherited" (218). Like nineteenth-century Gothic, twentieth-century Gothic "finds its most urgent energies in the home, in the presence of those most like, and most nearly related to, those who read and watch it" (Hopkins 151). The Gothic revival in the seventies is characterised by featuring the monster's point of view. While *Frankenstein* offers a brief moment where the Creature recollects his own experiences after being abandoned by Victor, the narrative is now entirely told in the supernatural being's voice. This narrative technique emerges from a cultural understanding of the monster as compassionate and benevolent, allowing authors to construct a story where the monster is not a terrible force to unravel but to fall in love with. The monster is not represented as an opposite force to the human being but as part of them. This construction of the monster becomes a step to undo the oppositional binary good/evil – a binary that YA fiction through its liminality often attempts to deconstruct.

During the late twentieth century, as previously indicated in this chapter, there was a notable surge of academic interest in the Gothic, deemed as worthy of exploring following the publication of Punter's *The Literature of Terror*. The study of the Gothic "increased as part of critical interrogations of the authority of the canon, reflecting further the recent focus on literature as a product of social forces, and on its relationship particularly to issues of class and gender" (Kilgour 221). Gothic literature started being approached through a transdisciplinary lens, giving rise to novel theoretical constructs in diverse fields. For instance, in the domain of feminist studies, in *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (1998), Diane Long Hoeveler introduces what she calls "Gothic feminism." As she explains:

> The female gothic constitutes what I would call a rival female-created fantasy-gothic feminism-a version of "victim feminism," an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness. Such an ideology positions women as innocent victims who deserve to be rewarded with the ancestral estate because they were unjustly persecuted by the corrupt patriarch. If the heroines manage, inadvertently of course, to cause the deaths of these patriarchs, so much the better. […] The gothic feminist always manages to dispose of her enemies without dirtying her dainty little hands. (7)

By analysing Gothic novels, especially those written by female authors, through a feminist lens, "[t]he vast, imprisoning spaces that appear so regularly in the Gothic as castles, monasteries, and actual prisons can be read as metaphors for women's lives under patriarchy" (Ellis 458). Feminist criticism interprets Gothic spaces as a metaphor for domestic incarceration. Ellen Malenas Ledoux dwells on this interpretation, concluding that female Gothic authors

> use the allegorical potential of Gothic space to engage in a more complex exploration of domestic politics than a univocal critique of patriarchy. […] castles, moats, and subterraneous passages represented in Gothic fiction have a fluid signification for women authors in the late eighteenth century. While authors do sometimes portray these spaces as threatening, they also depict Gothic settings in which female characters exhibit mastery and find economic enfranchisement. (332-33)

Ledoux contends that Gothic spaces also enable female agency, as they permit the subversion of traditional gender roles and question prevailing notions of female passivity. Within Gothic spaces, heroines actively engage in physical actions in response to threatening circumstances (these frequently involve attempts of sexual assault). Thus, female Gothic "has become predominantly associated with the narrative of the imperilled heroine fleeing a male persecutor through an imprisoning space that takes the place, in more or less symbolic fashion, of the domestic environment" (Spooner, "Unsettling Feminism" 135).

Although there has been an attempt to link the rise of the Gothic "with fin-de-siècle malaise, and, more specifically, the approach of the millennium, Gothic did not disappear after the turn of the century" (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 2). On the contrary, it is still flourishing in the twenty-first century. In *Contemporary Gothic* (2006), as the title indicates, Spooner delves into the forms the Gothic mode has taken in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, exploring how it has infiltrated Western society. She argues that contemporary Gothic distinguishes itself from older forms because it "possesses a new self-consciousness about its own nature; it has reached new levels of mass production, distribution and audience awareness, enabled by global consumer culture; and it has crossed disciplinary boundaries to be absorbed into all forms of media" (*Contemporary Gothic* 23). The Gothic kept thriving, creeping from the most surprising corners – not only its disrupting hauntings embrace technology, but its vicious monsters are now friendly vegetarians that freely stroll down the streets, making (teenage) hearts flutter. Indeed, the twenty-first century enables the emergence of a post-millennial Gothic that "demonstrates in some cases a continued preoccupation with the imminent destruction of the world as we know it, but also, in others, a significant change of mood to one of comedy and romance" (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 6).

Thus, the twenty-first century saw the rise of new Gothic strands. Among these new strands, academics and researchers identify the ecoGothic,[18] a study field that draws together ecocriticism with Humanity's ghastlier notions of the natural world, questioning the relationship between the human and the natural world – this relationship is characterised by humans' fear of Nature's agency and their loss of control over it, which, consequently, turns Nature into a space of monstrosity and horror that must be controlled. The presence of the comic has been a longstanding feature in the Gothic mode, as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik articulate in *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (2004). However, the comic Gothic has become a common aspect of the mode in the

[18] For more on the ecoGothic, see *EcoGothic* (2013), edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, and Sharae Deckard's chapter "Ecogothic" (2019).

twenty-first century. This evolving discourse has given rise to new sub-strands, such as what Spooner has coined "happy Gothic." In the twenty-first century, Spooner explains, "Gothic texts, products, imagery and artefacts can no longer be regarded as almost universally gloomy and miserable, or even scary and horrid" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 3). Hence, happy Gothic has come to define works that "combine conventional markers of the Gothic with a mood of pleasure, lightness or celebration" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 23). A common characteristic of these works is the depiction of the outsider as a friendly monster – as Spooner comments, "[c]ontemporary Gothic comedy champions the outsider and their resistance to mainstream taste even as it creates a space where they can be safely heard. It often functions to travesty culturally significant concepts of family, domesticity and childhood in the light of a liberal identity politics" (Spooner, "Gothic Comic" 200). The taming of the monster discussed here is an extension of the domestication initiated in the 1970s. Rather remarkably, in twenty-first-century Gothic texts, the monster frequently becomes a comic subject and "meets and multiplies in what might be described as monster heterotopias" (Spooner, "Gothic Comic" 194).[19] The monster thrives in a haven where it can safely build a community without fear of being persecuted by human beings.

The prevalence of the Gothic in contemporary media can be attributed to the enduring relevance of the themes originating in Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which resonate with contemporary culture. These include "the legacies of the past and its burdens on the present; the radically provisional or divided nature of the self; the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or 'other'; the preoccupation with bodies that are modified, grotesque or diseased" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 8). Such themes evoke a familiarity. Today's world is increasingly technologically advanced and globally interconnected, yet contemporary concerns remain intertwined with those from the last two hundred and fifty years. Moreover, Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Maria Beville note that the Gothic has "a long history of

[19] Spooner explains that "[t]he monster heterotopia takes [spaces as graveyards] and fills them with monsters: different orders of being which would seldom meet in the folkloric and literary texts they derive from, but which become incongruous twenty-first-century companions" (Spooner, "Gothic Comic" 194).

representing the darker side of the human condition." (1). As stated in the Introduction, the global community is currently experiencing significant turmoil and alarm, largely due to the actions and power held by elites and far-right parties that bring the darker side of the human condition to the surface. The Gothic mode continues to be the pertinent form for articulating contemporary uncertainties and apprehensions. Because of this capacity for resonance, the Gothic is a form that transcends temporal boundaries, projecting itself into the future. This transcendence should not come as a surprise; after all, "the Gothic lurks in all sorts of unexpected corners" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 8).

The awareness of the presence of the Gothic mode in speculative fiction, particularly in science fiction, is not a novel observation, as scholars have previously explored the intersection between the two. Botting argues that both the Gothic and science fiction concern themselves with representations of otherness and monstrosity since both modes "give form to a sense of otherness, a strangeness that is difficult to locate: monstrosity appears in the future and the past, in the mind and in culture at large, taking form in individual, social and textual bodies" (131). Additionally, Botting reasons, "Gothic and science fiction emerge, in often contradictory and complex fashion, with the emergence of modernity, bound up in the metaphors that are in the process of rewriting the world and instituting (wonderful/fearful) change" (*Gothic Romanced* 137). Transformative changes within society serve as the imaginative catalyst for both modes. In *Gothic Science Fiction 1980-2010* (2011), Sara Wasson and Emily Alder aver that "[t]he Gothic mode emerges readily in science fiction that explores power, anxiety, resistance and capital" (1). The edited volume uses the term "Gothic science fiction," "a hybrid category, that can be deployed in the service of a wide range of ideologies, world-views and strategic investments" (Wasson and Alder 16). Aris Mousoutzanis, whose essay can be found in the volume, claims that, during periods of imperial sovereignty, the Gothic and science fiction intertwine "to a higher degree during periods that witnessed major developments and fluctuations in the trajectory of modern biopower" (59). Even though Mousoutzanis considers narratives of the late Victorian period and the twentieth century, the resurgence of not-so-veiled imperialistic

endeavours in the twenty-first century (the United States' persistent attempts to purchase the island of Greenland and Russia's military incursions into Ukraine are manifestations of imperial ambitions) is a fertile ground for narratives in the realm of speculative fiction that are interwoven with the Gothic mode. Speculative fiction writers still use the Gothic mode in order to discuss the consequences of imperial powers' actions.

Furthermore, Brian W. Aldiss (and David Wingrove) contend that speculative fiction has roots in the Gothic; its form "is an inheritance of the Gothic" (17). Aldiss describes science fiction as "*the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced hut* [sic] *confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode*" (30), and recognises Shelley's ground-breaking novel *Frankenstein* as the founding text of the science fiction novel – even though the term "science fiction" did not exist at the time of the novel's publication. Joanna Russ claims that Shelley "created the first definite, unmistakable, science-fiction novel" (*To Write Like a Woman* 126). Remarkably, this novel "casts a gigantic shadow over science fiction: incessantly alluded to, repeatedly cited, regularly adapted and reworked, its presence is everywhere" (Botting, *Romanced Gothic* 135). Science fiction builds a legacy rooted in Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein*.

The recognition of the Gothic visions in dystopian fiction – recognised as a subset of speculative fiction and associated with science fiction – has not been extensively explored in academic studies. Nonetheless, its presence has not gone unrecognised. Amy Cartwright's doctoral thesis (2005) analyses Gothic elements in canonical dystopias, exploring the relationship between the Gothic tradition and dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), in order to create new theoretical perspectives on the perception of the body. In this exploration, Cartwright uses the term "Gothic Dystopia," describing it as "the vision of the future as a nightmare, populated by dreams of a long-dead era before the contamination of modernity" (240). On her take on post-war British dystopian science fiction, Sherryl Vint argues that it embraces Gothic's darker overtones: the ambivalence, the return of the repressed, the

supernatural, and monsters as characters and symbols. Vint describes dystopian science fiction narratives as "the dark fantasies of the New Weird" (396). While references to science fiction abound in the essay, it lacks a Gothic conceptual framework, which might mislead the reader into a superficial understanding of the representation of Gothic tropes in dystopian fiction. This observation leads to the subsequent sub-section of this work, which endeavours to establish an understanding of the Gothic mode that extends beyond the mere usage of a repertoire of images designed to fright and shock its readers.

1.1.1. Defining Literary Gothic

As established, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and the array of Gothic narratives that it originated imprinted in the readers' mind images that they cannot help but link to the Gothic literary world. As Punter argues,

> [w]hen thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. (*The Literature of Terror*, 1: 1)

The Gothic imagination is populated by strange and haunted places, the supernatural, monstrous figures and doubles, eerie atmospheres, mysterious and brooding heroes, helpless and naïve heroines, mysteries and family secrets, omens, curses, madness, decay, violence, and death. Interwoven, these elements not only build a profoundly disquieting, dreadful Gothic tale but also conjure pervasive themes that permeate each story: transgression, liminality, power and authority, persecution, entrapment, and the resurgence of the past.

Although Gothic tropes are "usually confined to tales of terror or 'horror' [they] lent themselves to other modes of writing, namely the detective story, the thrillers and

women's romance, and anticipated sub-gothic genres in plotting and characterization" (Bloom, *Gothic Histories* 63). Since its emergence in the eighteenth century, literary Gothic has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for adaptation, seamlessly merging with narratives categorized as, for instance, science fiction and fantasy, besides those mentioned above. It meddles with other literary genres, creating and/or intensifying a sense of eerie mystery and terror in the narratives. In these writings, Botting defends, Gothic motifs are "transformed and displaced by different cultural anxieties;" that is, "[t]error and horror are diversely located in alienating bureaucratic and technological reality, in psychiatric hospitals and criminal subcultures, in scientific, future, and intergalactic worlds, in fantasy and the occult" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 9). As Punter notes, "Gothic motifs have proved, over the years and indeed centuries, capable of remarkable transformation" (*The Gothic Condition* 15). This pervasive nature of the Gothic mode leads Mulvey-Roberts to compare the Gothic life to a giant poisonous plant with far-reaching tendrils, a "hot-house hybrid [that] is constantly mutating, making new growths out of old as in its propensity for parody and pastiche" (*The Handbook to Gothic Literature* xvii). Hence, the Gothic "is above all a hybrid mode: it often appears in collaboration with other literary forms, modes and genres" (Bloom, "Introduction to the Gothic Handbook Series" 8). How surprising can it be to envision the presence and influence of the Gothic in futuristic times? How surprising is it for the Gothic to influence the writing of YA dystopian fiction that deals with thematises so close to the mode?

This hybridity and the extraordinary aptitude for transformation enable identifying characteristics commonly associated with literary Gothic in works that are not part of the Gothic mode and neither intend to be defined as Gothic. It transforms other genres and texts "while maintaining its own cognitive implications and formal and thematic conventions" (Killeen 15). Nonetheless, this entangling does not leave the Gothic mode completely intact since "[t]he diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 9). There is a mutual contamination. Other fictions that employ themes and images directly

influenced by the Gothic mode can become part of the new, emergent Gothic forms. For example, similarly to the Gothic in its earlier form in the eighteenth century, science fiction utilises geographical and temporal distance to approach social-cultural-political uproars. However, narratives are transported into the future, many taking place in outside worlds. Other planets, Aldiss argues, "make ideal settings for brooding landscapes, isolated castles, dismal towns, and mysterious alien figures; often, indeed, the villains may be monks, exploiting a local population under the guise of religion" (43). The Gothic hybridity permits the elaboration of multiple definitions of literary Gothic. Punter articulates that several meanings have attached themselves to the idea of the Gothic, thus causing apprehension about it:

> [The Gothic is a] particular attitude towards the recapture of history; a particular kind of literary style; a version of self-conscious un-realism; a mode of revealing the unconscious; connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed – all of these meanings have attached themselves in one way or another to the idea of Gothic fiction, and our present apprehension of the term is usually an uneasy concatenation of them, in which there is a complicated interplay of direct historical connections and ever variable metaphor. (*The Literature of Terror*, 1: 4)

The Gothic is a literary and cultural phenomenon with a multifaced nature, resulting in complex interpretations of its themes and characteristics. It is a rich interplay of history, style, psychology, politics, and cultural tensions that influences how scholars and readers understand and categorise it today. A field so extensive and fruitful, Gothic studies encompass a panoply of definitions that approach its different characteristics – yet, they do not disagree or conflict among them, one definition building upon the other.

In *The Oxford Book of Gothic* (1992), Chris Baldick argues that a Gothic narrative should combine "a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration" (xix). Baldick's definition articulates the tension between time (past, present, and future) and space. These characteristics have acquired a critical role in a narrative to create a Gothic atmosphere where reality

and the supernatural intertwine. In *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (1994), Fiona Robertson defines the Gothic as "a type of fiction which invites readers' fears and anxieties in highly stylised mystery-tales, using a limited set of plots, settings, and character types, and including an element of history" (70). The element of history is essential to Robertson's definition of Gothic fiction. The author expounds that a novel should not be labelled Gothic

> if it makes no attempt to situate the events of its plot in a historical setting, however inaccurate or implausible […]. The distinction is important not just because it allows one to see more clearly Gothic's primary engagement with historical materials but also because it clarifies the purpose of non-Gothic experimentation with Gothic conventions. (71)

Robertson claims that for a novel to be classified as Gothic, it must engage with history, whereas a novel that simply employs Gothic conventions does not necessitate such engagement. This definition may be reductive and restrictive, potentially overlooking, for instance, the complexities inherent to the Victorian Gothic novel. While the tension between past and present remains in Victorian Gothic novels, the events often do not occur in a historical setting (of course, for today's readers, the narrative is set in a historical setting) but in the author's contemporary background. Due to criticising the socio-political environment, eighteenth-century Gothic transforms history into one of its themes; that is, history assumes a relevant role in constructing the plot. Hence, the Gothic represents "a particular attitude towards the recapture of history" (Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 1: 8). Jonathan Dent explores the relationship between history and the Gothic, arguing that "[t]he Gothic is not concerned with accurately reconstructing historical periods. [Nonetheless, due to being] intrinsically connected with the history of the eighteenth century, it exploits the blurred relationship between literature and history in order to question the extent to which we can know and understand the past" (14-15). Dent goes further, showing that the Gothic reveals how the construction of history is biased:

> Exploring sinister aspects of the past that remain outside the premise of the Enlightenment historiography and drawing attention to our frustrated access to the past through fragmented manuscripts and decaying buildings, the Gothic qualifies Enlightenment explanatory power by reminding readers that history is a 'discourse' rather than [an absolute truth]. Preying on notions of authenticity and exploiting the tenuous relationship between history and fiction in the eighteenth century, the Gothic serves as a timely reminder that history is the study of the past, not the past itself. (15)

The Gothic demonstrates the complex relationship between the past and history, illustrating how these concepts are far from the same.

Lloyd-Smith describes Gothic literature as "pushing toward extremes and excess" and a reactionary form that "explores chaos and wrongdoing in a movement toward the ultimate restitution of order and convention" (5). For Marina MacKay, a Gothic novel "typically represents a contest between vulnerable purity (an innocent, victimized heroine) and ruthless evil (often in the form of a cruelly calculating male aristocrat)" (277). In the second edition of one of his influential works on the Gothic, Botting explains that in the Gothic literary tradition, "texts are, overtly but ambiguously, not rational, depicting disturbances of sanity and security, from superstitious belief in ghosts and demons, displays of uncontrolled passion, violent emotion or fancy to portrayals of perversion and obsession" (*Gothic 2nd Edition* 2). In *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses* (2016), Gina Wisker declares that the Gothic in its literary form "shakes up and problematises tired ways of perceiving and expressing normality by disrupting the everyday world of residual compliance. It disturbs, upsets, ironises and parodies our deeply held beliefs and our safe but constraining narratives of, among others, progress, identity, power, family, safety and love" (2). Wisker further explains that the "Gothic as a genre offers ways of exposing, and articulating, some of the horrors and fears, enabling us to face them, imagine our way through them without ignoring them, dismissing them or panicking" (238). Ewan Kirkland, in his exploration of the representation of the Gothic mode in video games, states that "many critics consider Gothic fiction a response to contemporary concerns regarding industrialisation, urbanisation, massification and the displacement of religion,

spiritualism and superstition by scientific rationality" (4). Moving from his thoughts on Gothic literature, Kirkland states that the Gothic in general "might be variously regarded as a cycle, a trend, a collection of narrative tropes and traditions, an aesthetic and thematic disposition, a cluster of stock characters, settings and situations, or a descriptive and analytic tool" (2). In *Cyberpunk and the Gothic: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson* (2000), Dani Cavallaro addresses the literary Gothic, yet the author also contends that the Gothic can be understood as a discourse – a mode – that uses a set of images to address, as Kirkland describes it, contemporary concerns:

> Gothic is understood in two fundamental ways: first, as a fictional genre, encompassing the strands of historical romance, horror and tales of psychological obsession and haunting, ranging from the eighteenth century to the present; and second, as a discourse of wider resonance, utilizing images of disorder and monstrosity that embody cultural anxieties about the disintegration of traditional western values and social formations. (Cavallaro 164-5)

As overtly considered in this exploration of the Gothic mode and its development over the last two-hundred-and-fifty years, the movement of the Gothic from literature to other media is continuing. After all, like the poisonous plant that infects everything it touches or "a malevolent virus, Gothic narratives have escaped the confines of literature and spread across disciplinary boundaries to infect all kinds of media, from fashion and advertising to the way contemporary events are constructed in mass culture" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 8). Since it first emerged in the eighteenth century as a literary form, the Gothic has been adapted to represent contemporary fears and anxieties regarding social-political and cultural waves – from the grief and trauma left by world wars and genocides that leave an imprint on the society and graveyards haunted by ghosts to the uncertainty surrounding climate change that evokes a sense of dread about the future and the potential for societal collapse and extinction. From its very inception, Punter signals, the Gothic is "a form that relate[s] very closely to issues of national assertion and social organization, and which even on occasion, [can] 'take the stage' in foregrounding social issues and in forming social consciousness" (Punter,

"Introduction: The Ghost of a History" 4). For this reason, the Gothic is not going anywhere anytime soon, remaining a significant and enduring force in contemporary literature. As Piatti-Farnell and Belville note about it, "[t]he Gothic has never been more alive than it is today" (1). This liveness has spread to the YA novel, where the Gothic has increasingly permeated the narratives, giving rise to the distinct genre of YA Gothic fiction.

1.2. New Gothic Fictions: The YA Gothic Novel

In *Contemporary Gothic*, in her enquiry into the relationship between adolescence and the Gothic, Catherine Spooner suggests that the Gothic is the teenage genre of choice. The author explores with particular attention the presence of young female heroines in early Gothic narratives, followed by considerations of the Goth subculture and its representation (from clothing and music to films and television series). Spooner discusses the impact of the Gothic subculture on the construction of a Goth identity, often adopted by adolescents pursuing the Gothic performativity/authenticity, and its engagement with girl power. In this exploration, Spooner identifies the teen Gothic, defining it as a form that "articulates a tension between mainstream mass entertainment and a subcultural rebellion frequently expressed through style" (*Contemporary* Gothic 87). Even though Spooner's argument primarily focuses on films and television shows with Gothic characteristics featuring adolescents in order to discuss the teen Gothic form, the reflections echo the relationship between YA fiction and the Gothic mode in the twenty-first century. The teen Gothic form, the author argues, has undergone significant evolution throughout the decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, the main characteristic of this form is the portrayal of loss of control. Teenagers, confronted by a supernatural haunting force that disrupts their world, were frequently depicted as victims lacking control over their circumstances and experiences, even after surviving the tribulations they were put through (102-3). From the 1990s and beyond, teenagers seem to have taken control of the narrative: "[o]n the one hand they possess special powers that enable them to combat the forces of the evil […]; on the other they

may themselves be the monsters" (103). By finding empowerment in their supernatural status, which accentuates the perception of the teenager as a monstrous, liminal being, teenagers shift from the position of the "threatened" to "threat":

> This shift from the threatened teen to the teen as threat runs through contemporary teen Gothic. Teenagers themselves are now as likely to be the source of horror as the victim of it. This seems to reflect a two-edged trajectory: on the one hand teenagers, particularly girls, are being presented as more powerful and in control of their lives; on the other, teen Gothic capitalizes on real-life moral panics about teenage violence. (107)

In its current form, contemporary teen Gothic, the celebration of the outsider becomes a distinctive characteristic. Indeed, "in contemporary teen Gothic marginalization is often celebrated" (104). The Other, the monster, is welcomed into the ranks of adolescents – perhaps because they are so much alike. This characteristic is central to YA Gothic fiction, whose main (female) characters might even literally be the marginalised monsters themselves.

Catherine Driscoll suggests that "what we could call 'teen gothic' is pre-eminently interested in horrifying personal stories – in what is now widely understood as the angst-ridden experience of adolescence" (*Teens Films* 95). In "Teen Gothic,"[20] Glennis Byron and Sharon Deans also explore the genre of teen Gothic, focusing on its literary form. They offer that "in the sense of fiction written about teenagers for teenagers, [teen Gothic] is a relatively recent phenomenon," contending that "the materialization of teen Gothic novels as a distinct, plenteous category really began with the emergence and popularity of vampires fiction for teenagers in the late twentieth century" (87). Exploring three key themes – sex, death and autonomy, which in their analysis intertwine with the notions of monstrosity and otherness that Spooner takes into account in her investigation of the teen Gothic form –, Byron and Deans posit that

[20] The article "Teen Gothic" is a summary of the ideas introduced by Sharon Deans in her PhD thesis, *Teen Gothic: Sex, Death and Autonomy in Young Adult Gothic Literature* (2013).

teen Gothic narratives "bestow upon the adolescent an alternative viewpoint which allows them to see the world in a different way and crucially allows them to escape the didactic and instructive nature of 'realist' texts" (101). Contemporary teen Gothic fiction provides a space for transgression and subversion of social boundaries, enabling teenagers to experience autonomy and power. Consequently, "adolescent power is depicted in a far more positive and empowering fashion in teen Gothic texts, where power structures are shown to be challenged, compromised, and defeated" (97). Quite interestingly, one of the examples the authors discuss to illustrate their argument about teens being victorious over the system is Katniss's rebellion against the Capitol in The Hunger Games, using the label "YA Gothic fictions" to describe the novel. Taking into account canonical dystopian fiction, Byron and Deans state that "there has always been a strong relationship between the dystopian novel and the Gothic tradition" and "[i]n keeping with Gothic fiction as a whole, post-disaster fiction is unlimited in its possibilities and can transgress all boundaries" (98). While "the underlying agenda of many YA novels [is] to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance" (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 27), YA Gothic fiction challenges power structures. Rather than encouraging conformity, YA Gothic fiction foregrounds resistance towards adult authority. In opposition to Roberta Seelinger Trites's argument, as Byron and Deans reason, the protagonists of YA Gothic narratives, more often than not, reach maturity without reconciling with the institutions of power.[21] It can be observed that "[m]any of the characters in YA Gothic literature, and YA literature more broadly, interrogate the limits placed upon them by the adult authority figures that they encounter, as well as the structural, institutional and patriarchal forces that restrict the cultural and social possibilities available to them" (Smith and Moruzi, "Introduction" 4). As I elaborate in the chapters that follow, the same principle applies to YA dystopian fiction, where

[21] This theme is heavily featured in recent YA Gothic fiction. For instance, Tiffany D. Jackson's *The Weight of Blood* (2022) and Krystal Sutherland's *The Invocations* (2024), YA novels fluttering between the Gothic and the horror mode, explore female persecution and misogyny (Jackson's novel also tackles themes of racism and segregation). In both narratives, the main characters have supernatural abilities, being described as witches. These young, female witches destroy the structures of power that persecute them instead of immersing themselves in them.

teenagers threaten, challenge and transform the social structures that they must interact with to survive. Rather than submitting to the totalitarian system, they resist becoming another cog in the machine. Nevertheless, this resistance does not always signify a departure from traditional social-political models that govern contemporary society.

Karen Coats also tackles the understanding of the Gothic relationship with adolescence, reasoning that the forces that haunt the Gothic form make it "an ideal mode of expression for the emerging adolescent [who] seeks to test and perhaps throw off the stifling ego-ideals that he or she has internalized as a child under the rule of parents, and find ones that will reflect his or her individual desires and sense of self" ("Between Horror, Humour, and Hope" 84). YA fiction and adolescent readers are receptive to Gothic fiction, Kathryn James suggests, since "many of its key themes—monstrousness, the body, metamorphosis, transgression, anxiety, sexuality, romance—strike a chord with the adolescent subject" (116). It is therefore unsurprising that YA fiction wholeheartedly embraces the Gothic, even though the potential of the Gothic form for exploring adolescence was not initially recognised:

> With the origins of the genre in exploring young people's power, or lack of it, in relation to real-world coming-of-age dilemmas relating to class, race, drugs, and sexuality, among others, the Gothic was not a prominent mode in YA literature throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century, however, has seen a marked increase in the gothic themes of liminality, monstrosity, transgression, romance, and sexuality in fiction for young adults. (Smith and Moruzi, "Gender and Sexuality" 609).

Alas, the increasing popularity of YA Gothic literature in the twenty-first century "has been perceived by some adults (parents, teachers, politicians and concerned citizens) as undesirable, unsuitable and even as unhealthy for ostensibly vulnerable young people who instead should be shielded from such immoral, contaminating texts" (Kennon, "*Zombies vs. Unicorns"* 19). These judgements are far from unfamiliar within the Gothic

tradition, as they resonate with concerns expressed during the eighteenth century upon the release of *The Castle of Otranto* and its numerous offspring.

As noted in the Introduction, the Gothic mode has historically exhibited connections to adolescent fiction. Firstly, in some classic Gothic novels, adolescence is present through the presence of female protagonists who are young women at the end of their teen years, such as Emily St. Aubert from Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Catherine Morland from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), and Jane Eyre from Charlotte Brontë's novel of the same name. It is important to clarify that I am not claiming that Gothic fiction featuring teenage female protagonists can be categorised as YA fiction or adolescent fiction. After all, adolescence was only established as a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood in the twentieth century – as a matter of fact, "adolescence as we recognize it today is primarily a mid-twentieth-century construct" (Byron and Deans 88). Secondly, the representation of adolescence and the Gothic are interwoven. As Fred Botting explains, adolescence is actually integral to Gothic fiction, as in both "there is a fantasised inversion of boundaries" (*Gothic Pathologies* 6). He illustrates this reversion as follows: "we exist on a terrain where what is inside finds itself outside (acne, menstrual blood, rage) and what we think should be visibly outside (heroic dreams, attractiveness, sexual organs) remains absolutely inside and hidden" (*Gothic Pathologies* 6). The Gothic is the perfect mode for exploring the grotesque and frightening aspects of coming of age (Smith "Friday essay: why YA gothic fiction is booming").

Nevertheless, research on YA Gothic literature has not received sufficient critical attention, which is surprising when one verifies that the (in)famous book series *Twilight*, which has had a significant role in the boom in YA fiction, has Gothic configurations. *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic* (2020), edited by Clive Bloom, features a section entitled "Young Gothic," comprising four essays on the representation of the Gothic mode in children's and YA fiction. In this section, only Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi actively engage with YA Gothic. In the essay "Gender and Sexuality in Young Adult Fiction," they explore the representation of gender and sexuality in four YA novels with Gothic configurations: *Twilight*, Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* (2007-

2010), Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies* (2010), and Kenneth Oppel's *This Dark Endeavour* (2011). (*Warm Bodies*, a contemporary-slash-apocalyptic retelling of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* [1597], also has dystopian configurations.) They conclude that "YA Gothic tends to reinforce conservative patriarchal norms of gender and sexuality for implied girl readers" (609), while in male-centred YA Gothic narratives, "there can be greater emphasis on their drive to change the world and overcome the limitations of their state, whether human or monster, at the same time as they work to secure their romantic interests" (616).

Released in 2021, *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves / Monstrous Others*, edited by Smith and Moruzi, is the first volume that attempts to bring together the field of YA Gothic Studies, "examin[ing] the ways in which the YA Gothic plays with generic expectations, rewrites canonical Gothic novels, explores Gothic spaces and places, toys with the boundaries between the human and nonhuman self, and evaluates the particular importance of Gothic femininities" (Smith and Moruzi, "Introduction" 10). On the whole, the edited volume explores how the "premise about teen agency and control by adults is modified when melded with the Gothic and its ability to afford teen protagonists supernatural abilities with which to escape institutional structures, or for supernatural power to be enacted on human protagonists" (14). Drawing attention to the first section of the volume, which considers the transformations the Gothic undergoes to suit adolescent readers as well as how the merge between YA fiction and the Gothic mode permits to play with Gothic conventions through their hybridization with other literary genres, Bill Hughes's essay, "Genre Mutation in Young Adult Gothic: The Dialectics of Dystopia and Romance in Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*,"[22] adjacently explores the relationship between YA dystopian fiction and the Gothic. I write "adjacently" since Hughes classifies the novel as a paranormal romance, a hybrid genre that makes use of plot conventions of romance fiction sprinkled with Gothic imagery; that is, the novel is a fusion of the vampire paranormal romance genre with dystopia.

[22] Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* (2013) was considered for the main corpus of this thesis; nevertheless, due to the selection criteria I introduce and discuss further ahead in this chapter, the standalone did not make the cut.

Hughes argues that *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* "reconfigures the properties of paranormal romance by incorporating dystopian elements to represent the reification and distorted subjectivity of capitalism that neoliberalism aggravates" (38). The modulation of dystopia by paranormal romance, the author concludes,

> subverts some of the generic expectations of YA dystopias […] The dystopian genre sets up the stark world of alienated life, extrapolating from our own society of commodified spectacle. Modulating this with the already hybrid genre of paranormal allows the monolithic reification of that dystopia to be fractured and illuminated by gleams of emancipation, even if, as yet, that remains on the level of individual consciousness […]. In *Coldtown*, romance reveals countervailing forces and the Gothic mode mediates between this and neoliberal horror. The modulation of the YA dystopia by the already unstable and hybrid genre of paranormal romance unsettles the somewhat schematic certainties of the former genre. (57-8)

The origins of the YA Gothic novel can be traced back to the 1970s with the publication of *Down a Dark Hall* by Lois Duncan (1974) and *Flowers in the Attic* by V.C. Andrews (1979). While in the former novel, set against the backdrop of a remote and haunted boarding school, the Blackwood School for Girls, four teenage female students are used to channel the spirits of gifted historical figures, in the latter, the four Dollanganger siblings, born of their parents' incestuous relationship, are locked in a bedroom, where they are isolated and physically and emotionally abused. Both novels engage with Gothic themes, including transgression (in *Down a Dark Hall*, the threshold between life and death is transgressed when spirits are summoned to take over the girls' bodies; in *Flowers in the Attic*, the older Dollanganger siblings, Chris and Cathy, like their parents, develop an incestuous relationship), entrapment (illustrated by the students' confinement within the boarding school and the siblings' inability to escape their locked quarters), and the return of the past (the female students are possessed by the spirits of, for instance, Emily Brontë and Thomas Cole, while the siblings' family secrets are unburied, disrupting their understanding of the world). Nevertheless, only at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, due to the increasing popularity of vampire fiction for teenagers, did the YA Gothic fiction category

manifest in its entirety. As a matter of fact, Annette Cutis Klause's *The Silver Kiss*, a love story between a human teenage girl and a vampire boy, published in 1990, signals a growth in the teen Gothic market.

In the last two decades, the book market has seen an increase in the publication of YA Gothic novels, which usually turn into a series or expand into companion novels, a characteristic that demarcates them from classic Gothic works as well as gothic fiction market at adult readers (cf. Smith and Moruzi, "Gender and Sexuality" 610): Melissa Marr's *Wicked Lovely* (2007-2011), Kami Garcia's *Beautiful Creatures* (2009-2012), Kendare Blake's *Anna Dressed in Blood* (2011-2012), Ransom Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011-2021), Michelle Hodkin's *The Unbecoming of Mara Dyer* (2011-2014), Libba Bray's *The Diviners* (2012-2020), April Genevieve Tucholke's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (2013-2014), Victoria Schwab's *The Archived* (2013-2014) and *Gallant* (2022), Saundra Mitchell's *Mistwalker* (2014), Caty Winters' *The Cure for Dreaming* (2014), Kerri Maniscalco's *Stalking Jack the Ripper* (2016-2019), Madeline Roux's *House of Furies* (2017-2019), Erin A. Craig's *House of Salt and Sorrow* (2019), Tiffany D. Jackson's *White Smoke* (2021), Dana Schwartz's *Anatomy: A Love Story* (2022-2023), to name a few. A noteworthy trend in YA Gothic fiction is the proliferation of classic Gothic romances adapted and reimagined into YA narratives.[23] These texts use characters and ideas from the original novels as a springboard and twist them in fascinating ways to form something new, but at the same time highlight some of the ideas and thought-provoking aspects of the original tales. A few examples of this drift are: Bethany Griffin's *Masque of the Red Death* (2012-2013) and *The Fall* (2014) and Mara Rutherford's *A Multitude of Dreams* (2023), inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's macabre tales; *RoseBlood* by A. G. Howard (2017), a contemporary retelling of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909-1910); *Cadaver and Queen* by Alisa Kwitney (2018) and

[23] *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present* (2020), edited Dana E. Lawrence and Amy L. Montz, contains essays that explore the rewriting and adaptation of classical texts into YA novels (two of them focus on Gothic novels). Lawrence and Montz write that "adapting the classics is a way to engage young adult readers with their cultural past and to see how that past can be rewritten in order to emphasize what can be changed, what and who benefits from change, and how they, too, can be agents of change. These adaptations empower young readers, making them more culturally, historically, and socially aware through the lens of literary diversity" (2).

The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein by Kiersten White (2018), both novels a retelling of *Frankenstein* which follow Elizabeth Lavenza; *The Deathless Girls* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave (2019), a sapphic Gothic romance about Dracula's brides; *My Plain Jane* by Cynthia Hand, Brodi Ashton, and Jodi Meadows (2018) and *Within These Wicked Walls* by Lauren Blackwood (2021), both adaptations of *Jane Eyre* where evil ghosts run amok. One of the most prevalent transformations engendered in YA Gothic adaptations is the move from the restrictive gender roles of the time in which the stories are set. Similar to historical fiction for young people, YA Gothic fiction, both adaptations and original works, "take the modern reaction to the past and then project that reaction onto that past [aligning readers] with modern ideological assumptions of female status, rights and identity" (Wilson 7). Additionally, YA Gothic adaptations feature an interplay between history and fiction where timelines are played with through the presence of anachronistic elements, which range from ideas and language to fashion or technology that belongs to a different time than the one depicted in the narrative and reality and fiction occupy a liminal positioning.

For instance, *My Plain Jane* follows three main characters, both fictional and historical: Jane Eyre, who can see ghosts after a near-death experience; Charlotte Brontë, who becomes a character in her own story and goes on a journey to write a novel loosely based in her friend Jane; and Alexander, a ghostbuster who works for the Royal Society for the Relocation of Wayward Spirits. Through the use of anachronistic references, the narrative alludes to pop culture – among these references, there is usage of the word "ghostbuster," an allusion to the twentieth-century film franchise *Ghostbusters* (1984–present) – and novels published hundreds of years after the time the narrative takes place – after being exorcised and recovering her sanity, Bertha explains that for the main characters to retrieve the book of spirits in order to defeat the narrative's antagonist they have an impossible trial ahead:

> I'm afraid the *Le Livre de l'esprit errance* is quite impossible to obtain. [It is] locked in a room guarded by a three-headed dog, which drops into a pit of strangling vines, followed by a life-or-

> death life-size game of chess, which opens into a room with a locked door and a hundred keys on wings, and then there's a mirror. (Hand, Ashton and Meadows ch. 33)

This passage alludes to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), as the description closely parallels the trials Harry must endure in his quest for the philosopher's stone. Additionally, *My Plain Jane* engages with contemporary political issues. Following Jane's departure to Thornfield Hall, Alexander pursues her in order to recruit her to the Royal Society for the Relocation of Wayward Spirits, while Charlotte accompanies him against his will:

> "Go home, Miss Brontë."
>
> "I can't afford any more delays, Miss Brontë."
>
> "Please stop talking, Miss Brontë."
>
> Nevertheless, she persisted. (ch. 9)

The feminist movement adopted the phrase "Nevertheless, she persisted," which originated from an incident in the United States Senate in 2017 when it voted to require Senator Elizabeth Warren to stop speaking out against the nominee of the new Attorney General. When she continued to voice her objections, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell interrupted her, stating: "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted" (Reilly "Why 'Nevertheless, She Persisted'"). The phrase became a feminist rallying cry, symbolising resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

In these adaptations of canonical Gothic fiction, as well as in Gothic YA narratives set in times when females were to behave docilely and submissively, the young female protagonists are given agency. Commonly, in YA Gothic fiction, the protagonists are strong female characters. Indeed, teenagers in YA Gothic fiction are

> quite distinct from the adolescents represented in most Gothic fictions written for an adult audience. They are by no means the often-passive beings of earlier Gothic fictions who tend to lack agency, autonomy, and any real control of their own lives, and who end up dead, like Matilda and Conrad [in *The Castle of Otranto*], or ensconced in a "suitable," economically viable, marriage, as do Emily and Catherine [in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Northanger Abbey*, respectively]. Nor are they demonized simply for being adolescents in the manner of much later Gothic fiction, from *Dracula*'s Lucy, staked and stamped by her promiscuity, to Regan [in William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*] and Carrie [in Stephen King's novel of the same title], both literary demonized largely for being adolescents. (Byron and Deans 101)

Although some exceptions can still be found in YA fiction in which patriarchal norms are reinforced and young women are encouraged to embrace passive and restrictive gender, in most YA (Gothic) fiction female protagonists are not damsels in distress and are not afraid of unveiling mysteries, even if it means facing the darkness where these are hidden, nor of meddling with the supernatural, often embracing or destroying it. In truth, generally,

> contemporary Gothic adaptations of Romantic and Victorian literary works emphasise the conflicting tensions around social constructions of gender in the past, as well as how they function in the present. The subtext in both historical settings tends to 'exceptionalise' Gothic heroines as they sometimes rebel against and transgress societal gender norms, while always returning in some shape or form to traditional forms of femininity and gendered identity, resulting in a recentring of the domestic sphere that remains possible (and even favourable) after transgressions of these boundaries. (Connors and Szwydky, "The Pre-Monstrous Mad Scientist" 91)

However, most heroines of recent YA Gothic fiction resist (and refuse) this return to the domestic sphere, standing on the transgressive side of societal boundaries. As a case in point, in *Cadaver and Queen*, not only does *Frankenstein*'s Elizabeth Lavenza become the main character of the story, but she is also turned into an American young woman who, after her father's death, travels to Victorian England to be the first female medical student at Ingold (an allusion to the University of Ingolstadt in Germany). Elizabeth is no

longer the devoted "cousin" who sends letters to Victor and patiently waits for his return. In the *Stalking Jack the Ripper* series, inspired by historical criminals and the vicious crimes they committed, Audrey Rose belongs to the *crème de la crème* of society. Still, her interests lie in the gruesome practice of forensic medicine, a less-than-desirable position for a Lord's daughter. With a sharp mind for science and no fear of corpses or blood, both Elizabeth and Audrey Rose go above and beyond to prove they can occupy positions that were only available to men at the time, even if it means going against their family and/or society views of women and their place within the private sphere – they were expected to be the perfect angel in the house,[24] yet they vehemently refuse to be it, even though they engage in heterosexual romantic relationships. In YA Gothic fiction, female protagonists become empowered through confronting transgressive figures and supernatural entities as, mirroring the audience it is written for, they are learning how to navigate a complex world characterised not by stark dichotomies of black and white but by nuanced shades of grey.

Overall, even though YA Gothic fiction assimilates motifs and images first introduced in *The Castle of Otranto* – as Botting asserts, Gothic figures are "always responsive to changing times" (*Gothic 2nd Edition* 199) – it also disrupts them. The Gothic mode, Smith and Moruzi affirm, "is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the current historical moment," and "[t]he traditions of the genre are repurposed and reconfigured in contemporary fiction for young adults to reflect on the importance of young adults for their future possibilities, as well as their present modes of existence and possible resistance" ("Introduction" 1). Gothic conventions are reconfigured to captivate the adolescent audience of the twenty-first century. This transformation is not only aimed at adapting the retellings to contemporary realities but also considers the experiences and contexts of a teenager of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, YA

[24] "The Angel in the House" is a narrative poem written by Coventry Patmore and published in 1854. Drawing inspiration from his own marriage to his wife, Emily, the poem describes an idealised vision of a harmonious marriage. The "angel in the house" concept is found in the third canto, titled "The Lover," where the wife is perceived as a spiritual figure and conduit to get closer to God. The term was widely used to describe the perfect Victorian middle-class housewife, encapsulating societal expectations of femininity and domesticity.

Gothic fiction shows that "reading teen Gothic narratives requires an awareness of transmedia storytelling" (Priest, "Young Adults and the Contemporary Gothic" 282). Not only do the adaptations of Gothic classic novels bear in mind the plots and themes of the novels they are inspired by, but YA Gothic novels also present an intrinsic connection with their eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century ancestors. For illustration, Schwartz's *Anatomy: A Love Story*, though it is not a direct adaptation of *Frankenstein*, takes its epigraph from Shelley's Gothic novel, and the main character, driven to understand the intricacies of the human body, defies societal expectations in her pursuit of a passion for surgery in nineteenth-century Scotland.

In a broad sense, YA Gothic fiction still depicts eerie, terrifying landscapes, where strange and unfathomable events proliferate, are home to supernatural creatures and revenants, from shapeshifters and blood-sucking immortal creatures to ghosts and *doppelgängers*. Schwab's *Gallant* is set in an old family mansion haunted by ghouls, and the lineage connected to the mansion is cursed to live and die in the house. Nonetheless, high schools and boarding schools have become common settings for contemporary Gothic YA novels. Given that the main characters are adolescents, they are usually enrolled in school, where they spend a significant portion of their time. In many contemporary YA Gothic novels, supernatural beings attend high school as students incognito – in instances where their existence is not kept a secret or the awareness of their presence leads to persecution, supernatural beings attend schools specific for them as in Rachel Hawkins' *Hex Hall* (2010-2013) and *Vampire Academy*. Indeed, even broody, darkly mysterious (often of a supernatural nature) love interests saunter through high school halls, sharing a resemblance to Byronic heroes.[25] For instance, in Twilight, Edward Cullen, a teenage vampire who turned after nearly dying from Spanish

[25] The Byronic hero is an archetypal character recurrently featured in literary Gothic. This literary archetype is inspired by Lord Byron's writings, as well as by his personal experiences and reputation for unconventional behaviour. As Patsy Stoneman states, "Byron's heroes are not heroic because of any moral or social excellence. They may in fact be moral outcasts, yet have passed somehow 'beyond good and evil'. They are passionate, unpredictable, mysterious, irresistible to women, yet strangely vulnerable" (112). It is "a Romantic character-type defined primarily by his egotism, intellectualism and extreme passions [traits that] typically contrast with conventional ideas of masculine heroism" (Connors and Szwydky, "The Pre-Monstrous Mad Scientist" 96). Quite interestingly, Byronic heroes have been understood as literal or metaphorical vampires.

influenza, can be interpreted as a modern Byronic hero: he feels remorse for being a vampire and is haunted by his past, where he once fed on humans, as well as has a romantic obsession with Bella that renders him emotionally volatile and morally conflicted.

While some of these schools are contemporary buildings that remind readers of their own school (or school times), others have been transformed into schools from European medieval castles (Maniscalco's *Hunting Prince Dracula* [2017]) or churches (in Lauren Kate's *Fallen* [2009] an archaic church is turned into a school gymnasium). In YA Gothic fiction, the presence of Gothic elements destabilises the security and safety of school. It is crucial to note that scholarly environments in Western tradition were never safe to begin with, as Sherry R. Truffin illustrates in her discussion of the Schoolhouse Gothic, a term the author coined to address nightmarish representations of scholarly environments. This concept relies on a set of representations that draw "on Gothic metaphors and themes—sometimes unacknowledged—in representing and interrogating contemporary Western education and those to whom it is entrusted" (Truffin 5). In Schoolhouse Gothic narratives, the portrayal of school as a threatening site incorporates Gothic tropes, such as the curse, the trap, and the monster.[26] Smith and Moruzi explore the depiction of school in contemporary YA Gothic novels in "Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic." Through the analysis of magical boarding schools, they evaluate how the Gothic mode and the presence of female protagonists with supernatural abilities transform the traditional school story. Considering Mead's and Hawkin's trilogies, as well as Claudia Gray's *Evernight* (2008-2011), Smith and Moruzi point out that the female protagonists – a dhampir, a witch and a vampire – of these narratives "disrupt the existing school and social hierarchies to ensure the safety of their school and

[26] In the Schoolhouse Gothic, "curses take two forms: persistent hierarchies and power inequities (of race, gender, class, and age) and—ironically—the Enlightenment itself," while "traps take the form of school buildings, college campuses, classrooms, and/or offices, which function as analogues to the claustrophobic family mansions, monasteries, and convents of old" (Truffin 5). The monster results from the pressures exerted on the students – "the school produces psychopaths, zombies, and machines, usually from the raw material of the student" (5-6).

friends," and their supernatural abilities enable them to "breach the confines of traditional femininity" ("Vampires and Witches Go to School" 9), creating new modes of girlhood, even though conservative and heteronormative ideals still constrain the novels. The teenage female protagonists of these YA Gothic novels "embrace their unique qualities in disruptive and potentially transformative ways that offer them choice and control over their own narratives, even if their narratives are limited by desire and romance" (17). On more general observation of settings in YA Gothic fiction, the authors affirm that "recent YA Gothic fiction relocates the strange and the threatening to the mundane realities of contemporary city or small-town life. In YA fiction, suburban life and school settings reflect many teens' realities, but the Gothic disrupts the regulation, restriction, and order that these quotidian aspects ordinarily impose" (Smith and Moruzi, "Gender and Sexuality" 611).[27] No environment can be deemed safe for teenagers in YA Gothic fiction – of course, not that educational institutions are safe with the pervasive practice of bullying or monthly mass shootings that take place in countries such as the United States. The Gothic has always been hidden in shadowy folds, waiting to be uncovered.

As aforementioned, these novels feature supernatural creatures intrinsically connected to death. Additionally, the protagonists often find themselves confronted by death-infused experiences: from walking into a decrepit house inhabited by vicious ghosts, as in *Anna Dressed in Blood* and *The Diviners*, to being followed into foggy alleys by serial killers, as in *Stalking Jack the Ripper*. Through scrutinising the role of Gothic figures (for instance, the vampire, the werewolf, and the ghost) and their relation to adolescence, Byron and Deans argue that representations of death in YA Gothic fiction "turn away from the universality, nonfunctionality, and irreversibility of death, all of

[27] Smith and Moruzi also suggest that "[t]he predominance of YA Gothic narratives set in the contemporary United States [poses] a challenge in terms of the typical, yet anachronistic, gothic settings of a historic or ruined building" ("Gender and Sexuality in Young Adult Fiction" 611). Nevertheless, as noted during the analysis of the American Gothic, the Gothic in the United States transitions from presenting historical, ruined buildings as settings, introducing new Gothic geographies where threats lurk in every shadow, from colonial saltbox houses and untamed forests to isolated small towns and seemingly mundane suburban houses. The "newness" of the setting is not troubling for YA Gothic novels; instead, it allows the emergence of fresh Gothic terrors, expanding its thematic and spatial dimensions.

which are delimited by the fact of our embodiment and move toward other forms of continuance, embodied or not" (94). The vagueness in the representation of death "function[s] to represent the ambiguous nature of adolescence understanding of death," that is, through the representation of immortality "YA literature reveals adolescents who wish to define themselves against the inevitability of death, refuting the argument that they can only be considered mature when they define themselves in terms of their own death" (96). The representation of immortality is possible due to the presence of supernatural Gothic figures, which in YA novels "function as both a threat to life and a promise that death is not the end" (95).

Through the exploration of Gothic motifs in YA "dark" or paranormal romances, Priest draws attention to the death of female characters, whether their demise is symbolic or literal, and its liminality. Priest contends that "the heroine often has to die if a satisfactory level of narrative resolution is to be achieved" ("Young Adults and the Contemporary Gothic" 277). In these novels, "heroines die (sometimes in grotesque or violent ways), but this is easily overcome and seldom cause for great concern. The adolescent heroine's death is normalized to an extent that is almost absurd" (278) – after all, "the resurrected heroine's refusal to grieve for (or even worry about) her own death is unusual" (279). In conclusion, Priest suggests that "[d]eath – the ultimate disintegration of human identity – is refigured as an inconvenience simply requiring accommodation into one's lifestyle" (278). Perhaps it should not be interpreted as much as an inconvenience one needs to adapt to but as an amenity. After all, some human, adolescent female characters are drawn to this liminal limbo of undead existence; they crave death since its liminality enables them to possess supernatural abilities (in *Twilight*, Bella yearns to be turned into a vampire). Instead of being the end of the line, death is the beginning of an undead existence, which offers a new identity. Although female characters are no longer part of the story to satisfy a "Gothic obsession with the bodies of dead women" (Lilin "Death"), in YA Gothic fiction, there is still "a fascination with the (dead) female body in a way that reveals a deep connection to, and development of, Gothic traditions" (Priest, "Young Adults and the Contemporary Gothic" 275).

Supernatural figures in YA Gothic fiction assume a different role from their previous incarnations. Whereas previously monsters were often depicted as the source of all evil, they slowly became humanised versions of themselves, "as the story is focalised through the monster's perspective with empathy for their fight to survive among humans" (Smith and Moruzi, "Vampires and Witches Go to School" 13), following the trend which emerged in the 1970s Gothic novels, in which Gothic monstrous figures are portrayed as love interests and heroes. The monster as the hero is an intrinsic characteristic of YA Gothic fiction, as "[i]n portraying the monstrous Other as sympathetic, YA Gothic novels potentially offer a way of exorcising the fear of the wolf, and the loss of human subjectivity" (Franck 194). By means of their focalisation through the monster, the stories build a discourse in which the monster manifests their wish of not being viewed as a cruel being and avoids pertaining in actions and behaviours that make it monstrous (the vampire does not feed off human blood nor lure his victims, while the werewolf takes charge of his animal-side in order to keep their humanity). The monster in YA Gothic fiction does not wish to be defined by the supernatural and the abilities it offers them but by their humanity.[28] Of course, the humanisation of the monster does not signify that these creatures can no longer be malevolent, as there are still plenty of monsters featured as the villain of a story. (Needless to say, there are also antagonists who are human that reveal themselves to be monstrous.)

This paradigm shift can be easily perceived in the figure of the vampire, one of the most popular supernatural creatures in YA (Gothic) fiction – Smith and Moruzi suggest that this popularity is not unexpected since, on the one hand, there is the "obvious metaphoric sexual resonance of the vampire bite; while on the other, the vampire-state mirrors the liminality of teenager years" ("Gender and Sexuality" 612). In its first literary appearances, the vampire is characterised as intrinsically wicked. In John William Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819), Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, and Stoker's *Dracula*, "the representation of the vampire as monstrous, evil and other serves to guarantee the

[28] Readers cannot help but feel compassionate towards (or even identify with) the monster. This happens through the use of narrative techniques that permit the point of identification: focalisation, description in appealing terms, the exploration of pathos, and the speech of the monsters themselves that defines them.

existence of good, reinforc[ing] the formally dichotomized structures of belief" (Punter and Byron 270). In YA Gothic fiction, this undead creature "has moved on from his monstrous late-nineteenth-century incarnation and has been supplanted by a divided and tortured figure, whose actions are a result of his physical condition […] rather than some abstract conflict between good and evil" (Byron and Deans 89). Even though *Twilight* was not at the forefront of vampire fiction, Edward perfectly illustrates this transformation. Edward is depicted as a tortured soul, exhibiting characteristics similar to those of a Byronic hero, feeding on the blood of animals rather than humans.

Several twenty-first-century YA Gothic novels feature this new type of consciously aware, humanised vampire: Mead's *Vampire Academy* features Rose, a sarcastic dhampir (half-human, half-vampire) student who attends a boarding school for vampires; Sarah Beth Durst's *Drink, Slay, Love* (2011), in which Pearl, a vampire, after surviving a strange incident that should have killed her, starts developing a conscience that makes her identify with her food (humans) and consequently struggles to balance her vampirism with her newfound concern for humans; Renée Ahdieh's *The Beautiful* (2019-2020), vampires enjoy the nightlife of nineteenth-century New Orleans, befriending humans, and helping them survive an evil supernatural force that looms in the city. As a consequence of these representations, which intertwine with the happy Gothic trend, female vampires are no longer associated with the *femme fatale* nor represented as deviant, and, subsequently, they are no longer punished with death as a result of their supernatural power.

In literary Gothic, the *femme fatale* figure is the counterpart to the docile Gothic heroine. The *femme fatale* is defined as "[i]mperious, darkly emotional" and "may emerge from a normal girlhood, then turn into a vibrant flirt, smoldering succubus or grotesque predator" (Snodgrass 120). She is a woman of undeniable beauty, and her charm hides dangerous intentions – as Adriana Craciun describes her, *the femme fatale* is "the much-maligned hyperfeminine fantasy of heterosexual patriarchy" (15). Mario Praz extensively explores the creation and depiction of the *femme fatale* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that the *femme fatale* has always existed "both in mythology and literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative

reflections of the various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters" (189). There is no blueprint regarding this she-devil, but the several personifications of the *femme fatale* share common characteristics such as diabolical beauty and supernatural abilities. Praz considers Matilda from *The Monk* at the top of literary models of *femme fatales* that emerged during this time. Matilda practices magic arts, seduces holy men, entices them to do her bidding, helps lead them astray, and communes with the Devil (192-194). In the eighteenth century, the romantics, as well as the Gothic writers, were haunted by a version of the *femme fatale* "similar to Cleopatra's image: a woman of strong sexuality and influence on male protagonists, but of supernatural powers such asspells [sic], incantations or magical powers" (Elhallaq 88). Some of the most well-known *femme fatales* in Gothic literature are Geraldine from Coleridge's poem "Christabel" (1816), who corrupts the Angel in the House; Carmilla, who, with her infectious lesbianism, threatens the destruction of the foundations of the patriarchal system; and the vampire sisters, who seduce Harker, and Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*. Intriguingly, all these women are associated with vampirism, which has turned them into sexual predators.

In Gothic novels, the *femme fatale* is represented as one of the story's antagonists, if not the principal one. After all, the *femme fatale* is a monstrous female whose feminine body is bestowed with power. The representation of the monstrous female is a materialisation of male anxieties regarding femininity, and because the *femme fatale* crosses the boundaries of this expected femininity, she is bound to be punished by patriarchy. This punishment also has roots in their supernatural power, which confers on them the ability to tip the social balance. In her exploration of death, gender, and sexuality in adolescent fiction, James argues that "[i]n narratives where death functions to regulate norms of sexual behaviour and/or reinforce dominant sexual subjectivities by killing off the deviant body, the intersection between mortality, gender, and sexuality is particularly clear" (117). Females who do not conform to the ruling morality and sexuality must perish or risk contaminating the social order. As a result, the *femme fatale* must be punished with death so that social and gender order can be restored.

The paradigm shift is also perceivable in the figure of the werewolf, another monster pervasive in YA Gothic fiction – it is in YA literature "where the most radical transformation of the werewolf theme occurs, inspired by concerns over agency and subjectivity" (Franck and George 144). Furthermore, lycanthropy in YA literature is used "as a way of exploring the experience of adolescence" and "foreground the teenager as a liminal entity and always 'other' to the mature phase of adulthood. The adolescent's disgust with changes in his or her own emerging body, from acne to menstruation, is easily mapped onto the shapeshifting werewolf" (151). As a result, the werewolf frequently acts as a metaphor for puberty. The construction of werewolf fiction transitions from a portrayal of the werewolf as a monstrous entity, in which it is "no longer regarded as cursed, [and] is increasingly considered more alluring than monstrous" (Byron and Deans 91). The most significant characteristic of werewolf narratives is the emergence of the female werewolf.[29] Female werewolves are found in Patricia Windsor's *The Blooding* (1996), Annette Curtis Klause's *Blood and Chocolate* (1997), and Andrea Cremer's *Nightshade* (2010-2012). The development of the female werewolf is meaningful because "she represents a casting off of all the trappings of 'correct' womanhood. [After all t]o be a female werewolf is to fight, snarl, be promiscuous and atavistic, to reject the domestic and embrace the feral, to be hairy and greedy and violent" (Priest, "Where Do Female Werewolves Come From?"). Similar to the vampiric *femme fatale*, the female werewolf deconstructs patriarchal preconceived ideas about the nature of women. In other words, the female werewolf disturbs stereotypical notions of femininity since she is far from the innocuous female image constructed by society. If once female characters in the Gothic mode were prey to preternatural beings, they have now become the predators themselves.

YA Gothic features a panoply of girl monsters who are disruptive and a threat to society, breaking patriarchal expectations of female behaviour. Nevertheless, even

[29] Some of the earliest examples of female werewolves in Anglophone fiction are Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839) and Clemence Housman's *The Were-Wolf* (1896). The lack of female werewolves in fiction is not surprising since lycanthropes were traditionally "understood as 'hypermasculine' creatures, associated with aggression, hunting, and territorialism" (Priest "Where Do Female Werewolves Come From?").

though they bestow all this physical and supernatural power, the pursuit of a romantic relationship often turns their supernatural abilities and threatening status into a merely "decorative smokescreen for the reinforcement of traditional feminine values" (Smith "Friday essay: why YA gothic fiction is booming"). The representation of female monsters prompts another significant theme of the YA Gothic. As previously noted, literary Gothic has historically served as a space to approach a range of anxieties. Besides addressing fears about adolescence and liminality, puberty, and identity, YA Gothic fiction also explores apprehensions concerning notions and constructions of girlhood, a concept that I analyse in the final section of this chapter.

Although they occupy the role of heroes, it is fundamental to understand that monstrous creatures are still intrinsically connected to sexuality and sexual awakening[30] – they exert the same sexual power as their ancestors. For instance, in Julie Kagawa's *The Immortal Rules* (2012), the first novel of a YA vampire dystopian trilogy, Allison, the main character, drinks blood from her love interest's pulsing veins. The vampire bite has not lost its sexual connotations, as perceived in the following description:

> I lunged, sinking my fangs into his neck, driving them deep. Stifling a cry, Zeke stiffened and gripped my arms, arching his back. His blood coursed hot and sweet into my mouth, spreading through me, a slow-moving fire. […] He breathed my name, a sigh of benediction and longing, and I couldn't get close enough, never close enough. His heartbeat roared in my ears, pounding out a savage rhythm, and I lost myself in the moment, cocooned in ecstasy, feeling the essence of this remarkable human swirl through me. (Kagawa ch. 23)

In this passage, the roles are inverted; the female character becomes the predator, and the male character becomes the prey. However, there is the perpetuation of

[30] The portrayal of romantic relationships between humans and monsters falls into the paranormal romance genre. As Bill Hughes states, "[p]aranormal romance takes the plot conventions of romance fiction and stylises it with a Gothic mood. All the dark dangers and terrors of the Gothic give an edge to the sunniness of romance with the introduction of the monstrous lover. Thus, humans have love affairs with vampires, werewolves and all manner of supernatural creatures that once haunted tales of sheer horror, humanising the Gothic mode while problematising romance" (38).

female/male power dynamics and relations, even if inverted. Nevertheless, vampires no longer represent sexual corruption or transgressive sexual behaviour, such as Carmilla and Dracula, who are considered sexual predators for threatening society's gender and sexual mores. Sexual desire and intercourse no longer signify the death of what, in the patriarchal perspective, has been deemed a transgressive and depraved body. Female characters, supernatural or not, increasingly have the opportunity to explore their sexuality without the fear of facing early demise as a form of punishment. Nevertheless, early YA fiction has been responsible for perpetuating the notion that teenagers who enjoy their sexuality suffer devastating consequences. As Trites explains,

> [m]ost YA novels about teenage sexuality have at best a conflicting ideology and at worst a repressive ideology that both reflects and perpetuates Western culture's confused sexual mores. But the very existence of these repressive ideologies demonstrates that sexuality is a locus of power for adolescents. If it were not, adults would feel no need to regulate teenagers' sexuality. (*Disturbing the Universe* 95-96)

Given that sexuality and engaging in sexual activity provide adolescents with a sense of power, ideologies have sought to regulate teenage sexuality by characterising it as deviant and imposing repression. A character's sexuality offers a locus of power; however, this power must be circumscribed before the narrative ends. This control is often articulated through, for instance, the representation of the victimisation of teenage girls and the early death, whether literal (the physical body succumbs) or figurative (manifesting as psychological distress, mental disruptions and/or trauma) of adolescents who engage in sexual practices. Novels such as *Go Ask Alice* (1971), Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), Ellen Hopkins's *Impulse* (2007), Courtney Summers's *Cracked Up to Be* (2008), and Emily M. Danforth's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2012), among others, depict sex and sexuality as linked to negative consequences for the female characters, who experience emotional trauma that often leads to depression and/or self-harm and, in certain instances, death.

Relationships in YA Gothic fiction disrupt the boundaries between human and Other, as there may be romantic relationships between a human and a supernatural being (similarly, to some extent, to relationships between two characters with supernatural characteristics, in which case the adolescents in a relationship belong to different "species"). The possibility of a romantic relationship between the monster and the human adolescent results from the departure from traditional portrayals of the supernatural creatures as a bloodsucking bat or a violent, animalistic beast that must be put down violently. Due to being supernatural creatures or being in a relationship with one, adolescents in YA Gothic fiction can explore "the nature of their sexual desire" and delve "into their dark side, usually without letting it absorb them completely" (Byron and Deans 93). Through building romantic relationships with monsters, adolescents can explore their own sexual cravings (frequently) without the repercussions depicted in earlier YA fiction. It must be stressed that these relationships are often heteronormative – essentially, "forming heterosexual relationships in the right way is [YA Gothic's] greatest fixation and serves as an indication of characters' goodness or monstrosity" (Smith and Moruzi, "Gender and Sexuality" 619). Despite the transgressive potential of YA Gothic, texts frequently uphold traditional gender roles and heteronormative relationships that continue to be recognised and valued by mainstream society.

YA Gothic fiction is disruptive in relation to its roots, with strong-willed teenage protagonists, especially female adolescents, who move from passive victims to agent heroines. As Byron and Deans express, the teenagers portrayed in contemporary YA Gothic

> are shown to be adolescents negotiating the balance between an emerging sense of self as a competent individual, on the one hand, and a transformed, but continued, feeling of connection with significant others, on the other, and this emerging sense of self and autonomy is shown to be accompanied by an equally increasing awareness of their own personal power. (101)

The recognition of their agency empowers them to stand up against the existing social structures – be they patriarchal systems that dictate women's roles or supernatural

orders that segregate the different categories of monsters. This awareness instils in adolescents the fortitude to rebel against such constraints and catalyse transformative change within the supernatural worlds they inhabit, drawing notable parallels to the protagonists found in YA dystopian fiction.

1.3. From Utopian Dreams to Dystopian Nightmares

We always leave a candle burning in the darkness.

Moira Young, "Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?"

The utopian literary tradition began in the sixteenth century with the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). In the narrative, a Portuguese sailor, Raphael Hythloday, tells More of the isolated island of Utopia, describing in great detail its inhabitants, customs, and ethical principles. The account of a harmonious and just society is juxtaposed with the social-political landscape of sixteenth-century Europe, which is "denounced as a continent full of socioeconomic imbalances, oppression, injustice and violence" ("denunciada como um continente cheio de desequilíbrios socioeconómicos, de opressões, injustiças e violências"; my trans.; Bastos da Silva, *O Imaginário da Utopia em Portugal e no Mundo* 7). In *Utopia*, More envisions a blueprint for building a better society, denouncing the wrongdoings of his fellow citizens, and, as a consequence, his work is understood as an expression of positive utopianism. Although utopian visions and desires already existed before the publication of *Utopia*, [31] as there are several records of imaginary better places preceding its publication, from Hesiod's Golden Age

[31] For more on utopianism before the publication of More's *Utopia*, see the first chapter of *The Utopia Reader – Second Edition* (2017), edited by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent.

to Plato's *Republic* to the Garden of Eden and Cockaigne,[32] which, as Lyman Tower Sargent explains, are called "utopias of escape" and "the body utopia," fantasies created by Nature or deities, focusing on pleasure and abundance (*Utopianism* 12), More creates the formulae of the utopian narrative. Indeed, "More erected a formal model, a literary paradigm from which future fiction works of conscious utopian intent would burrow" (Aldridge 3), influencing the literary utopia genre throughout the next five hundred years. Following the publication of More's *Utopia*, utopian fiction emerged with works such as Sir Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana, or the Revolution of 1900* (1890), Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* (1905), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975). The utopian narrative, Fátima Vieira explains, often follows a generic structure:

> it normally pictures the journey (by sea, land or air) of a man or woman to an unknown place (an island, a country or a continent); once there, the utopian traveller is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an explanation of its social, political, economic and religious organization; this journey typically implies the return of the utopian traveller to his or her own country, in order to be able to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society. […] Another characteristic is that it is human-centred, not relying on chance or on the intervention of external, divine forces in order to impose order on society. (7)

Through the construction of utopian literary worlds, serving as a lens through which to examine existing societal structures and the human condition, authors offer models for building a better society. Hence, utopias are imaginary constructions in which realities that torment the human being are rejected. They express "the desire of a better way of being" (Levitas 9) at the same time that they challenge and question the status quo. Consequently, "[b]y establishing horizons of expectations (with the inevitable

[32] In spite of its relationship with utopian visions, "utopian literature is *not*: myth, fantasy, folktale, Cockaigne or Earthly Paradise, primarily because none of the latter are 'historically alternative socio-political conditions'" (Aldridge 4).

awareness that they will never be reached) utopias guide man to the reinvention and the reconstruction of humanity, and thus lead him to his emancipation" (Vieira 23). Through the continuous reinvention and reconstruction of humanity, as Vieira advocates, utopian literature is a powerful mechanism that prompts readers to question their present reality, inviting deeper reflection on individual and collective desires towards a more just and equitable society. Utopia "is a mirror that shows, raises awareness and incites to correction" ("é espelho que mostra, consciencializa e incita à correcção"; my trans.; Bastos da Silva, *O Imaginário da Utopia em Portugal e no Mundo* 10).

Although utopian imaginaries continue to persist in the field of literature, the shadowy side of utopia rose within the genre. This side, Vieira claims, "is related to the turning of utopia towards the future, on the one hand, and to the idea of scientific and technological progress on the other" (15). The twentieth century was dominated by nightmarish narratives that came to be known as dystopias[33] – they drew on social, political, and cultural issues, projecting them into frightening futures. Dystopian fiction, as Tom Moylan asserts, is "largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century" (xi). This century, characterised by two violent world wars, genocide, global political tensions and conflict, and endangering technological advances, served as a fertile ground for the emergence of countless harrowing visions of future societies. Many dystopian novels published throughout the twentieth century, which "came to represent the *classical*, or canonical, form of dystopia" (Baccolini and Moylan 1), are a projection into the future of the socio-political issues of the time that concerned their authors. That is,

> the dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if

[33] John Stuart Mill first used the neologism "dystopia" in 1868. During a debate about Ireland and the tithe, the word "dystopia" was used to describe something "too bad to be practicable" (248). The word "came into usage not only to refer to imaginary places that were worse than real places, but also to works describing places such as these" (Vieira 17).

> continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside. (1-2)

Thus, "[w]ith its capacity to frighten and warn, dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self" (Basu, Broad and Hintz 1). Dystopias of different times reflect the anxieties of that period: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), where the citizens are genetically modified and placed in pre-determined castes based on their intelligence quotient; Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937), a warning against Nazi propaganda which depicts a totally male-controlled fascist society that has subjugated women turning them into breeders; George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), where a totalitarian government creates the Thought Police that persecutes individuality and freedom of speech; Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) where books are forbidden and burnt by a government seeking to abolish critical thinking; Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), where adolescents are part of ultraviolence culture; and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a totalitarian Christian theocracy that explores the subjugation of women who lose their individuality and the power over their own bodies. As representations of the consequences arising from the corrupt side of human nature, dystopian societies emerge from the ashes of the contemporary world to haunt readers.

Similar to the literary utopia, literary dystopia also follows a common narrative structure: "the dystopian text usually begins directly in the terrible new world [and] the element of textual estrangement remains in effect since the focus is frequently on a character who questions the dystopian society." Indeed, "a counter-narrative develops as the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance" (Baccolini and Moylan 5). Albeit utopia and dystopia are conceptualised as opposite binaries, the space that separates utopia from dystopia is not as distinct as it may initially appear. Literary dystopia "utilizes the narrative devices of literary utopia, incorporating into its logic the principles of the euchronia […] but

predicts that things will turn out badly; it is thus essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images" (Vieira 17). Additionally, as Margaret Atwood declares when addressing her dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985):

> The utopia/dystopia form as a form is always concerned with contemporary social patterns for the simple reasons that utopian means 'nowhere', it doesn't exist – we've never travelled to other planets, it's almost like writing about death, and life after death: nobody has actually been there and come back to tells what it's like. Utopia is about our wish-fulfilment, fantasies, and dystopia is about what we secretly think might happen instead. (11)

The two forms are intrinsically linked. Despite the frequent bleak nature of dystopian narratives, their purpose is not to induce despair and hopelessness in the reader. Dystopias are, by and large, "a variant of the same social dreaming that gives impetus to utopian literature" (Vieira 17).

At this point, it is imperative to explore in depth the concept of "dystopia," as an understanding of this term is pivotal to delineating the concept of "young adult (YA) dystopian fiction." In "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994), Sargent states that a dystopia is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended contemporary readers to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (9). According to Alexandra Aldridge, "a dystopian novelist, instead of recreating some fragment or actual world, extrapolates from his concept of actuality in order to make a holistic framework, a complete alternative (inevitably egotistic) structure" (18). Here, both Sargent and Aldridge present two essential points about dystopia: it represents a society worse than the one the reader inhabits, and it is set in the future. Keith M. Booker writes that dystopian literature

> situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical

> examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (3)

In interpreting Booker's definition, Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz claim that the term "dystopia" "typically applies to works that simultaneously imagine futures and consider the present, essentially occupying a liminal space between these times" (9). Concisely, Chris Baldick describes dystopia as "a modern term invented as the opposite of utopia, and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 361), while Beatrice Battaglia suggests that it is "unquestionably a literature of fear" (66). Quite interestingly, Battaglia divides the canonical form of dystopia into three structural and thematic parts:

> The first part presents the monstrous world […], involving the reader immediately on a psychological level through the emotional texture of daily life. It is a feeling of dissatisfaction, of lack, of privation and the absence of anything basic and vital that lays the basis of the central part, where the need to rebel and the search for a way out as a *duty* are enacted. This means that the hero's individual endeavour takes on a collective significance, with the focus shifting from the protagonist to the source that inspires him – instinct or the past or myth – which thus appears as the real driving force and protagonist in the central part […]. The third part represents the failure o' the hero's rebellion; it confirms the power of the *monster* but restricts the dimensions of the defeat to the individual, leaving room for hope. (53)

Moylan contends that dystopia "expresses a simple refusal of modern society" (xii). In *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Hintz and Ostry define it as depictions of societies where "the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok" (3). Marina MacKay claims dystopias are "unambiguously bad places [which are] not *geographically* elsewhere (More's *Utopia* is a remote island) but *temporally* elsewhere, in a monstrous future of mind-managed humanity in a totalitarian state" (159). For Gregory Claeys, the neologism is used "to describe a

fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show up their fallacies" ("The origins of dystopia" 107). While these definitions vary, the term "dystopia" is mostly applied to describe a textual form. It generally comprehends societies worse than the contemporary one, critiquing present conditions, often revealing flaws in political and social systems and evoking fear of negative future outcomes.

Another concept that emerges from the development of the field of Utopian Studies and takes centre stage in this research is the critical dystopia, whose definition is rooted in the critical utopia. Although the twentieth century was fertile in dystopias, it also offered a space for the emergence of the critical utopia. Moylan first introduces the concept in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986). Moylan explains that in the 1960s, with the revival of the literary utopia, a new form of utopia emerged, the critical utopia. In these new utopian works,

> the subversive imaging of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of the traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed. [These texts are aware] of the limitations of the utopian tradition, [rejecting] utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream, [dwell on] the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated, [and focus] on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (10)

There is space for the future to be a better place, yet free from the constrictions of perfection that frames the original utopian narrative. With the foundational stones set, Moylan, Raffaella Baccolini, and Sargent developed and defined a new terminology: critical dystopia. Sargent describes a critical dystopia as

> a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally included at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with eutopia. ("U.S. Eutopias in the 1980s and 1990s" 222)

In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000), for Moylan, a critical dystopia is "a textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the appositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration" (xv). In *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and The Dystopian Imagination* (2003), Baccolini and Moylan stress that critical dystopias are texts that "negotiate the necessary pessimism of the generic dystopia with a militant or utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text's alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers in every dystopian account" (7), offering a hopeful ending within the text itself. Critical dystopias are texts "that maintain a utopian impulse" since they

> allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work. In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective 'ex-centric' subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule. [Moreover, in these texts, there is] an intensification of the practise of genre blurring. By self-reflexively borrowing specific conventions from other genres, critical dystopias more often blur the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand its creative potential for critical expression. (7)

Vita Fortunati asserts that the critical dystopia "reflect[s] on the functions of literature, on its imaginative possibilities and on its risks of mystification. [Critical dystopias] prefigure a horizon of hope, expressing a tension towards change that classic anti-utopias refused, because beyond the black horizon they configured no hope, only a regressive desire of returning to the past" (19-20). In "The Persistence of Hope in

Dystopian Science Fiction," Baccolini goes a step further, contemplating the end of the critical dystopia:

> Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for utopian change. (521)

In her recent work, Baccolini expands on this concept, affirming that new "critical dystopias describe a mostly dystopian, future society, but they also portray surviving and imperfect utopian enclaves within the larger dystopian world" ("Recovering Hope in Darkness" 1230). Hope in critical dystopias arises from resisting closure, consequently building a utopian impulse. A critical dystopia offers an all-encompassing ending, leaving the future of the characters hanging in the balance.

As I explore in the following subsection, most YA dystopias feature an open ending. Although the characters do not know what awaits them, the future seems bright, the horizon filled with possibilities. Dystopian societies have the opportunity to build a new social-political fabric that moves away from the controlling and all-enforcing totalitarian society they live in. YA dystopian texts end on a hopeful note, with the possibility of building a world that strives to be a better place for everyone. Hence, the hopeful ending is a core characteristic of YA dystopian fiction. While a growing number of literary dystopias dominated the twentieth century, particularly in the United States of America, the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of YA dystopian fiction. Indeed, YA dystopias are a product of the twenty-first century.

1.3.1. The Rise of YA Dystopian Fiction

The upsurge of the YA fiction market took place at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The increasing publication of YA novels is attributed to the international success of the *Harry Potter* series, whose last three books, according to Michael Cart, are YA novels, "helped turn young adult literature into an increasingly global phenomenon and also sparked a new interest in fantasy as a genre not only for children but also—and perhaps more importantly—for young adults" (Cart 118) as well as established the YA fiction in a format that is recognisable today. YA fiction continued its rise with the publication of the first instalment of Meyer's *Twilight* series and, a few years later, Collins's *The Hunger Games*, which spawned a wave of dystopian fiction within the YA literary market.[34] "The state of YA in the 21st century," Antero Garcia remarks, "is that of a genre that has spun wildly into the future and that YA future is a bleak one for the human race" (71). This trend in the YA market Garcia is referring to is that of the rise of YA dystopian fiction. The prevalence of dystopian fiction in post-9/11 YA literature was an inescapable phenomenon. The social-political climate emerging from post-9/11, Melissa Ames explains, contributed to the popularity of YA dystopias and their mass consumption (6). Like post-war canonical dystopian fiction, YA dystopias emerge during social unrest, discomfort, and uprising.

In the aftermath of the worldwide popularity of The Hunger Games, there was a noticeable thriving in the publication of YA dystopian novels. With this, there was also a proliferation in academic research and critical analysis on the YA dystopian study field in the last decade (post-2010). The Hunger Games trilogy is the object of study of several research volumes. For instance, *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games: Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*, edited by Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark (2012), and *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis* by Tom Henthorne (2012) offer an interdisciplinary approach to the trilogy covering a multitude of topics such as gender and feminism, surveillance, politics, war, reality television, and economics, to name a few. *Space and Place in The Hunger Games Trilogy* edited by Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, Juliet Elizabeth Tyler, and Elaine Jones (2014), examines

[34] I use "YA dystopia" and "YA dystopian fiction" interchangeably.

how places shape people, exert power to create social hierarchies, and can be conceptualised, delineated, envisioned and used. *Agency in The Hunger Games: Desire, Intent and Action in the Novels* by Kayla Ann (2020) explores the theme of personal agency by analysing themes such as the overabundance of bodily imagery, social norms and expectations in the Capitol, and problematic parental figures. Even though the primary focus was initially on Collins's trilogy, scholars' attention soon shifted to other YA dystopian novels published in the aftermath of its popularity. *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, edited by Balaka Basu, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz (2014), brings together a collection of essays that approach YA dystopian texts from diverse perspectives, such as ecocriticism, posthumanism, and spatiality. *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Fiction* (2014), organised by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz, discusses the roles of power, agency, and repression, with emphasis on girlhood and female rebellion importance for the development of a new role for the young teenager in a patriarchal society. *"Tell Freedom I Said Hello": Issues in Contemporary Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (2018), edited by Christian Ludwig and Nicole Maruo-Schröder, critically considers the emergence and impact of YA dystopian fiction. The volume is organised into two parts: the first discusses literary and cultural perspectives, while the second addresses the genre's didacticism, focusing on its potential for teaching English as a foreign language.

However, it is worth noting that YA dystopian fiction was being published and well received by readers and critics prior to the release of The Hunger Games (Appendix 1). Novels such as Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* (2001), Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2001), M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Nancy Farmer's *The House of the Scorpion* (2002), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005), Catherine Fisher's *Incarceron* (2007), Gemma Malley's *The Declaration* (2007), Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007), Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008), Mary E. Pearson's *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008), and Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) are all YA dystopian novels. Many of these authors returned to their novels after the publication of *The Hunger Games*, launching

several sequels.[35] Furthermore, while *The Hunger Games* popularised the trilogy format and spawned a growing number of imitators (Fitzsimmons "Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy"), it is not the origin of the YA dystopian novel. Lowry's ground-breaking novel *The Giver* is considered by many scholars and researchers to be the beginning of YA dystopian fiction (Cart 123; Hentges 77). However, I argue that Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* first introduced the plot and themes that readers have come to identify with YA dystopian fiction.

In Blackman's world, the reader is confronted with a totalitarian society where segregation operates to keep the Crosses (dark-skinned people) in control of the Noughts (lighter-skinned people). Noughts rebel and fight against racial inequality, many joining the Liberation Militia, a violent paramilitary rebellious organisation. The main characters, Persephone "Sephy" Hadley, a Cross, and Callum McGregor, a Nought, are teenagers (Jonas from *The Giver* is a twelve-year-old, a pre-teen, while Sephy and Callum start at fourteen and sixteen, respectively, and as the story progresses, they become sixteen and eighteen) and develop romantic feelings for one another amidst a totalitarian regime in turmoil. Sephy's and Callum's romantic relationship informs the plot, alongside the rebellion against segregation and the fight for equal rights. The textual structure of the YA dystopia, as readers recognise it today, has its roots in the novel of a Black British author.

Still, YA dystopian fiction has deeper roots. In tracing its legacies, Sarah Hentges identifies the feminist and speculative fiction narratives that have significantly influenced its rise. Focusing on the concept of "transcendent community," Hentges argues that Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, in which "the 'blazing world' is a direct connection to the fire theme that weaves throughout YA dystopia" (31), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is "a clear template for many YA dystopian novels that take up the subject of compulsory reproduction and

[35] Before the release of *The Hunger Games*, the publishing of YA dystopias was not a localised geographical phenomenon; that is, these were not written mainly by American authors. For instance, Blackman, Reeve, and Malley are British; Fisher is British/Welsh; Doctorow is Canadian; Ness is British-American; Anderson, Farmer, Westerfeld, Shusterman, and Pearson are American.

enslavement of women for purposes of reproduction" (33), and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, are at the roots of YA dystopian fiction. According to Hentges, Butler is the primary mother of YA dystopian fiction, as *Parable of the Sower* "is a model for many YA dystopia texts and female protagonists" and connects "YA dystopia's Girls on Fire [a concept I explore in the subsequent section] and their stories to Butler's Lauren Olamina and her coming of age to power story" (34).

Nevertheless, why did YA dystopian fiction become so popular? Why did a boom in YA dystopian fiction happen in the aftermath of Collins's The Hunger Games? Scholes and Ostenson undertake the task of understanding the popularity of YA dystopian fiction among teenagers (readers who are no longer teenagers have also been captivated by the genre). They determine that the interest comes from the elements and themes in the texts, such as inhumanity and isolation, agency and conscience, platonic and romantic relationships, and issues of free choice. Scholes and Ostenson explain that these themes "serve to actually shape [teenagers to think] about the society around them and even encourage them to take subversive action" ("Understanding the Appeal of Dystopian Young Adult Fiction"). In simpler terms, Moira Young, author of the Dust Lands trilogy, a YA dystopian trilogy set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, states that "[t]eenagers like to read dystopian fiction because it's exciting. It all comes down to the story. The story comes first, and the setting – extraordinary though it may be – is of secondary importance" ("Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?").

In addition to the themes highlighted by Scholes and Ostenson, YA dystopian fiction also features themes of control, which encompasses totalitarian governments (born out of radical political or religious ideologies), divisions within society (based on class, intelligence, abilities, personalities, appearance), oppression, propaganda, repression (there is no freedom of choice nor free speech), and the reconstruction of the past. It includes violence (such as psychological and physical punishment, incarceration and torture, and cruel death), survival (it comprises isolation, loss of hope, the fight against the odds, and the will to survive), and individual and collective rebellion. Through featuring and exploring these themes, YA dystopian novels create worlds in which society has been devastated by an unknown catastrophe, and the usual ways of

life and social norms have been radically restructured, opening the space for the rise of totalitarian societies.

In these futuristic societies, adolescents take on pivotal roles, and the dictatorial regimes exert their power over them through several mechanisms. For instance, adolescents are "genetically modified to weed out physical differences," "put through intensive psychological tests in an effort to find solutions to the world's undisclosed disaster," "forced to violently kill in order to adhere to the expectations of adults that perhaps abuse power," "forced into limiting constraints of identity and labor associated with their identity," and "in a classed society that further stratifies the wealthy and working class" (Garcia 71). Oppressive mechanisms such as these serve as a catalyst for the teenage protagonist's eventual rebellion against the very structures that seek to control them. Hence, the protagonists of YA dystopian narratives, according to Jessica Seymour, "are capable of transcending their limitations and toppling the regimes" and "are frequently portrayed as being actively engaged in social and political issues, and often their disempowerment at the hands of adult characters is the catalyst for the narrative action" (631). Commonly, the adolescent protagonists are female teenagers – the female protagonist "outnumbers the male protagonist, even as he is almost always by her side, on the side, in the background, or in some other pivotal role" (Hentges 29). They are insiders in their society and perceive its wrongdoings, having experienced the hardships caused by the socio-political system. In contrast, a minority remains convinced that the government works for the greater good and wish to conform to social expectations, such as Cassia from Ally Condie's Matched trilogy, who experiences a gradual awakening after another boy's face appears on the screen when she views the micro card she was given at her Match Banquet, and Tris from Veronica Roth's Divergent series, whose desire to fit in one of her society factions prompts her to recognise the cracks on the system. Nevertheless, no matter where they stand, these teenage girls end up rebelling against the oppressive government, partaking in violent uprisings.

Although YA dystopian fiction has been called out due to its representations of violence, dystopian literature is necessary for teenagers since, according to Janie Slater, it

> 1. Provides a healthy outlet for exploring socially unacceptable topics within our own spheres and communities.
>
> 2. Helps us see new, different perspectives than we're capable of from our own limited experience.
>
> 3. Helps us sort out and express feelings and emotions, providing cathartic release and relief.
>
> 4. Inspires us with often courageous, defiant (in a healthy way), quirky and unique protagonists who overcome barriers and limitations. (qtd. in Cart 125)

Furthermore, YA dystopian fiction is a space where binary tensions can be negotiated, hence constructing and offering readers new models of being. Jennifer Harrison proposes that it

> provide[s] models for how young people can positively negotiate between the development of individual subjectivity and collective identity; they offer new ways of considering concepts such as time, progress, evolution, and development; they reconsider binary constructions and hierarchies; they renegotiate and reconsider social structures such as the family and the community; and finally, they depict identity and bodies as fluid, fractured, and mutable. (3)

The future in YA dystopian fiction is full of possibilities that help teenage readers make sense of the transitions within themselves and in the ever-changing world. As Carrie Hintz and Eric Tribunella summarise, YA dystopian "action often extrapolates current trends, asking young people to speculate about a future world where violence, injustice, and environmental degradation have rendered the world uninhabitable" (512). Undeniably, YA dystopian fiction shares many themes and characteristics with the canonical dystopias from the twentieth century. Similar to their predecessors, YA dystopian fiction explores contemporary society's darkest fears and the most extreme consequences that might ensue if humanity does not change its ways.

Although they are in debt to canonical literary dystopias, YA dystopias have forged their own path, diverging from their roots. For instance, according to Kay Sambell, a difference between dystopias written for adults and adolescent readers is their didactic impact: "Whereas the 'adult' dystopia's didactic impact relies on the absolute, unswerving nature of its dire warning, the expression of moral meaning in the children's dystopia is often characterized by degrees of hesitation, oscillation, and ambiguity" (164).[36] Furthermore, Rebekah Fitzsimmons examines the genre conventions in YA dystopian fiction, stating, parallel to Battaglia's structural division of the canonical form of dystopia, that it has three distinct phases:

> Phase 1 establishes the rules and realities of the dystopian world and places the protagonist in direct conflict with that system through a ritualized rite of passage symbolizing coming of age. Phase 2 expands the world of the dystopia beyond the protagonist's home to show that the protagonist's problems are only a small part of the larger dysfunctional system; given the size and scope of these inequities, conflict with the ruling forces of the dystopia becomes inevitable. Phase 3 forces alliances to shift as new forces (re)appear to realign the balance of power; these forces often demonstrate alternative societal structures that appear to offer an alternative to the status quo. ("Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy")

In phase one, the protagonists' home is a microcosm of the dystopian system. The ritualised rite of passage is, Fitzsimmons explains, "where the dystopian system initiates the protagonist's transition from childhood to adulthood through proscribed practices" (*ibidem*). Examples of the rites of passage that initiate the coming-of-age process in YA dystopian fiction are: the Reaping Ceremony in The Hunger Games, an annual event where two tributes (one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen) are selected from each district to participate in the Hunger Games, during which the tributes must kill one another until only one remains, who is crowned the Victor; the Choosing Ceremony in Divergent, where sixteen-year-olds must choose one of the five factions

[36] The author uses the term "children's novels" loosely, including in her discussion both children's novels, such as Lowry's *The Giver*, and YA novels, such as Tim Lott's *Fearless* (2007).

for life; the formal evaluation in Lauren Oliver's Delirium in which teenagers undertake in order for the government to determine their educational future and find prospected marriage matches; the Match Banquet in Matched, where seventeen-years-old are matched to their future partner based on algorithmic calculations, to name a few. The term "ceremony" itself conjures images of transition. In these cases, the female characters are "at a crucial (symbolic, ritualistic, liminal) juncture in [their] life; a juncture that goes hand in hand with the dystopian aspect of the society [they live] in" (Heinze 32).

In phase two, the larger world is represented in two ways: the world is known to the protagonist, but it remains inaccessible, or the existence of additional settlements is a revelation that disrupts the dystopian system itself. This phase concludes with a cliffhanger, introducing new parties whose presence creates power imbalances within the dystopian system. The new factions inhabit a world where the tendrils of the dystopian government have not reached, making possible new forms of life and freedom. In this sense, phase two breaks with the totalitarian world boundaries "in order to suggest other possible systems and solutions to the estranging principle responsible for the dystopia in the first place" (Fitzsimmons "Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy"). The outside world is inhabited by forces whose interests initially line up with those of the protagonists. Nonetheless, the protagonists' actions and desires for a better future might align differently from those of their new allies. Hence, in the first moment, the revelation of the mysterious outside force can "serve as a beacon of hope—a sign that life outside the dystopian system is, in fact, possible. [However,] the outsiders offer equally problematic solutions to the existing system" (*ibidem*). The outsider system might not be much better than the one the protagonists are fighting against: it might not offer the freedom they are looking for or want to achieve for themselves and the whole society under authoritarian control.

Phase three depicts the last confrontation between the protagonist and the tyrannical forces. The confrontation ends with "a complete, violent overthrow of the system and the destruction of the dystopian figurehead (and other looming authoritarian figures)" (*ibidem*). This last confrontation entails loss: loss of the known

system, loss of home, loss of loved ones, loss of one's own life (although uncommon, YA dystopian fiction does feature protagonists who die, such as Callum in *Noughts & Crosses*, Fen in Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* (2013), and Tris in the *Divergent* trilogy). Nonetheless, from the ashes of loss, hope rises. A hope that will foster and grow into a new world that does not settle on the overthrown authoritarian system or rebuild based on the one of the outsiders. This hope stems from the impulse to build a better place; it is the embodiment of Lyman Tower Sargent's "social dreaming." Overall, "[t]he YA dystopian trilogy captures this idea of process: the dystopia develops out of a crisis, devolves into a latent dystopian state, then is overthrown, and reemerges as a utopia-in-progress" (*ibidem*). In this context, the intersection between the YA and the critical dystopia is evident.

The YA dystopian craze has slowed down in recent years, eventually giving way to a return to its roots: realistic fiction, a trend headed by John Green (Cart 126), author of bestselling YA novels such as *Looking for Alaska* (2005) and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). Nevertheless, whenever social-political events and legal systems oppose human and environmental rights, one might observe a return to the publication of dystopian texts on a smaller scale – this time as standalone novels or duologies – that denunciate the wrongdoings and what might happen if one does not take action. One example that rekindled the surge of YA dystopias is Donald Trump's election as President of the United States in 2016 (another resurgence[37] should eventually be expected with his election for a second term in 2024). The election, more or less veiled, frames YA dystopias such as *We Set the Dark on Fire* (2019) by Tehlor Kay Mejia, *Internment* (2019) by Samira Ahmed, and *Sanctuary* (2020) by Paola Mendoza and Abby Sher. Trump's hate speech against immigrants and non-Christian religions inspired the menacing worlds depicted within these texts. In *Internment*, Muslims are taken by force from their homes and locked up in detention centres. In *We Set the Dark on Fire* and *Sanctuary*, illegal immigrants are

[37] In the most recent prequel of The Hunger Games, *Sunrise on the Reaping* (2025), Collins depicts the mechanism the government uses to manipulate news outlets and spread fake stories, constructing narratives that align with its ideological agendas. The novel represents the power of propaganda and public relations, highlighting how these distort the individual's belief in reality – an approach that resonates with the tactics employed by Trump's administration.

preyed on, violently beaten, tortured, and murdered. *Sanctuary* further represents immigrants being caged and forced to do slave-work for the government: they are forced to build a wall that separates the newly seceded state, California, from the rest of the country. These novels portray Trump's America, where his policies are taken to an extreme – or, perhaps, the representations are not so extreme, since both adult and child immigrants being caged and separated from their families was not simply a stroke of imagination but in fact a reality under Trump's government.[38]

Barry Lyga's and Morgan Baden's *The Hive* (2019) also takes on Trump's America. In this standalone novel, the HIVE (Heuristic Internet Vetting System) takes over the United States of America. The HIVE has become a new form of social justice, where individuals can be condemned for their online behaviour on the mandatory social media platform BLINQ and punished according to the number of condemns their publication receives. Punishment, inflicted by mobs instead of the authorities, ranges from petty humiliation (the main character watches students throwing trash on a classmate punished because of a sour breakup) to kidnapping, torture, and murder. The HIVE and the BLINQ are instituted and approved by the President, whose in-text characterisation and interviews remind the readers of Trump and his speeches[39] – Trump, who, two years after the publication of *The Hive*, actually created his own social media platform, Truth Social.

"YA dystopias," Basu, Broad, and Hintz point out, "are a vivid snapshot of contemporary cultural anxieties: what individuals and even the human species as a whole might have to fear in the future" (13). In light of the current socio-political times, characterised by war and genocide, the increasing presence of far-right parties and totalitarian regimes, and climate change, YA dystopian fiction will hardly ever fade away,

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[38] Several news outlets reported that children were kept in cages in detention centres, separated from their parents ("Trump migrant separation policy").

[39] One example is the speech transcription that opens the novel. When announcing the HIVE, the President of this parallel America states: "Today, the promise of the internet is finally fulfilled in America. It's going to be big. And beautiful. And I think people are really gonna like it, and I think it's going to be very good for the United States of America" (Lyga and Baden 5). These words echo Trump's regarding the border wall to separate the United States from Mexico – he claimed it was going to be a "big, very beautiful door" ("Trump's Evolving Words on the Wall").

even if its publishing and marketing popularity declined by 2017. Its decline is frequently attributed to market oversaturation (Paterek "YA Dystopian Adaptations") and the rushed cinematographic adaptations, with examples such as Rick Yancey's *The 5th Wave* (2016) and Roth's *Allegiant* (2016), the latter "signal[ing] the end of [the] current trend of YA dystopian movie franchises" (Freeman "Allegiant Signals the Last Gasp"). YA dystopian narratives will continue to resonate with audiences, offering both cautionary tales and avenues for hope in an uncertain world.

1.3.2. YA Dystopian Fiction: Towards a Definition

As stated previously, following the release and commercial success of The Hunger Games, YA dystopian fiction took the traditional and indie publishers by storm, blossoming into numerous series. For this study to comprehend an ample sample of narratives that allows for the development of a theoretical framework, a selection had to be made from the pool of available YA dystopian works. The corpus selection process underwent several stages to reduce the number of works under analysis while still maintaining a significant number of texts that permit reaching comprehensive conclusions. Before establishing the corpus criteria, it was fundamental to define the concept of "young adult (YA) dystopian fiction" in order to catalogue the possible titles for analysis.

In *The Utopia Reader, Second Edition* (2017), Sargent and Claeys describe YA dystopias as a phenomenon from the twenty-first century that little differ from previous dystopias, featuring violence as a central theme and a romantic relationship as a standard trope (525-6).[40] They underline how to differentiate them from classical dystopias via a passage from Whiti Hereaka's *Bugs* (2013):

[40] Sargent and Claeys also write that most young adult dystopias "are written by women, have a female protagonist, and are aimed at a female audience" (525). Regarding whom YA dystopias are aimed, it cannot go without saying that they are often marketed towards girls, for example, through the depiction of what might be seen as gendered covers (Croggon "Gendered covers are failing young adult readers"), which can exclude male readership. Besides, "[t]he fancy covers of these books cater to a mainly white

> What I've figured out about dystopias is this: if you wake up and find yourself in the middle of one, the first thing you need to do is figure out if it was written for kids or adults. If it's for kids, then an overlooked ordinary person, probably you, will be able to rise and change the world. If it's for adults… then we're all fucked. (ch. 1)

Here lies a crucial point that I comprehend as a significant difference between canonical dystopias and YA dystopias. Dystopias are expected to be hopeful – after all, "dystopias that leave no room for hope," Vieira explains, "do in fact fail in their mission. Their true vocation is to make man realize that, since it is impossible for him to build an ideal society, then he must be committed to the construction of a better one" (17). Indeed, "dystopian worlds are bleak not because they are meant to stand as mere cautionary tales, but because they are designed to display—in sharp relief—the possibility of utopian change in the darkest of circumstances" (Basu, Broad and Hintz 3). However, while YA dystopias offer hope for the future within the text, the ending of canonical dystopias confines forlornness albeit the suggestion of a better world, which can be found outside the narrative. As Day, Green-Barteet and Montz state in the introduction of their work, YA dystopian researchers have noticed that "the potential for hope has often been identified as a feature that distinguishes young adult dystopias from those written for adult audiences" (10). They depart from the grim visions of twentieth-century canonical dystopias. A liminal body of literature between children's and adult fiction, YA speculative fiction (in which YA dystopia is often included)[41] tackles

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and mainly uppermiddle [sic] class, heteronormative audience" (Garcia 29). Although women write most YA titles, there is a sexism issue in the industry regarding the labelling of women's sci-fi and fantasy books as YA fiction despite their content. In a manner, "as more women's novels get mistakenly classified as 'young adult,' it furthers the message that grown-up fantasy and sci-fi are for men" (Nunnally "There's a Weird, Sexist Problem in Fantasy That We Need to Talk About"). Female authors' works are more likely to be categorised as teen books – authors such as Rebecca Roanhorse and Silvia Moreno-Garcia have pointed out how their science fiction and fantasy books have been and still are mislabelled. Before the release of the novel *The Hunger Games*, YA dystopias were equally written by female and male-identifying authors. Whilst I cannot refute the above statement, the publishing industry context and its inherent sexism must also be considered to elucidate the matter.

[41] Speculative fiction is an umbrella term that includes an array of "non-mimetic genres—genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality—from fantasy, science fiction, and horror to

contemporary issues by moving from oversimplified crises easily solved in children's fiction that resemble adult fiction, yet, unlike much adult fiction, it features a hopeful optimism often found in children's fiction. Despite engaging with adolescent problems, YA novels, Basu, Broad and Hintz contend, "are nonetheless tied to the broader tradition of children's literature that stresses hope. YA dystopias can uphold the tradition of optimism, embrace a more cynical vision, or oscillate between the two" (2). Fitzsimmons also advocates this potential for hope found in YA dystopias, arguing that each series "concludes with a gesture toward Ernst Bloch's 'utopian hope,' where society begins to reassemble itself, moving toward more-democratic, justice-oriented structures" ("Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy"). The conclusion of YA dystopian works usually leaves the characters' future suspended. However, there is always a note of hope and the possibility of building a better world, highlighting the utopian dimension within the YA dystopian text. In other words, building a utopia within these dystopian worlds is often possible. The open ending in YA dystopian narratives represents the spark of hope: hope not only for the character's future but also for the reader's chaotic present and future. It is this hope that will create a new world that denies the systems that have been overturned. The open ending, offering the possibility for a better tomorrow for the individual and the community, becomes a pattern in YA dystopian fiction; it becomes a genre convention.

Susan Watkins writes that in YA dystopias, "the world has been rebuilt after some kind of disaster or apocalyptic event along totalitarian lines to create a dystopian society where there is no individual freedom." These narratives "show us strong young women central characters who challenge the power structures around them and attempt to destroy them" (27). Discussing Victoria Aveyard's *Red Queen* series (2015-2018), Sarah Olutola compares the novel to many other YA dystopian narratives preceding it, which follow "a teenaged, female protagonist who, as a member of a marginalized class, lacks socioeconomic and political power and eventually joins a revolution against the

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their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres, including the gothic, dystopia, zombie, vampire and post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, weird fiction, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, retold or fractured fairy tales, and many more" (Oziewicz "Speculative Fiction").

oppressive ruling class" ("Blood Rules"). It is interesting to note that over the last two decades, teenage protagonists have taken over dystopian fiction. **"**Teenagers make natural protagonists for dystopian novels," Fitzsimmons reasons, "because they are expected to rebel and push boundaries, which is a necessary plot device for a dystopian narrative to perform its critical work." As she further elaborates,

> [s]tereotypically, teenagers feel that they are outcasts in society, that they are not understood, and that adult society is repressive, unfair, and built on outdated or arbitrary rules. Dystopian fiction magnifies those unjust, repressive elements and pushes them to the extreme, building a fictional world devoted to critiquing aspects of society that seem fundamental and unchangeable, and exposing the teen reader's place in the real-world equivalent of that system. ("Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy")

Adolescence within society is a time of turmoil, and teenagers constantly question the societal and political rules based on obsolete models, pushing them in order to change the world they inhabit. These views translate into these texts. Additionally, as I dwell on chapter 2, teenage protagonists are central to these stories of totalitarian powers and rebellion due to their in-betweenness.

Consequently, YA dystopian fiction, like YA literature in general, introduces teenage female and male characters in search of understanding the process of growing up and rediscovering their world. Hence, "[m]any young adult dystopias, in fact, have a distinct kinship with the *Bildungsroman* (or coming-of-age) tradition" and "the process of attaining maturity means an engagement with the corruptions of society, imagined as a breaking of innocence" (Hintz 191-192). Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that in *Bildungsroman* narratives, which Chris Baldick defines as "a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 27), the reader expects to accompany the protagonist on their journey into adulthood. Most YA dystopian novels conclude with the protagonist remaining a teenager (Katniss and June are exceptions; both are portrayed as adults in the epilogue of the final book).

As Roberta Seelinger Trites contends, many YA novels (especially problem novels) often fit the *Entwicklungsroman* novel tradition, which finishes before the protagonist reaches adulthood. Trites explains that "the character grows as s/he faces and resolves one specific problem. But because the time span of the *Entwicklungsroman* is more truncated than that of the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist of the problem novel is rarely an adult by the end of the narrative" (*Disturbing the Universe* 14).[42] The teenage protagonist is depicted as maturing and evolving throughout adolescence, resolving the conflicts that arise from a quest for identity.

By taking into consideration the corpus of theoretical and critical Utopian Studies I discuss in this chapter, I define "young adult (YA) dystopian fiction" as a text whose protagonists, ordinary adolescents fight dictatorial and/or powerful governmental structures to change social dynamics while struggling to understand their place in the world and build a fairer society, and the (mostly) open ending grants eutopian possibilities. Naturally, the term "ordinary" should be taken with a grain of salt because, as observed in following chapters, many protagonists have a skill or an innate quality that sets them apart from their peers, as, for example, Katniss excels at archery and has in-depth knowledge of how to survive in nature, and Tris is Divergent, which means that she possesses characteristics of the various factions, which makes her unique from other people. This definition is fundamental for delineating the main corpus.

The distinction between dystopian fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction, concepts that frequently intertwine, was also carefully considered. The list of YA dystopian novels[43] under consideration to outline the primary corpus also included novels that, in

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[42] As the author contemplates, the definition of *Bildungsroman* is inherently androcentric, excluding female protagonists. In *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (1981), Annis Pratt argues that the traditional patterns of the *Bildungsroman* do not apply to female characters. For female protagonists, the *Bildungsroman* often "provides models for 'growing down' rather than for 'growing up'" (14) since its plots are "shaped by the dominant social norms for womanhood" (16). Young female protagonists find themselves in narratives where they learn to be submissive and conform to the patriarchal order, fitting into the roles traditionally ascribed to them, such as that of "wife."

[43] The research took into account the following Goodreads list to outline the main corpus: https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/dystopia. Goodreads is a comprehensive and searchable book database that is updated daily by administrators and Goodreads librarians. As an up-to-date source, Goodreads was chosen to enlighten the primary corpus.

my perspective, more accurately align with the characteristics of post-apocalyptic fiction, as well as apocalyptic fiction.[44] For instance, Susan Ee's trilogy *Peryn & The End of Days* (2011-2015) is classified as "dystopian." Nevertheless, the narrative begins six weeks after angels of the apocalypse descend from heaven with the intention to annihilate the contemporary world. While these angels constitute an oppressive force, they have yet to build a totalitarian social structure. This is particularly evident given that humans are still scattered and in hiding, even though some groups are actively building defensive structures against the angels.

It is important to note that the distinction between these genres is not watertight. One text can easily contaminate the other, themes crossing boundaries and creating hybrid texts. One example is the worldbuilding of dystopias. It encompasses settings where disastrous events regarded as apocalyptic (such as climate change, nuclear holocaust, never-ending war, and pandemics, among others) are responsible for transforming the geographical, social, and political landscape. Therefore, post-apocalyptic fiction deals with the consequences of a worldwide calamitous event. This genre represents what ensues after an apocalyptic event that leads to societal breakdown and widespread death, such as looking for other survivors and provisions, wandering in a techno-free environment, and attempting to build new communities and social-political structures, which may steer towards authoritarian or strict theocratic governments, thereby contributing to the emergence of a dystopian world.

In her considerations of women's post-apocalyptic narratives, Watkins, who does not seem to differentiate between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic,[45] enumerates two key post-apocalyptic fiction features: "First, the world before the disaster is in living or

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[44] Succinctly, apocalyptic fiction focuses on events that end the world as it is known. The cataclysmal event occurs during the novel's timeline, and the narrative expands on its impact on civilisation and the characters' survival.

[45] Watkins also argues that conventional apocalyptic fiction, written mainly by males, tends towards conservatism. In these texts, "traditional patriarchal and imperialist definitions of what civilisation is are central and the momentum after the imagined disaster is either towards the restoration of what has been lost during the apocalypse, or focuses on nostalgic mourning for the past" (1). Contrarily, contemporary post-apocalyptic female-authored narratives claim "positive futures for humanity after the apocalypse, rather than yearning for the past or attempting to rebuild in the same way as before" (27).

cultural memory" and second "the clear attribution of blame for the apocalyptic disaster on human carelessness for the environment, the excesses of techno-science and capitalist exploitation of natural resources" (9-10). While worldwide destruction can also be attributed to human behaviour in dystopian narratives, the representation of living and cultural memory takes a very different turn. The erasure of living and cultural memory is common in dystopian texts, where the past is rarely accessible, often unearthed through long-lost documents and artefacts, and its knowledge endangers those who seek it. Moreover, dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and apocalyptic fiction serve distinct purposes. The sense of despair evoked in readers by dystopian narratives stems from the authors' intention to portray these dystopian worlds as genuine threats. This intention contrasts sharply with that of apocalyptic writings, which confront humanity with the horror of the end of society and humanity (Vieira 17).

In light of these concepts, I initially asserted the following corpus criteria of thematic and chronological nature: the novels (1) are part of the Anglo-American narrative literary tradition; (2) were published in the last two decades (3) by the so-called "The Big Five"[46] with a focus on the labels dedicated to YA literature; (4) novels whose action takes place in urban settings and/or in which the city plays a vital role in the narrative. Although the four initially selected criteria decreased the number of texts, they were shown to be fallacious. Over the last few years, the Big Five have acquired publishers that were once considered independent – not to mention their attempts to acquire one another.[47] The publishing industry is constantly changing. For this reason, this criterion was not accurate, negatively influencing the outlining of the corpus. Regarding the fourth criterion, while collecting the initial data on published YA dystopian novels, it came to my attention that, in numerous novels, the city did not always play a vital role in the narrative due to the action not being heavily set there (for example, even if power resides in the Capitol, in the 74th Hunger Games the arena is a large expanse of

[46] The publishers included in the designation "The Big Five" are Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, and Simon and Schuster. These publishers are so named because they are the leading book trade publishers in the United States.

[47] One such example is Penguin Random House's bid to buy Simon and Shuster in 2020 (Carras and Faughnder "Penguin Random House to purchase Simon & Schuster").

wilderness; in Kiera Cass's *The Selection*, the setting is a palace where the contenders for the prince's hand are isolated from the outside world). The fourth criterion would hinder a general view of the published works, leaving out YA dystopian novels that influenced the genre and, most importantly, preclude the production of a comprehensive study on the types of Gothic visions that are constituted and represented in English-language YA dystopian fiction. The initial criteria proved to be unreliable in fulfilling this project.

Due to these issues, I re-evaluated and modified the criteria. Hence, the corpus of this project consists of titles corresponding to the following criteria: (1) they belong to the tradition of Anglo-American fiction tradition; (2) they are published by traditional publishers (thus excluding self-published works); (3) they were released after Collins's *The Hunger Games*, whose success instigated the boom in YA dystopian fiction. By applying the criteria, in the first instance, I identified one hundred and thirty-one YA dystopias (Appendix 2), most of which are part of duologies or trilogies.[48] Since it was still a high number of works and due to time constraints, other factors were also taken into consideration: (4) the number of existing translations, (5) whether the novels were awarded and/or nominated for an award, (6) their popularity among readers,[49] and (7) if the books are bestsellers.[50] Regarding the book series, I evaluated the data gathered through the Goodreads database by taking into account the first novel in the series. Later, the first criterion was changed from "Anglo-American fiction" to "Anglophone fiction" to be more inclusive, that is, to encompass English texts that were not only initially published in the United Kingdom or the United States of America.

As my research focuses on the representation of girlhood within these novels, I found the need to add another criterion: (8) the narratives must feature a protagonist

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[48] For this analysis, I considered only YA dystopian novels published until the end of 2021, as this marks the year in which I compiled the primary corpus for this study.

[49] This data was collected through Goodreads by analysing the book data (ratings and reviews) and author (number of followers). All the books selected have more than 40,000 ratings and 4,000 reviews (the popularity line I drew to reach a feasible primary corpus).

[50] Regarding this criterion, not all books in the series achieved bestseller status; at least one book in the series has been a bestseller in the country it was initially published. They were featured on lists such as the New York Times Bestseller list and the *USA* Today's *Best-selling* Booklist.

or co-protagonist who identifies as female. This excluded all novels whose main protagonists are male-identified characters and where there are no female co-protagonists with a point-of-view in the narrative. Some of the series later introduced prequels and sequels which followed other characters, such as Collins's *The Ballad of Songbirds and Serpents* (2020) and *Sunrise on the Reaping* (2025), or where the female main character is now an adult and/or takes a backseat within the series, such as the last two books in The Selection series, *The Heir* (2015) and *The Crown* (2016), the sequels to Carrie Ryan's *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009) and Suzanne Young's The Program (2013-18), and Marie Lu's *Rebel* (2019). Hence, the corpus (9) focus on the original duologies/trilogies and the female characters that were first introduced. Consequently, while Marissa Meyer's The Lunar Chronicles (2012-15) has four main female characters, my exploration focuses solely on Cinder, who is introduced in the first book. The other female characters, each of whom lends her name to subsequent titles in the series, have no point-of-view in the first book of the series and are either merely referenced, quickly featured, or completely absent. Upon applying the new criteria to the original list of one hundred and thirty-one YA dystopian novels, I narrowed down the selection to eighteen titles (Appendix 3)[51] that constitute the main corpus of this thesis (see table 1).[52]

Table 1 - Selected YA Dystopian Novels

Title of Books in the Series	Author	Series Title
The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay	Suzanne Collins	The Hunger Games
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Carrie Ryan	The Forest of Hands and Teeth
Matched, Crossed, *Reached*	Ally Condie	Matched

[51] The data was collected between 1 July 2022 and 3 July 2022.
[52] This list is organised chronologically based on the publication date of the first book in each series.

Across the Universe, A Million Suns, *Shades of Earth*	Beth Revis	Across the Universe
Delirium, Pandemonium, *Requiem*	Lauren Oliver	Delirium
Wither, *Fever*, *Sever*	Lauren DeStefano	The Chemical Garden
Divergent, *Insurgent*, *Allegiant*	Veronica Roth	Divergent
Shatter Me, *Unravel Me*, *Ignite Me*	Tahereh Mafi	Shatter Me
Legend, *Prodigy*, *Champion*	Marie Lu	Legend
Cinder, *Scarlet*, *Cress*, *Winter*	Marissa Meyer	The Lunar Chronicles
Under the Never Sky, *Through the Ever Night*, *Into the Still Blue*	Veronica Rossi	Under the Never Sky
Starters, *Enders*	Lissa Price	Starters
The Selection, *The Elite*, *The One*	Kiera Cass	The Selection
The Darkest Minds, *Never Fade Away*, *In the Afterlight*	Alexandra Bracken	The Darkest Minds
The Program, *The Treatment*	Suzanne Young	The Program
Red Queen, *Glass Sword*, *King's Cage*, *War Storm*	Victoria Aveyard	Red Queen
This Savage Song, *Our Dark Duet*	Victoria Schwab	Monsters of Verity
Scythe, *Thunderhead*, *The Toll*	Neal Shusterman	Arc of a Scythe

I want to stress that I am aware of the limitations of the criteria applied. As Zetta Elliot denounces, "racism in the publishing industry is cultural and systematic" (402). With racism still intrinsic to the book industry, there is a notable lack of diversity in the

novels distributed by the major trade book publishing houses, whose marketing power can significantly impact a novel's worldwide popularity. Publishers define the market, and "[t]he problem with publishers marketing toward a specified market is the loss of diversity and voice that accompanies this decision" (Garcia 29). After all, "the marketing decisions often limit audiences in ways that leave youth of color feeling like outsiders" (35). Marketing becomes a tool that averts exploration or book-buying choice, offering readers books whose diversity goes from lacking to non-existing.[53] As argued in politics of representation, in media, one mode of depiction or portrayal gains primacy over another, thus revealing "the power relations and power structures in our society" and demonstrating "that controlling the meaning of representations is an elemental part of how power structures work and how political power is maintained" (Ghosh 1). Erasure, monolithic identity, tokenism, and racist stereotypes function to maintain power in the hands of those who hold it and create an artificial status of a white elite. While discussing the existence of a small number of titles by authors of colour, in the 2010 edition of *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, Cart points out that "[t]here still aren't enough editors of color, there still aren't enough writers of color, there still isn't enough of this, there still isn't enough of that–but most of all, the sale of multicultural books simply isn't generating enough dollars to entice publishers to significantly expand their offerings" (126).

The lack of editors of colour does silence non-dominant perspectives, but I disagree with the idea that there are not enough writers of colour. The wording should be reframed to "there still are not enough opportunities for writers of colour" or "there are not enough writers of colour being paid wages to be full-time writers," as exposed by the hashtag #PublishingPaidMe. Likewise, book publishing and bookselling are a business above everything else, focusing on profit over diversity and representation. Nevertheless, racism is inherent in the book industry. If a YA text does not disseminate hegemonic definitions of identity and replicate the dominant social structures, that is, if

[53] Read Garcia's *Critical Foundations in Young Adult Literature: Challenging Genres* (2013) for more on young adult fiction, the publishing mechanisms, and book marketing and the changes it operates on youth culture and its consequences on diversity and YA fiction itself.

it does not deal with Western notions of adolescence and reinforces hegemony, it receives less publicity and a book ban is called. One cannot generate revenue from books that are not advertised and/or are removed from the shelves.[54] Recently, there has been an effort to change the "whiteness" of the book industry. Nevertheless, while self-publishing and indie publishers offer an opportunity to Black, POC (People of Colour), and LGBTQ+ authors to share diverse stories led by non-white and non-heterosexual protagonists and side-characters, whitewashing, cultural appropriation, and racism are still too institutionalised in the traditional publishing world. Although "the number of multicultural books is steadily increasing each year, there remains a striking lack of diversity within the YA genre" (Garcia 37).

The culture of literary prizes and book awards lists is also problematic when it comes to changing this paradigm, as one can also find a lack of diversity on the lists and among the distinguished books. In the essay "Where Are the People of Color?: Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society," Steven T. Bickmore. Yunying Xu, and Myra Infante-Sheridan show how these lists consist predominantly of white writers. The data collected about the National Book Award for Young People's Literature reveal that book lists "are 75% White authors and only 25% diverse" (51), showing how problematic representations of race and ethnicity are and the harmfulness of book award culture. White authors, characters, and stories dominate most lists and awards. In a sense, these lists reveal who is marginalised or absent altogether from YA fiction, both within and outside the narrative.

Like many YA novels, YA dystopian narratives show a lack of diversity when we closely observe most characters' race and sexual orientation. The protagonists are often white cisgender heterosexual females who get into relationships (and love triangles) with white cisgender heterosexual males. Besides, most societies represented in these

[54] The following articles address the challenges of people of colour in publishing and diverse book bans and censorship: Mark Chandler's "Writers of colour forced to publicise themselves, Koomson says," Richard Jean So and Gus Wezerek's "Just How White Is the Book Industry?," and Madeline Will's "Calls to Ban Books by Black Authors Are Increasing Amid Critical Race Theory Debates."

narratives are white and heteronormative, and the texts lack any conversation on race and gender. However, this lack of representativeness does not mean ideologies about race are erased from the narratives. On the contrary, the reader can find discussions on the theme, even if not acknowledged. Frequently, Mary J. Couzelis writes, science fiction novels "reinscribe current social and racial hierarchies through their character depictions, and these portrayals often privilege the dominant race" (131). In *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* (2021), Meghan Gilbert-Hickey and Miranda A. Green-Barteet question the reason race, racism, and racial tensions and hierarchies are not discussed in YA speculative fiction. They list three possible reasons: (1) YA speculative fiction (YASF) relies on "imagined worlds in futuristic or fantastical locations," and because of it, "authors can, and often do, create worlds in which race neither signifies nor is used to justify systemic and structural oppression" ("Introduction"); (2) YASF texts recognize that race is a socially constructed category, and it was created to enable those in power to claim, maintain, and codify it; (3) race is no longer used to create and maintain power structures. Nonetheless, it does not mean the systems and social relationships represented are not based on racism, racial tensions and hierarchies, and segregation. YASF authors build postracial societies that erase the experiences and histories of marginalised communities. By and large, "[t]he effects of postracialism and colorblindness are not, however, as many white people seem to believe, an end to racism, but rather, a suggestion that racial discrimination and inequality are no longer issues that can – must – be confronted directly" (Gilbert-Hickey and Green-Barteet, "Introduction"). The monochromatic futures assert that race is no longer a concern, positing that racism is vanishing in today's society. Through maintaining narrative silence about these contemporary matters, as Couzelis affirms in her exploration of race in *The Giver*, *Uglies*, and *The Hunger Games* that YA dystopian texts "perpetuate the hegemonic status quo of pretending race does not matter, which only privileges the dominant race (132). After all, "[i]nclusion of multiple races in a futuristic setting could potentially acknowledge minority contributions to culture, prevent ongoing marginalization, and unsettle white privilege ideology" (138). YA dystopias, more often than not, mirror rather than defy racial stereotypes.

Through applying the chosen criteria, the selected titles are predominantly written by white American female writers. This thesis includes a few works written by women of colour (e.g., Tahereh Mafi and Marie Lu) and part of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., Victoria Schwab). However, although the authors identify with the aforementioned identities, the female protagonists of these novels are white cisgender heteronormative non-disabled females.[55]

1.4. Girlhood Studies: How to be a Girl in Ominous Times

According to Kennedy Casey, Kylee Novick, and Stella F. Lourenco, who analyse books published for the ages of zero to sixteen between 1960 and 2020, the representation of female characters has notably increased over the past sixty years; however, they "remain underrepresented" (7). Their findings indicate that "male protagonists tended to be overrepresented in fiction books targeted to younger children, and overrepresentation decreased as the age of the target audience increased" (11). Literature intended for older audiences sees a significant growth in the presence of female characters as protagonists. With the rise of YA fiction in the twenty-first century, female teenage protagonists have come to dominate fiction for adolescents. This trend is corroborated by several reports released over the last decade. For instance, in 2014, a year when YA dystopian fiction was still particularly popular, it was reported that "65% of the protagonists in YA novels were female, 22% were male, boys and girls shared main-character duties in 13%" (Sutton "Gender by the numbers"). This trend has remained steadfast, as data indicates that in YA novels published in 2023, 72% of the protagonists are female characters (Subity "The Young Adult Market Report"). The prominent presence of female characters permits the depiction of adolescences in

[55] The last book of *The Lunar Chronicles*, a series part of the primary corpus of this thesis, features a main Black character. However, the novel is written by a white author, and the portrayal of Winter is problematic due to the treatment of her mental illness and the scenes in which she is "disciplined—often violently—into docility" (Green-Barteet and Gilbert-Hickey, "Black and Brown Boys in Young Adult Dystopias" 14).

which teenage girls not only challenge and subvert the role that patriarchal society expects of them but also engage in acts of rebellion and heroism.

The representation of female adolescence in YA fiction is tied to girlhood studies, a field that came to attention in the late twentieth century, rooted in "*third-wave feminism*, which included the voices of girls" (Pomerantz 848), and the girl power movement. The notion of girl power emerged in the early 1990s as "an underground radical feminist movement that advocated for the improvement of girls' lives" (Harris 16), offering a transformative and always-evolving discourse on girlhood. Through its commercialisation, girl power took on several meanings, representing "meanness, hypersexuality, the pursuit of perfection, and the kick-ass girl" (Pomerantz 848). The field of girlhood studies interweaves with girl studies, which, in 1998, Gayle Wald defined as "a subgenre of recent academic feminist scholarship that constructs girlhood as a separate, exceptional, and/or pivotal phase in female identity formation" (587). Shauna Pomerantz, one of the most prominent voices in the field, states that girlhood studies is "a multidisciplinary field of inquiry into the lives, experiences, and cultural practices of people who identify as girls, as well as an examination of how girls are discussed and represented in popular and academic venues" (846). However, while the field offers an important perspective on the study of girls and girl culture, it is important to note that "until recently, girlhood has been 'the other' of feminism's womanhood: girlhood was defined negatively, against womanhood" (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 4); that is, womanhood represented the successful overcoming of female adolescence as if the former stage of life was nothing more than a perturbing life period to be defeated. Today, girlhood "is recognized as an important social category in its own rights, and girls are characterized as agentic"; girlhood is also "signified through a number of competing, often contradictory, discourses about what is means 'to be a girl'" (8, 10). The last three decades have produced several discourses on girl identities and forms of being: Girl Power, in which girls are positioned as agents instead of passive recipients; Reviving Ophelia, popularised by Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994), in which "the image of girlhood [is] fraught with danger" (Driscoll, "Girls Today" 22), and girls are victims of social forces; Girl Effect, in which adolescent girls are

key agents of development and investing in girls (especially in the Global South) is the most efficient way to combat poverty, improve health, and drive economic growth; and Girl Up, which encourages teen girls (mainly in the Global North) to become advocates for girls' rights globally, to name a few.[56] Despite Girl Power and Reviving Ophelia being positioned at opposite ends of narratives on girlhood, both discourses "have drawn attention to the status of potential of the adolescent woman, [and] have also, paradoxically, reinforced cultural expectations and limitations" (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 5).

Nevertheless, girlhood is not a monolithic concept. As Amanda K. Allen and Miranda A. Green-Barteet write, girlhood studies "accounts for the experiences and circumstances of young women, while taking care to acknowledge that there is no universal experience of girlhood" (615). A single formula cannot define it since cultural and racial differences construct experiences of girlhood throughout the globe. However, the erasure of racial, cultural, and sexual orientation in discourses on girlhood is common enough, leading to the construction of universal narratives on how to be a girl rooted in Western views. Additionally, discourses such as Girl Effect and Girl Up are embedded in Western (white) saviourism. Most importantly, the discourses surrounding girlhood show that it has become a site for hopes and anxieties about girls and girls' experiences. In essence, girlhood constitutes a culturally constructed space fraught with contradictions and constraints, existing in-between discourses and narratives as well as expectations; it

> is perceived as a liminal state, a neither-here-nor-there existence plagued by the very same systems of power that view female non-compliance to the socially proscribed norm as punishable since it can pose a threat to its androcentric power hierarchies. It is a struggle against social pressures to perform girlhood within the dominant hegemonic discourses that define the girl's socio-cultural context. It is also characterised by a fear of repercussions for voicing one's own

[56] The existing discourses surrounding girlhood highlight that it "is never predetermined; girlhood is not a stage of maturation fixed by biological imperatives and necessary states of psychological development" (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 11).

> truth—a truth that may not conform with the social expectations of girlhood and that can impact their relationships within the personal and public spheres. (Santos, *Untaming Girlhoods* 124-25)

In *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2002), Anita Harris delves into the construction of girlhood in contemporary Western societies. Harris argues that "[y]oung women today stand in for possibilities and anxieties about new identities" and "the creation of the contemporary social order and citizenship is achieved in part within the space of girlhood" (2). Girls are represented as the future; they are represented "as both carriers of and defenders against social change" (3). Within this context emerges the Future Girl, a global creation rooted in the concept of girl power. This construction of young women is influenced by current economic and work conditions and newly emergent ideologies about individual responsibility and choices. "Despite evidence that suggests gender discrimination is a persistent problem for women in social, political, and economic contexts," Sean P. Connors and Lissette Szwydky convey, "the Future Girl fosters the impression that feminism, having achieved its intended purpose of providing access to these political and economic spaces is no longer needed" ("From Girls on Fire to Historical Bad Girls" 37). Thus, in the twenty-first century, discourses on girlhood are frequently shaped by two recurrent themes, neoliberalism and postfeminism, without considering the socioeconomic barriers posed by gender, race, social class, sexuality, and disability. The neoliberal and postfeminist rhetoric places emphasis on self-making and individualism (Cann, Godfrey and Warner xi). Consequently,

> [m]odern-day girlhood is now defined by individualism, consumerism, hypersexuality, and the belief that girls can do, be, and have anything they want without fear of structural inequalities such as sexism, racism, or homophobia interfering with their individual efforts to achieve success. As a consequence, such structural inequities have now come to be seen as individual rather than social problems. (Pomerantz and Raby 288)

Roberta Seelinger Trites approaches the impact of neoliberal visions on speculative fiction, enumerating in her analysis the following YA dystopian novels: Collins's *The Hunger Games*, Price's *Starters* (2012), and Smith's *Orleans*. "Many of these speculative fictions," Trites posits, "feature strong and independent-minded girls who save the world from itself, as if the only thing that can possibly reverse the corrupt extremes of the patriarchy is a female" (*Twenty-First-Century Feminisms* 85). This assertion resonates with Harris's discussion on teenage females being the carriers of social change. Additionally, Trites defends that female protagonists in speculative fiction are "neoliberal individuals charged with saving the world by means of their individual assets" since they are unable to rely on the social-political structures, and their body "is a commodity—and it is often the only commodity that young women in speculative fiction can consistently rely on as entrepreneurs in a free market (neoliberal) economy" (106). In other words, these characters embody neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivities, with adolescent girls in speculative fiction and the Future Girl being closely linked.

Returning to Harris, the author identifies two categories of contemporary girlhood: the "can-do" and "at-risk" girls. The "can-do" girl is described as optimistic, confident, self-assured, self-investing, success-orientated, able to enact her subjectivity and agency, thus embodying girl power. As "can-do" girls, "[t]he idea of girlpower encapsulates the narrative of the successful new young woman who is self-inventing, ambitious, and confident" (Harris 17). The "at-risk" girl is vulnerable (the social-economic and cultural environment deepens her vulnerability), set to failure, self-destructive, and a passive victim. These girls, as Harris explains, "are imagined as both the passive victims of circumstances beyond their control, and also as wilful risk takers who use girlpower to their own (self-)destructive ways" (25). In her observations, Harris states that "it is the features of current times that render young womanhood a site of either new possibilities or problems, that fill young women with confidence and optimism or, conversely, leave them alienated and self-destructive" (14). Young womanhood, that is, girlhood, is an ambiguous, liminal site.

The representation of girls in literature, a branch of girlhood studies, is often shaped according to the cultural and social norms of the moment (many texts included in the main corpus reproduce contemporary discourses on girlhood and around girls). Discourses on girlhood produce more or less stereotyped female figures that can frequently be found in YA literature. For instance, the classic girl nerd, who is "nerdy, dowdy, and ostracized for her intelligence," and the post-nerd smart girl, who is "attractive, capable, and sexually desirable. She is clever and sexy, brainy and beautiful, and, though she may not always be popular, she has the power and confidence to build her own world" (Pomerantz and Raby 287). The butt-kicking girl, "brave girls who stand up for themselves and the greater good [and have] a moral compass and [are] trying to do the right thing" (Currie at al 42). Or the historical bad girl, who "[r]egardless of the historical time period in which she lives, [manages] to subvert the conservative gender norms of her day outsmarting and outshining her male counterparts" (Connor and Szwydky, "The Pre-Monstrous Mad Scientist" 93-4).

As I am considering the relationship between the Gothic and English-language YA dystopian fiction, my exploration takes into account the representation of girlhood and girls in the Gothic mode (Gothic girlhood) and YA dystopian fiction. The Gothic mode is "rife with coming-of-age stories for girls becoming women" (Deighton "I Don't Want to Close My Eyes"). As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, young female characters frequently inhabit the Gothic mode, the narrative following the transitional period from girlhood to womanhood. Subsequently, the Gothic mode presents a space to construct forms of girlhood.

In *The Gothic Child* (2013), Margarita Georgieva explores the role of children in Gothic literature from its origins through the early eighteenth century. Georgieva claims that "[t]he essence of the gothic child is to be both one thing and its opposite, which confers on its portrait a polarised and ambiguous aura, and simultaneously a combination of the two. The gothic child is thus always to be found in some sort of transition between one state and another" (196). Here, Georgieva emphasises the gothic child's liminality. As the author expounds, Gothic children "are represented on the threshold of death, on the margin of society […] orphaned, abandoned, lost, [and]

deprived of heritage, escaping or running," and, consequently, "are temporarily given access to borderline spaces outside of society – forests, islands, abandoned cottages, ruins, prisons" (197). Therefore, the Gothic novel "attempts to create a child figure entering parallel worlds, travelling to places outside the immediate reach of known society, where the limits shift from adult-enforced taboos, imposed on the moral and physical existence of the child, to unlimited freedom" (198-9). Although Georgieva's considerations take into account both young female and male characters, these descriptions leave the impression that the Gothic child is essentially a girl. After all, it is girls that are continually in a sort of transition, inhabiting an in-between that does not only have roots in being pre-teen or adolescent but also because they possess a body that is in a constant state of change (this view is developed by Leah Phillips in her considerations about female herohood that I summarise ahead). Hence, an in-between existence is an essential piece to the representation of Gothic girlhoods.

In the context of Gothic girlhoods – a concept scholars often use, yet it lacks a concrete definition – emerges the figure of the Goth girl, which is inspired by the Gothic heroine. In the essay "The Gothic Girl Child," Lucy Armitt explores this figure in Gothic texts published between 1845 and 2009. The Gothic girl child is understood "as an enigma; a cipher for the appealing nature of things not always fully understood; one who is alluring, but potentially dangerous" (Armitt, "The Gothic Girl Child" 60). She is of dubious age since there is a slipperiness in defining the bounds of the child. To such an extent, "in Gothic narratives it is much more common for girl children to become ensnared in patriarchy's refusal to let them mature" (61). Hence, Armitt's discussion of the Gothic girl child embraces girls from eight-year-old Flora (in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*) to sixteen-year-old Carrie (in King's *Carrie*). The author concludes by pointing out the difficulty of finding positive messages for young women in the Gothic literary tradition as sisterhood and girl bonds "are consistently fraught with danger, betrayal and loss," and concludes that "the Gothic girl child must undergo trauma on her journey toward womanhood" (72). The trauma the Gothic girl experiences is depicted by the loss of a parent (or both), the loss of childhood (indicated by menstruation), and uncanny otherworldly experiences.

Catherine Spooner also delves into the figure of the Goth girl. First, it is important to stress that Spooner defines girlhood "as a temporally fluid domain located prior to marriage, maternity, or meaningful career" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 101). Moreover, while exploring the genre of teen Gothic, she contends that girlhood is "suggestively constructed along Gothic lines, as barbaric overthrow of 'proper', patriarchally sanctioned, adult femininity," further explaining that "[t]here is a direct trajectory from Cathy's rebellion in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) to the modern teenage angst of the film *Ginger Snaps* (2000) or Rachel Klein's novel *The Moth Diaries* (2004)" (*Contemporary Gothic* 89). Similarly, through exploring the Gothic for girls in comics, Julia Round asserts that "Gothic for Girls constructs and acknowledges girlhood as an uncanny experience, interrogating expectations and reimagining its fears" (ch. 12). Spooner states that the Goth Girl is "attractive, quirky, intelligent and sensitive but troubled, and adopts black clothing in order to express her sense of difference from her immediate community," adding that, "[i]n her isolation, she taps into a broader image of girlhood in Gothic fiction" (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 99). Spooner's comments on isolation are supported by Armitt's characterisation of the Gothic girl child, who finds herself alone, unable to build lasting bonds with other girls. Hence, the Goth girl becomes "a version of the archetypal Gothic outsider, [who] is at odds with her immediate community" (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 100). Besides, the Goth girl offers "an opportunity to portray a darker sensibility or more biting wit within a larger ensemble" (117). She is isolated in both physical and mental spheres. She finds herself living in remote spaces far away from a community where she is mostly alone, with no one to talk to. Her journey to unveil her happily-ever-after is inscribed by experiences that are nothing more than traumatic. This description of the Goth girl encapsulates a significant aspect of my exploration and definition of Gothic girlhood.

In her exploration of teen films and by observing teen types and stereotypes in horror films, Catherine Driscoll claims that stories of Gothic girlhood are generally characterised by domesticity (*Teen Film* 97). Krysta Fitzpatrick identifies the cinematographic genre Girlhood Gothic, arguing that it is a "teen genre that not only depicts the abjection and uncanniness of white girlhood through a pejorative lens,

equating the transition to adulthood to a series of violent encounters, rendering most girls powerless victims but also reinforces patriarchal beliefs and values through the guise of girlhood-centred narratives" (7). Furthermore, "[t]he representations of girlhood in the Girlhood Gothic genre make transgressive monsters and silent victims of young women attempting to find their place in the world. Their desire for autonomy and agency is met with abjection and violence, just as they themselves are rendered uncanny and grotesque" (38).

With these considerations on the relationship between the Gothic and girlhood in mind, Gothic girlhood, marked by an in-between existence, represents a discourse of isolation, of being and/or feeling an outsider. It is characterised by violence and a traumatic journey towards womanhood (in fact, even though trauma assumes a pivotal role, it might jeopardise the conclusion of this journey). Girls are overwhelmed by feelings of terror and horror, anxiety and dread, and the sense of an impossible escape from their surroundings – they are overcome by a sense of claustrophobia (from this perspective, Gothic girlhood aligns with Chris Baldick's definition of the Gothic).

Moving on to YA dystopian fiction, Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz discuss the construction of a dystopian girlhood. Female protagonists of YA dystopian fiction "occupy liminal spaces as they seek to understand their places in the world, to claim their identities, and to live their lives on their own terms" (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz 3). Within the liminality – the most defining element of dystopian girlhood – the female protagonists can find the possibility for resistance and rebellion. Adolescent female protagonists in YA dystopian texts "use their in-between positions as a means for resistance and rebellion against the social orders that seek to control them" (3-4). The in-between state in which the protagonists find themselves has the power to redefine what it means to be a young woman. In other words, it holds the potential to construct a new discourse on girlhood within and beyond the confines of dystopian texts. Additionally, YA dystopian texts and their protagonists provide "the explicit exploration of the rebellious girl protagonist, a figure who directly contradicts the common perception that girls are too young or too powerless to question the

limitations placed upon them, much less to rebel and, in turn, fuel larger rebellions" (4). The authors conclude,

> while each individual protagonist's experience provides insights into the intersections of adolescence, dystopia, and rebellion, the larger picture created by considering the myriad representations of rebellious adolescent womanhood also calls attention to the broader impact of such stories. By insisting upon their female protagonists' liminal existences, these contemporary dystopian young adult novels participate in larger discourses about adolescent womanhood that redefine not only the young women themselves but also their place in their own society and the impact they may have on future generations. (12)

Hence, YA dystopian fiction contributes to a discourse on girlhood where girls thrive on liminality, becoming increasingly self-aware and politically active.

Inspired by Katniss's nickname, "the girl who was on fire," Sarah Hentges develops the concept of Girl on Fire, through an examination of how female characters are represented in YA dystopian fiction. In her observations, Hentges first differentiates between the Girl on Fire as an individual character and as a genre of Girls on Fire, explaining that "[a]s individual characters, these girls have their own challenges and most tell their own stories. As a genre of Girls on Fire, these girls speak to an important cultural moment and an optimism that shapes the future" (5). With both these views in mind, then, Hentges describes the Girl on Fire as

> rarely a perfect, infallible hero; she is most often a real girl struggling to find herself and keep her friends or family safe against impossible odds. She wants to discover the truth that has been kept from her, and from the populace more generally. She wants to cut the ties that bind and bring freedom to oppressed people. She is an outcast, a rebel. (6)

In her considerations, Hentges also suggests that "[t]he power of YA dystopia and American futures resides with the Girl on Fire. Ordinary girl or extraordinary girl, she embodies hope" (12). In the introduction of *Teaching Girls on Fire: Essays on Dystopian*

Young Adult Literature in the Classroom (2020), a collection Hentges edited along with Sean P. Connors, the definition of the Girl on Fire is further developed. The Girl on Fire is

> a fictional character in young adult dystopia who has a variety of influences on the real world. She questions the way things are and works toward change. She struggles, she fights, she explores, she loves, she nurtures, she challenges. She comes of age and comes of consciousness. She is often the last or only defense for those who cannot fight for themselves. She is intersectional and multidimensional. She is a story and a symbol. ("Introduction"4)

The Girl on Fire represents a set of values – "the value of collaboration, ingenuity, and persistence" (Hentges and Connors, "Preface" 1) – which are ingrained in her journey: a journey to find herself and to change the world; a journey into herohood. The actions of the Girl on Fire, Hentges claims, "are often activism in their worlds and can inspire activism in ours," justifying that "[r]eading about girls who change their world, or even just change their lives, makes us more willing to fight for our world" (227). In fact, the power of YA dystopian fiction to engage readers in political matters is observed by Lindsay Morton and Lynette Lounsbury, who argue that YA dystopian texts "function as triggers for political action by compelling readers' attention through a 'scared straight' approach" (57). These texts, Thomas J. Morrissey claims, "call readers to action through paratextual spaces that bridge the gap between real and diegetic worlds" (199). Hence, the Girl on Fire redefines girlhood and claims political authority for young women. This figure boosts female adolescents' confidence, particularly when it comes to controlling their lives and (re)claiming their rights as well as the rights of their community.[57] Indeed, as Sonya Sawyer Fritz asserts in the essay "Girl Power and Girl Activism in the Fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfeld, and Moira Young," YA dystopian fiction "can be understood as helping female adolescent readers to develop a

[57] In "Becoming Mockingjays: Encouraging Student Activism through the Study of YA Dystopia," Sean P. Connors explores how YA dystopian literature can be used as a springboard for student activism, empowering students to become real-life Mockingjays.

new awareness of their own potential as empowered socio-political agents who can confront injustice" (30). The Girl on Fire resists political forces in an attempt to change society. She is an activist.[58]

Interestingly enough, resistance is a key topic in girlhood studies. In their discussion of girls' literature and girlhood, Allen and Green-Barteet contend that "resistances (and the ways girls resist normalizing forces and power relations) are common themes in girls' literature" (617).[59] In their observations on the representation of resistance in literature, the authors argue that "girls' resistance – which is often portrayed with non-normative girlhoods – is often viewed with suspicion and mistrust, as something that must be monitored, controlled, and even stopped or prevented" (612). Consequently, "the concepts of girls' agency, power, and resistance (including how girls negotiate standards of normative femininity, or the continued expectations that girls will subordinate themselves to those perceived to be in positions of power) have all been – and continue to be – central concerns within girlhood studies" (616). They conclude that

> the depiction of girls' resistance within girls' literature is nuanced, complex, and ambiguous, often demonstrating the tensions or conflicting norms found within constructions of girlhood [and that] while our society purportedly wants strong, active, persistently successful girls, girls' literature suggests we are more ambivalent about girls who actively resist (or who want to remake) the very power structures that control them. (622)

Although resistance – and subsequent rebellion against the status quo that commonly emerges, principally in YA dystopian fiction – is crucial to the construction of girlhood, literary depictions expose the cultural tensions surrounding female agency and power.

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[58] Alexandra Aldridge discusses the role of dystopian characters as activists explaining that "[t]he dystopian hero makes a direct attack on existing structures or superego institutions through revolt against the status quo ethos. He usually becomes, in contemporary jargon, 'politicized', an 'activist'" (18).

[59] Allen and Green-Barteet clarify that "[t]he potential for girls' alternatives, resistant self-interpretations to challenge not only normalizing forces, but sometimes even the structures of power relations, is an important concept recognized within girlhood studies and a key narrative within girls' literature" (614).

The narratives featuring girls challenging power structures unmask the contradictions surrounding discourses not only about girl resistance, power, and agency but also on how to be a girl.

It is important to understand that "the Girl on Fire is not the first incarnation of the strong girl protagonist [even though Hentges would argue that] the category of Girl on Fire contains and supersedes all of the previous incarnations – the Smart Girl, the Historical Bad Girl, the Future Girl" (Hentges and Connors, "Introduction" 8). Curiously, even though the Girl on Fire archetype emerges from the representations of girl protagonists in YA dystopian fiction, she can be found in other YA literary genres than dystopian fiction. After all, the Girl on Fire is a female protagonist who is complex, intelligent, brave, and a triumphant survivor of impossible situations (Hentges 1). This description can be applied to other female protagonists of YA fiction, such as Laia of Serra from Sabaa Tahir's fantasy series *An Ember in the Ashes* (2015-2020) and Starr Carter from Angie Thomas's contemporary fiction novel *The Hate U Give* (2017). Although these novels are not set in dystopian futures, their protagonists confront strict social realities and their narrative trajectory mirrors that of the Girl on Fire – they too confront oppressive systems, navigate moral ambiguity, and emerge with a renewed sense of agency. The presence of the Girl on Fire across various genres shows its significance to contemporary representations of girlhood.

Even though scholars like Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz and Hentges identify the powerful dimension of the figure of the YA dystopian female protagonist, she is not a consensual figure. Indeed, the criticism that emerged is quite polarising: female protagonists in YA dystopian fiction are, on the one hand, revolutionaries that inspire political activism and take down binary notions that influence the construction of "girl" and "how to be a girl"; on the other hand, rather than embodying feminist ideals or offering alternative forms of female adolescences, their actions and behaviours propagate the patriarchal discourse.

In *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (2015), Jeffrey A. Brown explores the figure of the girl revolutionary through examining blockbuster films that feature teenage action heroines, including the adaptations of The Hunger

Games and Divergent. Like Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz and Hentges, Brown claims that girl revolutionary heroines inspire political activism. Most importantly, Brown argues that these young heroines

> are permitted to be strong, smart, resourceful, and violent in a manner that was unthinkable for teenage girls in the media of past generations, but they also reveal a melding of class-based, anti-authoritarian resistance within a gendered context. The heroines of these tales combine a progressive idea of adolescent girlhood with a cultural critique of patriarchal systems and oppression. (168)

The rebellion present in these adolescent girls' narratives is central to their stories, "not just as a resistance to patriarchal control, but also as a mediation of feminist and postfeminist principles within a larger cultural climate of neoliberalism" (168). In a postfeminist climate, narratives about girl heroines like Katniss and Tris challenge neoliberal discourses of choice and individual freedom, which are intrinsic to discourses on girl power. Brown contends that "[t]he Orwellian narratives of the girl revolutionary stories resignify choice and freedom as things that are not assumed but need to be fought for" (176). The author also states that "[t]he girl revolutionary narratives do present an affirming message about resisting oppression, the efficacy of collective action, the demeaning effects of beauty standards, and women's genuine empowerment" (191). By and large, Brown maintains,

> what we are seeing in these girl revolutionary stories is not a postfeminist repudiation of feminism, but a new, younger, politically aware version of feminism overthrowing the shallow, self-serving, and corrupting principles of neoliberalism and postfeminism. These heroines are a type of feminist wolf in postfeminist clothing. They may be pretty, they may get the hunky boy, they may have a veneer of platitudes about female empowerment, but within the narrative they are feminist through and through. (196)

Contrarily, Margaret J. Godbey suggests that Katniss reinforces conventional gendered expectations. Godbey writes that

> Katniss may be tough, she may be feisty, but her survival hinges on her ability to become an object of desire; thus, she evokes a fantasy of female power that does not disturb conventional conceptions of gendered behavior for teenage girls. Throughout the series, Katniss is nurturing, beautiful, submissive to adult male authority, and, above all, chaste. ("Beyond Sensation")

In exploring YA dystopian trilogies, Sean Daniel Donnelly articulates the concept of "dystopian girl." Arguing against the notion that she is a descendant of the critical dystopia tradition, Donnelly proposes that the dystopian girl is "an entirely new figure, both within the dystopian tradition and in popular culture more generally." Drawing on the work of Day, Green-Barteet and Montz regarding the liminality inherent to dystopian girlhood, he contends that "her liminality is often firmly resolved by the narrative endings imposed upon her by the trilogy format. These endings work to enclose the girl within normative understandings of femininity and adolescence, undermining the notion of her as the daughter of the feminist critical dystopian tradition." Donnelly further posits that the dystopian girl is "a figure who signifies the postfeminist, postracial and neoliberal assumptions which are hegemonic in early twenty-first century western culture" (5). He observes that, while she may initially find herself "in the liminal space of utopian political possibility," and be successful in her pursuit of radical systemic change, her narrative often culminates in her being encoded as a figure of anti-utopian negation (16). Hence, to Donnelly, the dystopian girl signifies a rejection or failure of utopian ideals rather than their fulfilment, casting doubt on the feasibility of a better world. This interpretation is one I do not endorse, as it diverges from my own reflections on YA dystopian fiction and its female protagonists, a position I articulate more thoroughly later in this thesis.

In *Untaming Girlhoods: Storytelling Female Adolescence* (2023), Cristina Santos criticises the view that The Hunger Games and the Divergent franchises feature "strong 'feminist' girl warriors" (xiii), writing that

> [Katniss and Tris] are, in my opinion, another example of a veiled patriarchal discourse: a strong girl fights to protect her love interest and/or family even though it could lead to her probable death. Sounds rather progressive, right? Well, let's dig a bit deeper—she does this by sacrificing herself for the greater good, no matter the consequences to her own well-being. These franchises feature girls who have the freedom to live (somewhat) outside essentialist gender roles, but only for a limited time—since, to remain members of their society, they must ultimately return to normative roles of wife and mother or be martyred in the fight. (xiii)

Santos further expands this view later in her work through discussing the figure of the YA girl warrior, whom the author describes as someone who "though seemingly packaged as a progressive, agentic, and active protagonist is, upon closer examination, revealed to be nothing more than a marketable disguise of codes focused on *taming* girl(hood)s" (*Untaming Girlhoods* 120). Although I agree with the Santos's criticism about some depictions of female characters in YA fiction being masked as progressive forms of girlhood and of being a female and, as Santos suggests, "just propagate persistent traditional stereotypes undervaluing a girl's intellect, agency, and in some cases, collective girl power" (xiii), I find myself questioning the assertion that these depictions "expose a culture of permissibility that it is acceptable for the girl to get beat up, mentally traumatised, and even killed since it is for the greater good" (xiii). As I discuss in the following chapter, YA dystopian protagonists experience violence in a myriad of ways, even participating in this violence (in)voluntarily. I agree with Santos' assertion that in contemporary society, cultural representations of violence against girls and women have become increasingly normalised, particularly when these girls and women are depicted as strong figures. In *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from The Hunger Games to Campus Rape* (2016), Kelly Oliver posits that in the genre of YA dystopian fiction, female adolescent revolutionary characters such as Katniss and Tris function as both predators and prey. Focusing on the film adaptations of the novels, Oliver suggests that "images of teenage girls being repeatedly beaten and battered on screen normalizes violence toward girls and women, including sexual violence. While these films feature tough girls who can fight off their attackers and protect themselves, they

also contribute to our acceptance of assault" (18). Portrayals of violence against girls, Oliver contends, "anesthetize their abuse in ways that not only normalize violence, including sexual violence, but also valorize it," rendering abuse as a typical aspect of coming-of-age (115). Furthermore, in these instances, the "violence toward strong girls can be interpreted as punishment for their independence from men [and their] resistance to patriarchal stereotypes becomes justification for their abuse" (21).

However, it is important to consider that YA dystopian fiction is rooted in the utopian literary tradition. As observed, it is the work of dystopian narratives to, directly or indirectly, criticise the cultural and social-political moment when they were written. YA dystopian fiction prompts readers to think critically about, for instance, the dangers of climate change and the rise of totalitarian governments by depicting the unsavoury societies that arise from these issues. Hence, in this perspective, YA dystopian fiction challenges the physical and sexual violence inflicted against girls and its normalisation through its depiction. That is, exposing a culture that tolerates violence against teenage girls (against females in general) is part of the work YA dystopian narratives in the twenty-first century must do. Today's society is confronting a growth of misogynistic ideas fuelled by the "manosphere" and far-right political movements,[60] and adolescent girls are targets of various forms of violence, which highlight their vulnerability. This violence includes physical and emotional abuse, sexual harassment, dating violence, and bullying, both in digital spaces and in physical environments.[61] YA dystopian fiction denounces a society that has come to accept the violence girls and women experience.

[60] The following articles examine the correlation between the contemporary rise of misogyny in society and its associations with the "manosphere" and far-right political movements: Arie Perliger's, Catherine Stevens and Eviane Leidig's "Mapping the Ideological Landscape of Extreme Misogyny," Tina Askanius's "Gender, misogyny and far-right extremism," Simon Copland's "Misogynistic mass violence is on the rise. Why are we ignoring it?," and Brianna I. Wiens, Nick Ruest and Shana MacDonald's "Misogyny has become a political strategy."

[61] My brief comment on violence against female teenagers addresses it in general terms, not taking into consideration factors that increase physical and psychological violence, such as race, class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

The representation of violence against females is common in the Gothic mode. As Spooner exposes in her conceptualisation of barbaric feminism,[62] Gothic fiction presents "a sado-masochists dynamic that appears to enjoy the spectacle of violence against women and the reaffirmation of cultural stereotypes projecting women as either victims, monsters, or *femmes fatales*" ("Unsettling Feminism" 129). Notably, the author also identifies the concept of "savage girlhood," through observing the female protagonist of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Catherine Earnshaw, and her desire of returning to her girlhood. In her observations, Spooner cites Moers's reflections on the savagery of girlhood. Moers calls Catherine's longing for her childhood, which has "been made up of hatred, brutality, and random cruelty," "the savagery of girlhood," constructing girlhood as a time of savagery, and suggesting that "[t]he savagery of girlhood accounts in part for the persistence of the Gothic mode into our own time; also the self-disgust, the self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction that have been increasingly prominent themes in the writing of women in the twentieth century" (107). Spooner concludes that savage girlhood "returns to disrupt adult decorum," and "is a subject position that can be temporarily and perhaps ironically inhabited in order to allow the expression of fierce passions, ferocious angers, harsh truths" (141).

The representation of violence against teenage girls reveals the importance of addressing girlhood as a deeply traumatic, Gothic space. Girlhood is a space of trauma, either due to the physical and psychological violence girls experience and/or perpetuate or its visible and invisible "monstrous" bodily transformations. As Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva emphasise, "[t]he changes in the growing body are much more prominent in literature featuring female characters, presumably because conventional male heroes are too busy with adventures to bother about bodily changes. Female characters, looking inward, perceive the changes in their bodies with fear and anxiety" (13). The fear

[62] Spooner states that barbaric feminism troubles feminism, contending that it "disrupts the dreams of progress towards an imagined sage future with its temporal discontinuities and returns. It does not clarify, rationalise or sanitise; it is risky, difficult and it does not aim to please. Rather, it offers an arrested space, in which the savagery of girlhood plays out, an unsettled and unsettling – a distinct Gothic – feminism" ("Unsettling Feminism" 144).

and anxiety derive from female bodily transformations still being somewhat taboo and something that should be hidden. The representations of and discourses on girlhood expressed above, with the notable exception of those rooted in the Gothic mode, seemingly sweep this pervasive violence that girls experience under the rug, as well as the importance of facing and learning how to survive the traumatic experiences. It is essential to stress that YA dystopian fiction addresses these issues directly, since, in the aftermath of traumatic experiences, female characters struggle with their mental health and develop coping mechanisms. It underscores that trauma does not simply dissipate following the dismantling of a totalitarian regime – for instance, as I address in the next chapter through the analysis of the representation of violence in these stories, twenty years after the fall of the Capitol, Katniss has not fully overcome her traumatic experiences, and has learned to coexist with her traumatic memories. Perhaps, then, one should not be as dismissive of the YA dystopian protagonists. They might not all be feminist heroines, and they might not all have a problematic nature. Their existence, nonetheless, gives voice to new forms of representation on how to deal with mental health. Besides inspiring girls to thrive in liminality and be politically active, they convey the important message that it is normal to feel down or learn to cope with traumatic events, demonstrating that navigating challenging emotional landscapes is vital to personal growth. As a matter of fact, it is an important part of the adolescent girl's journey towards herohood.

1.5. Deconstructing Herohood: The Rise of the Female Hero(ine)

> No single heroine dominates or endures. Instead heroines keep evolving, challenging authority and legitimacy, rebelling, resisting, and demanding makeovers. Traditional hierarchies of heroism are forever being reshuffled and rearranged as cultural values shift and are rebalanced.

Joseph Campbell defines the hero's journey in the monograph *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Also known as the monomyth, the hero's journey is the mythological formula of the adventure of the hero, describing a common narrative in which the hero departs on an adventure, goes through a transformative journey and returns home changed. According to Campbell, "[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return" (23). Furthermore, in the monomyth, the hero who sets off on this journey is someone who, according to Campbell, "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (23). Perhaps unexpectedly, Moira Young suggests that YA dystopian fiction features the same pattern as the monomyth:

> For the most part, dystopian fiction owes more to myth and fairytale than science fiction. These are essentially heroes' journeys – they just happen to be set in an imagined future world. The hero, reluctant or willing, is just as likely to be female as male. Something happens – an event, or a messenger arrives bearing news – and the teenage protagonist is catapulted out of their normal existence into the unknown. They cross the threshold into a world of darkness and danger, of allies and enemies, and begin a journey towards their own destiny that will change their world. They will be tested, often to the very edge of death. The stakes are high. The adults are the oppressors. The children are the liberators. It's heady stuff, far removed from the routine of everyday life. ("Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?")

In *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (1997), Margery Hourihan ascertains that

> [i]n Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in innumerable versions, from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational and dedicated. It tells how they overcome the dangers of nature, how other 'inferior' races have been subdued by them, and how they spread civilization and order wherever they go. It tells how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled. It tells how their persistence means that they always eventually win the glittering prizes, the golden treasures, and how the gods—or the government—approve of their enterprises. (1)

This is the story of the hero; that is, Campbell's monomyth. This narrative, which "has dominated children's and young adult literature, passing on the traditional values to each new generation" (3), follows a common pattern: the hero, a white[63] and young male, leaves home to venture into the unknown, where he encounters dangerous obstacles and adversaries, which he easily surmounts due to his attributes of physical strength, valour, ingenuity, rationality and determination to succeed. After a successful journey, the hero returns home, where he is welcomed and rewarded. This reward may manifest in the form of a beautiful woman (9-10). The hero, who "embodies the privileged terms of the interconnected dualisms which have shaped Western thought and values" (57), is defined by a set of characteristics. As Leah Phillips summarises in her discussion of female-heroes (the term she prefers to use instead of "heroines"), the hero represented in the monomyth is traditionally "a young, white man who is of some standing. He is also fit, as in physically able (often also attractive)" ("Impossible Journey" 4).[64] As a matter of fact, Hourihan states, the hero "is not merely young, as much as he is essentially an adolescent" (74). Unfortunately, due to the characteristics commonly ascribed to the hero of the monomyth, "quest stories cultivate and help to

[63] Although Campbell also draws on myths and narratives from a wide range of cultures (including African, Asian, Native American, and Pacific traditions), he often focuses on Western and European examples of heroes, giving the impression that the hero is white.

[64] Whiteness becomes central to the construction of the hero: **"**[c]lass and mastery, for example, directly engage the hero's whiteness by insisting that because of his skin colour the hero exists in an elevated position, a position rendered evident and knowable by his body" (Philips, *Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction* xvii).

institutionalize binary and hegemonic gender roles as well as patriarchal systems of power" (Hohenstein 1).

In addition to the characteristics Hourihan enumerates, Phillips identifies another fundamental trait of the archetypal hero: body stability. Phillips explains that body stability, even though it is not directly mentioned, intertwines with the characteristics that Hourihan highlights, determining that "[i]n a synecdochal exchange, hero and bodily stability and wholeness are one and the same, because without a stable body, there is no hero" ("Impossible Journey" 4). Body stability is of utmost importance to the archetypal hero. Recalling Mary Hilton's and Maria Nikolajeva's suggestion, bodily transformations are more prominently depicted in literature featuring female adolescent characters than in novels centred on male adolescent characters because male heroes are often preoccupied with adventures, leaving little narrative space to worry about bodily changes. This occurs because, Phillips contends, as "the adolescent girl is becoming-woman – with concomitant shape-changes – she is linked to the body to a degree her boy counterparts are not, despite the body's centrality to both male and female adolescence." Furthermore, "[t]he adolescent girl's heightened association with the body is not only the mechanism by which she is excluded from the hero paradigm, but it is also that by which hegemonic developmental schemes mark her as adolescent and limit her potential" ("Impossible Journey" 2). Female bodies are unstable – in fact, Hourihan stresses that "[h]ero stories inscribe the male/female dualism, asserting the male as the norm, as what it means to be human, and defining the female as other—deviant, different, dangerous" (68). Hence, if the male body is stable, the female body must be unstable. With all these exclusions they face, female characters that inhabit the hero's world do not become heroes themselves.

The exclusion of the adolescent girls in the hero's journey narratives as the hero is quintessential, as Philips notes in *Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Reframing Myths of Adolescent Girlhood* (2023), a study on how female-heroes reframe adolescent girlhood. The monomyth, Phillips argues, "excludes girls from the role of hero because they are his bride, while also barring them from that position if they do not look, and to a lesser dress act, the part" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy*

Fiction xi). Girls are objectified, becoming prizes to be won by the hero, comparable to the swords and potions he gathers throughout the journey. In other words, in these narratives, girls are typically represented as the hero's bride. In the monomyth, marrying the hero represents successful girlhood (xi). Subsequently, to have a successful girlhood, "the bride prize must perform normative white femininity, joyfully attend to house duties and chores and be made to sparkle so that she might secure a husband (the hero)" (2). In an attempt to move from the exclusionary practices promoted by the hero's journey, the emergence of female-heroes in YA fiction, Philips claims, redefines the parameters of heroism and femininity. Female-heroes "are pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a hero, girl and *even* human." This redefinition is made possible due to the inclusion in the conceptualisation of what it means to be a hero of the body, which is characterised as "fleshy, material, prone to change and capable of producing new bodies" (x).

Female-heroes expose the body and its fleshly materiality, a dimension erased in the archetypal hero's journey since the hero is associated with the mind, reason, truth and rationality. "Archetypal hero stories," Phillips clarifies, "erase the body and its fleshy materiality to mitigate the threat the body poses to heroic logic and rationale by erasing signs difference, enforcing linear, teleological development and insisting on isolating individuality, superiority and success" (xii). Conversely, "[t]he female-hero includes bodily instability in what it means to be a hero. In so doing, they work to reframe the myths not just of adolescent girlhood but of what it means to live and be within this world" (xiv). To do so, female-heroes "use the spaces between oppositions to forge a self that is grounded in embodiment and related to other selves" and the body is so central in this because "it is the ur-monster: the first and most intimate boundary, serving to preserve the difference between self (hero) and other (monster), but it is also the other within the self, ever-threatening order, stability and control" (20).[65] Subsequently, the inclusion of bodies and their fleshy materiality "within what it means

[65] Phillips suggests that "the hero's fleshy, material body is his first and most intimate monster – and the key to reframing what it means to be a girl" (xiv). The body is the key to reframing myths of adolescent girlhood.

to be a hero, mak[es] spaces for bodies that grow, break, bleed and change" (xiii). That is, it makes space for adolescent girls to move from being hero brides to become female-heroes. As a result, representations of adolescent girls as heroes

> work against the archetypes of the male hero and the damsel in distress, or rather the hegemonic gender allocations they usually maintain. The representations of the teenage heroines challenge the myth that heroes must be white, masculine, heterosexual, and privileged patriarchs and they also rework notions of ideal girlhood to include girls of color or queer girls, for instance. (Hohenstein 4)

In *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* (2021), Maria Tatar posits that the hero's narrative began a transformative process when women started writing. The rising of heroines reshaped the notion of what constitutes heroism: it "requires not just intelligence and courage, but also care and compassion" (Introduction). Narratives centred around female heroes depict the values they embody, specifically values of empathy, care, and connection, while constructing stories of trials that require resilience, persistence and the forging of alliances. This contrasts with narratives whose hero's power is used to injure, which are culturally enshrined by individuals (*ibidem*). In discussing the archetype of female tricksters**,** which are defined as "girls gone wild in ways that challenge cultural stereotypes" (ch. 6), Tatar explores a new hero archetype that has emerged in the last decades, the "warrior woman", a figure who does not only fight her own battles but is "also caring and compassionate, in touch with the natural world as well as with those who inhabit it" (*ibidem*). Although the warrior woman does present a different version of being a girl in (fairy-tale) narratives, Tatar worries that this archetype emulates the classic male hero. As she writes in a different study, "[w]ith the rise of warrior women in popular entertainments comes a degree of cultural anxiety about producing a new stereotype that, while disavowing the notion of princesses passively awaiting liberation, risks installing an even more disturbing archetype of female heroism" ("Female tricksters as double agents" 39). The warrior woman, on the one hand, runs the risk of becoming a stereotype like the male hero, while on the other,

her pervasive presence in media can lead to presenting female heroism as the reverse of female passivity. However, contrasting with Tatar's concerns, as well as Cristina Santos's vision of the YA girl warrior, in *Girl Warriors: Feminist Revisions of the Hero's Quest in Contemporary Popular Culture* (2019), Svenja Hohenstein interprets the girl warrior (exemplified, among others, by Katniss in The Hunger Games) as a figure that should be understood "as a complicated, complex, and ambivalent phenomenon that cannot easily be categorized into good vs. bad, empowering vs. disempowering, or progressive vs. conservative." Besides, Hohenstein contends that

> [u]nlike their male counterparts, who are invariably masculine, female warriors combine and fuse feminine and masculine gender traits; they are not either or, but both at the same time. Therefore, their portrayals offer more than a simple inversion of gender and instead highlight that this issue is more complex than many other mainstream cultural texts want their consumers to believe. (8)

Hence, the girl warrior stands in a liminal space. She occupies the in-between space between feminine and masculine gender traits. Significantly, in this same work, Hohenstein delineates the model of the feminist quest heroine, which

> follows the well-established pattern of the classic heroic journey quite closely, yet her narrative changes and subverts central aspects of both the quest and of typical characteristics of the male hero. In fact, the narratives deviate from the model of the quest hero in exactly those moments that usually maintain and celebrate traditional masculinity and male superiority and instead replace them with feminist elements [which] are staged as heroic […] thus contributing to and expanding on the model of female heroism. (14)

The feminist elements include the importance of community, the re-evaluation of femininity, and the challenge to patriarchal structures. Through the presence of these elements in the narrative, while the classic quest structure remains intact, it is

reoriented to centre on feminine forms of heroism. This shift brings emotion, collaboration, and resistance to patriarchy into the core of the hero's quest.

The embodiment of an amalgam of feminine and masculine traits of the girl warrior evokes Tatar's Trickster Girl, a modern female trickster heroine. In exploring this figure, Tatar identifies Katniss as a Trickster Girl. First and foremost, as female tricksters, heroines "mark a rupture in our understanding of what it means to be a heroine by embracing features traditionally assigned to the mythical hero and trickster [and] offer a final repudiation of Campbell's notion of heroines as self-contained women who are there to reproduce and replicate." Secondly, the contemporary incarnations of the female trickster

> has become a smart, sassy feminista [sic] and more, charged with sending new messages via literary and cinematic media about women's rejections of victimization, physical weakness, and household drudgery. Girl tricksters in particular seem consistently united in their double mission remaking the world even as they survive adversity. Justice becomes their consuming passion. [Additionally, this figure] has developed a more fluid notion of gender identity and has embraced androgyny in her postmodern incantations. Her double-faced nature—incarnating paradox, exploiting contradictions, and enacting dualities—enables her to straddle the gender line and to draw on her resilience in the quest for fairness and social justice. (*The Heroine with 1001 Faces* ch. 6)

In other words, modern female tricksters challenge and disrupt binary oppositional models, standing on the threshold between opposed categories. They also "are experts at getting out of the house [sending] strong signals about the possibilities, and perils, of new identities in the public sphere for women" (56). Moving into the public sphere, they no longer build their identity around the roles of "wife" and "mother." Furthermore, as Tatar emphasises, Trickster Girls reshape the world they inhabit as they battle opposing forces, assuming "a social mission once they refuse the status of victim, and justice becomes their consuming passion" ("Female tricksters as double agents" 57). Here, the Trickster Girl, similar to Hentges's Girl on Fire archetype, works towards social change that makes her an activist. Female protagonists in YA dystopian fiction often embody

characteristics of the Trickster Girl archetype – indeed, "in contemporary YA dystopias, female protagonists," Jessica Seymour contends, "tend to blur gender distinctions by performing many of the gender attributes commonly portrayed by male characters" (628) – as they resist and subvert dominant power structures using their wit, and, as I explore in the following chapter, operate in liminal spaces, living in-between spaces like the Trickster Girl. Santos's YA girl warrior also embodies this activist dimension, yet to the author, this is detrimental since her "personal dissolves into the political [giving] herself for/to others" and, consequently, "experience[s] a certain death of the self" (140).

Tatar is not the first to use Katniss to discuss new archetypes of female heroes – due to being behind the emergence of the new forms of YA dystopian female protagonists, Katniss often ends up receiving most of the (positive and negative) criticism that these adolescent girl characters face in scholarly work. Academics often use Katniss to move from particular to general concepts on the YA (dystopian) female hero. For instance, in *The Hunger Games: Spectacle, Risk and the Girl Action Hero* (2018), through exploring cinematographic adaptations of The Hunger Games, Catherine Driscoll and Alexandra Heatwole define the speculative fiction heroine:

> She is fundamentally brave and honest, with courage extending both to intrepid physical action, even when she fights reluctantly, and to critique of the way the world works around her, although she is often less insightful about herself. She thus opposes the traditional representation of girls as prizes rather than agents in myths, legends, and folktales. She also always represents the challenges posed by expected gender roles, as well as the comforts and pleasures they can offer. She often positions these contradictions as unresolvably complex, with the sacrifice of some pleasures or forms of self-validation required to choose others. (Introduction)

However, even though the speculative fiction heroine challenges the traditional gender roles of adolescent female characters in the monomyth, in an earlier essay, "Glass and Game: The Speculative Girl Hero," Driscoll and Heatwole express that "[f]eminist critics often do not embrace this girl hero. She is frequently dismissed as fundamentally

defined by her appearance and by the perceptions and praise of others, a view consistent with discourses on 'postfeminism'". Moreover, "this new girl hero is widely read as a disarming spectacle of ideal girlhood, her successes seen as superficial or incidental in comparison to the way they sustain restrictive codes of femininity" (261-2).

In the introduction of the edited volume *Heroic Girls as Figures of Resistance and Futurity in Popular Culture* (2024), Simon Bacon discusses girl heroes in the twenty-first century, introducing the Heroic Girl. An "umbrella (nomadic) term," as the author explains, the Heroic Girl

> describes the ways that young female characters with various cultural and ethnic backgrounds find the agency and their authentic selves in the face of patriarchal prohibition and violence around them. More so, this is an act they do not attempt just for their own sake but equally for those — sisters, mothers, daughters — around them. (2)

Subsequently, the Heroic Girl is defined as

> a girl who, by surviving the old order — in most cases hypermasculinities created by patriarchal normativity — is able to change her own life, and quite often, the lives of those around her. […] The Heroic Girl is one who literally defeats the world she was born into to become something she was not before [and] exists beyond the old order and makes her own future and identity with every step she takes. (6)

Additionally, Bacon points out, "the Heroic Girls of sci-fi [which YA dystopian female characters are part of] and Gothic fantasy or horror are often cast as 'warriors' as they regularly need to fight, metaphorically and literally, the forces of the old order within the narrative worlds they inhabit" (3). Notably, in his considerations, Bacon associates

the Heroic Girl with Carol Clover's Final Girl,[66] as she is an evolving form of the girl who survives due her own ingenuity while everyone around her dies, as well as links her to Anita Harris's Future Girl (despite Bacon not explicitly referencing the concept), arguing that the future "is no longer to be left in the hands of the forms of manhood that have brought the world to its current position but should rather be passed over to the girls" (1). As the author concludes,

> whilst the world appears to be intent on limiting the freedoms and choices open to women, young girls are the ones that are still able to envision and make possible an environment that is different than what existed before. These young women are no longer Final Girls in the singular, but Heroic Girls in the plural who care equally for their sisters, friends, family, and the environment who more than ever before are fighting to not only be heard and take control of who and what they are, but to change the very nature of today and tomorrow. (9-10)

These various visions of the girl hero intersect, contrast and expand upon one another, illustrating the figure of the girl hero as an agent of societal and political transformation. These depictions emphasise her capacity to heal societal structures and move from gendered conceptions that render her passive and victimised. The Gothic heroine is characterised by this passivity, suffering and victimisation that today's female heroes endeavour to deconstruct. However, the Gothic heroine[67] is an ambivalent figure because while she may initially appear passive, her journey frequently involves acts of defiance and cunning against the patriarchal structure that tries to ensnare her.

In classic Gothic novels, Fred Botting asserts, the Gothic heroine is

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[66] The Final Girl, Clover defines through analysing horror films released in the 1970s and 1980s, "is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. […] She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)" (35).

[67] The Gothic heroine is constructed in opposition to the *femme fatale*. For instance, if the *femme fatale* (or any woman who does not embrace the role of virginal maiden) is transgressive, the Gothic heroine is virtuous.

> prey to imagined as well actual dangers, quick to lose rational control and give way, or faint, in fear of bandits, murderers, ghosts where there may be none [and is someone who enjoys] unusual, if daunting, degree of independence, often drawn by misunderstandings and curiosity into situations that lead to a sense of powerlessness and persecutions. (*Gothic* 2nd Edition 5)

Kate Ferguson Ellis explicates that in Gothic narratives, the classic Gothic heroine is entrusted "to escape from the castle that has become her prison, to preside over its demystification, a process that usually requires its violent destruction, and to claim the fortune and the lineage that the villain has sought to make his own" (463). While in this process, the Gothic heroine discovers her agency – even though, on the one hand, it is not long-lasting, and, on the other, she is still not prone to fainting in the face of danger or required to be rescued by a male character (a rescuer who often becomes her husband). In *The Castle of Otranto*, Isabella and Matilda, who can be interpreted as the original Gothic heroines, at particular narrative moments, subvert the patriarchal system by assuming agency: Isabella runs away when she learns of Manfred's plans to marry her and produce an heir, escaping from his grip and ruining his plans; Matilda helps Theodore escape from her father. In these instances, they become Ellen Malenas Ledoux's "defiant damsels," a term the author uses to describe Gothic heroines that challenged perceptions by "responding actively to threatening situations" (331). Nevertheless, Isabella and Matilda each follow the two typical fates of the Gothic heroine: while Isabella is married off[68] to Theodore, now Prince of Otranto, Matilda tragically dies. Isabella's fate comes as no surprise, since, as Maggie Kilgour points out, "the domestic sphere is the only appropriate end of a woman's adventures: whether

[68] As a prize for her purity and perseverance, the Gothic heroine marries. Although she is neither murdered nor corrupted, in the end, the Gothic heroine still dies, even if figuratively. By marrying, she experiences a "figurative death," since she becomes a possession of her husband. Ruth Bienstock Anolik notes that "the conflation of marriage and death in the Gothic novel is supported by a complex of frequently recurring conventions. The trope of the dangerous male relative reflects the legal reality that the father and the husband, who promote marriage, whose economic plots and possession of the woman are supported by marriage, are the primary causes of the civil death of the woman. The recurring motif of the interrupted wedding […] operates, then, as a narrative attempt to defer the figurative death of the heroine" (27).

that woman be the heroine or the reader herself, who, the thrilling adventure of reading over, closes the books and returns to her daily duties" (8). At the end of the Gothic narrative with the dissipation of Gothic forms of domesticity, the heroine returns "to the real version, now purified of its contaminated forms, so that women's continuing incarceration in the home that is always the man's castle is assured" (38). However, Diane Long Hoeveler writes that even if the heroine of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot "destroy the patriarchy, she can attempt to outsmart it; she can mime it to death. Positioning herself as the deserving and innocent victim of oppression, malice, and fraud, the female gothic heroine exchanges her suffering for money and a man, a means of financial support and security" (18). Gothic heroines use their suffering to find themselves a comfortable position, exchanging their freedom for a domestic life under the control of the patriarchal order.

Nevertheless, Gothic heroines do experience freedom and engage in adventurous and dangerous journeys. Although Ellen Moers's considerations are about Radcliffe's heroines, her insights can be applied to the Gothic heroines that have emerged since the publication of Walpole's influential novel. Heroines in Gothic literature are maidens sent "on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties," and when falling under the sway of villainous characters, they

> are forced to do what they could never do alone, whatever their ambitions: scurry up to the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-invested forests. And indoors, [they] can scuttle miles along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperon because the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space.

As Moers concludes, in the Gothic novel, "heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction" (126). Nonetheless, as soon as their journey comes to a resolution, if the Gothic heroine survives the trials, she returns to the domestic sphere to become a wife. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, also observing the Gothic heroine in Radcliffe's oeuvre, proposes that "[p]art

of the uniquely Gothic quality of these novels derives from the tenuous positions of their disempowered heroines who find themselves both literally imprisoned in castles and convents, and figuratively confined by social expectations that limit their autonomy and circumscribe their options" ("Introduction: The American Gothic" 3). Hence, the Gothic heroine is portrayed as a victim of the patriarchal order. She moves momentarily from a passive[69] to an active position in order to protect herself from the villainous antagonists and restore the proper order. Nonetheless, she always finds herself back in the patriarchal society that deems women vulnerable and passive. A reflection of the gender expectations of her time, the Gothic heroine archetype is, more than anything, a stereotype that traps women in the private sphere and powerless social roles.

Although the construction of new archetypes of heroines counteracts stereotypes and challenges traditional roles, Tatar alerts to the flip side of the emergence of these heroines:

> As heroines emerge with new faces and features, and as they begin to put themselves on display, they inevitably provoke a backlash in the form of antiheroines, specters that haunt us and become a palpable and present feature of the cultural landscape, reminding us that fashioning new heroines is always shadowed by the project of inventing new villains. (*The Heroine with 1001 Faces* Introduction).

The redefinition of what it means to be a heroine is far from facing no resistance, triggering social anxieties that result in the creation of female villains as a way to keep the status quo in place or suppress female empowerment. Female heroism and villainy are linked constructs in cultural discourse, in which redefining one often redefines the other. While YA dystopian heroines are celebrated by readers, who are inspired to

[69] Notably, the passivity of the Gothic heroine is taken to new extremes in the Modern Gothic novels. Joanna Russ asserts that the Gothic heroine's "connection with the action of the novel is always passive; they are focal points for tremendous emotions, and sometimes tremendous struggle, simply because they exist" ("Somebody's Trying to Kill me" 679). In these narratives, the Gothic heroine is constantly portrayed as a passive victim.

become political agents and activists,[70] they are often regarded by their governments as villains. Indeed, beyond literary confines, as Tatar notes, these agentic and disruptive female heroines, who forge new pathways for being a girl and part of a community outside the domestic sphere, inspire real-life girls.

[70] YA fiction novels acting as a source of civic engagement is nothing new. As Antero Garcia states, "[a]s more and more youth are finding meaningful connections to the world and society through young adult literature, the genre can be seen as a liminal space of possibility" (Garcia 111).

2. Gothic Visions in YA Dystopian Fiction

I want to open this chapter with a narrative description that follows the main character's perspective. (This passage is not drawn from a specific text but is constructed to illustrate the thematic patterns that will be examined throughout this chapter.)

> Walking down the path, she glances over her shoulder as a feeling of being observed seeps into her. Trapped with nowhere to go, the sensation of claustrophobia and fear steadily intensifies. She unearths long-buried secrets that endanger her. She battles to preserve her freedom and will as those in power seek to crush them. She navigates enclosed spaces, haunted by monstrous presences lurking in the shadows. Desperate, she flees into the surrounding wilderness to escape her impending demise. Nightmares disrupt her sleep: she awakes in terror, screaming into the darkness. She is haunted by visions that might be real or mere hallucinations – there is no certainty.

These evocative descriptions could easily belong to the plot of a Gothic novel. However, they actually depict the tribulations faced by the protagonists of the various YA dystopian narratives under analysis. Gothic and dystopian fiction, although separated by time, as Amy Cartwright points out, "are linked by a common apprehension about times of change." The Gothic "has resurfaced again and again in times of moral panic and social disintegration, and [dystopias] arise from this same concern for the here and now which is transferred to a fearful future" (23). Unsurprisingly, then, to represent these concerns, dystopian fiction (as well as YA dystopian fiction, as I focus on this chapter) assimilates Gothic themes and motifs.

To answer to the main research question, that is, to understand what kind of Gothic visions are constituted, and how they are represented in English-language YA dystopian fiction, by taking into consideration the theoretical frameworks on the Gothic

discussed here, I elaborated a set of questions and, subsequently, applied them to the YA dystopian texts selected through the process of close reading. The following questions were outlined:

1. What governing or authoritative structure exercises control over the dystopian society in the novel, and how is this control maintained?
2. What is the position of the female protagonist in the dystopian society (e.g., insider/outsider, privileged/marginalised)?
3. Does the female protagonist experience and/or engage in violence (e.g., physical, psychological, sexual)?
4. What are the female protagonist's motivations to engage in violence?
5. What consequences does the female protagonist face as a result of experiencing and/or engaging in violence?
6. Does the female protagonist feel physically and/or psychologically trapped?
7. Is the female protagonist in a liminal position (excluding being a teenager) and/or does she move in liminal spaces?
8. What role does the representation of the past play in constructing or challenging dystopian social-political structures?
9. How does the female protagonist recover and/or reconstruct the buried past?
10. How does the re-emergence of the past influence the narrative arc?

Through these questions, this thesis aims to examine the dynamics of societal structures, gender and class relations, representation of girlhood, and the interactions between characters and their environments.

By addressing these questions, it becomes evident that YA dystopian fiction most frequently assimilates and incorporates the following themes intrinsic to the Gothic mode[71]: power, the past, and liminality. The depiction of these themes in the YA

[71] These subjects were identified through observing the critical and theoretical frameworks of the Gothic mode in the first chapter, even though they were not explicitly named throughout the discussion.

dystopian series selected is thoroughly examined in this chapter, where I explore how they are translated into the main corpus. The selection of these themes is neither arbitrary nor does it intend to claim that no other Gothic themes can be found in YA dystopian fiction. This choice arises, first, from an identification of recurring Gothic themes in scholarly discourse – an identification made possible by the initial analysis of the Gothic mode. Second, given that this study focuses on YA fiction, my research prioritises the Gothic themes that shape these YA dystopian narratives, which resonate with questions of adolescent power and agency – two themes associated with this literary category. Before delving into an analysis of each theme, I wish to stress the intersectional relationships among them: they often intersect, overlap, and reinforce one another. Although the discussion is structured thematically, inevitable interrelations and echoes among the themes emerge throughout the analysis. Additionally, while there was the intention to address each series in the discussion of the chosen themes, since the main corpus encompasses eighteen YA dystopian series, due to length and time constraints, the analysis focuses on those in which the themes are relevant and prominent.

2.1. On Power

They're gonna clean up your looks
With all the lies in the books
To make a citizen out of you
Because they sleep with a gun
And keep an eye on you, son
So they can watch all the things you do

My Chemical Romance, *Teenagers*

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock observes that "the central topic thematized by the Gothic is inevitably *power*: who is allowed to do what based upon their subject position within a particular society at a specific moment in time" ("Introduction: The American Gothic" 2). The Gothic mode centres around power imbalances, critically addressing concerns about the appropriations and misuses of power and how it is held by various institutions, encompassing aristocratic, political and religious, and exposing the patriarchal control imposed on women. As a matter of fact, the Gothic mode employs power dynamics in order to unmask the oppression experienced by marginalised individuals, whether based on their gender or race, as well as to critique social norms by framing them as ideological constructs. It is therefore unsurprising that Gothic villains are often situated in positions of authority. Usually a male character, Frederick Frank states, may he be "a debauched monk, rapist nobleman, cruel count, ferocious brigand, or malicious caliph, the Gothic villain is a two-sided personality, a figure of great power and latent virtue whose chosen career of evil is the result of a clash between his passionate nature and the unnatural restraints of conventions, orthodoxy, and tradition" (qtd. in Davison 69). A charismatic figure, the Gothic villain always holds positions of power within the institutionalised, hierarchical and patriarchal system that disempowers the Other. Hence, as Mark Edmundson suggests, the

> Gothic thrives in a world where those in authority – the supposed exemplars of the good – are under suspicion. The mind of terror Gothic senses hypocrisy in high places. But is also fascinated by heights, by power, fame. It requires contact with glamour to keep its spirits up, yet mistreats the fascination on which it compulsively feeds. It seeks absolute stability and assurances from leaders, and then rebels when the leaders are revealed as fallible and not fully in charge, or (worse yet) when they really do succeed in establishing complete control. A deep ambivalence about authority lies near the heart of our culture of Gothic. (20-1)

The struggle to harness or keep power translates into forms of control since authority figures who hold power often exert control over the disempowered. The attempts to fight back control "at the core of the Gothic can be divided into two broad categories:

the individual contending against impersonal forces directly, and the individual contending with a specific other or others (a human villain or monster) that itself is the symptom or reflection of larger personal forces." The impersonal forces that the Gothic protagonist faces "include weather, war, pandemics (zombie producing or otherwise), and, in some cases, God" (Weinstock, "Introduction: The American Gothic" 3). To discuss the theme of power, the Gothic employs representations of violence (physical and psychological violence, the former leading to the depiction of madness), surveillance (linked to the topic of paranoia), and entrapment (physical and psychological imprisonment and social marginalisation) – representations that often intertwine. For instance, social structures use their power to carry out violence targeting powerless individuals and social groups. The Gothic interrogates the constructs of power through the theme of transgression. Within the Gothic tradition, transgression is pivotal in examining the limits of internalised norms and values. The transgression of boundaries, "especially [of] those boundaries that define the normative power structures" (Taylor 49), including social, gender, sexual, and ethical boundaries, permits one to question and (re)define these same boundaries.[72] Gothic transgression allows the overthrow of conventional hierarchies of power.[73]

YA fiction takes on the theme of power dynamics as teenagers, who are in a transitional stage, find themselves at the threshold of being powerful and powerless. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (1998), a pivotal text in the YA Studies field, Roberta Seelinger Trites explores the construction of subjectivity, relations of power and repression, and the need for adolescent protagonists to negotiate the several levels of power found in the numerous social institutions to which they belong, such as family, school, and government. Trites claims that in adolescent fiction everything is linked to issues of power. Teenagers are asked to disturb the universe; that is, they are asked to assert personal power. This request is

[72] Nonetheless, such transgressions can trigger intense feelings of fear and terror, which can paradoxically reinforce the necessity of moral and propriety limits (Botting, *Gothic 2nd Edition* 5).

[73] Although the Gothic mode presents itself as a place of transgressions and itself transgresses the boundaries of reason, the subversiveness of the genre is often questioned. Frequently, the Gothic has been regarded as a conservative tradition; that is, it reinforces social, political, and cultural conventions.

part of the *ethos* that informs many adolescent novels. Through this questioning, adolescents "learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church; government; social constructions of sexuality, gender, race, class; and cultural mores surrounding death" (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 3). Thus, representations of growth are linked to what the adolescent learns about power, whether institutional or their own.

YA dystopian fiction could not avert exploring power relations. As Tris, the protagonist of the Divergent trilogy, observes two Dauntless members, Four and Eric, interacting on her first day at the compound of her new faction, she reflects on her father's words: "My father says that those who want power and get it live in terror of losing it" (Roth, *Divergent* 68). Similarly, in the Shatter Me series, its protagonist, Juliette, contemplates the nature of power: "In my very limited experience I've already found that people seeking power are not to be trusted. People with lofty goals and fancy speeches and easy smiles have done nothing to calm my heart" (Mafi, *Unravel Me* 126). It becomes clear that anyone pursuing or possessing power is not to be trusted. One of the key themes in YA dystopian fiction is that of power, where it "often targets difference, creates difference (like along economic lines), and fears those it cannot easily control" (Hentges 128). These narratives not only portray adolescent protagonists who, as Trites puts it, are challenged to disturb the universe but also live within oppressive systems of power that constrain their agency and subjectivity. Indeed, power dynamics are a central theme in YA dystopian fiction, as it is "a genre that focuses on societies in which rogue governments and (increasingly) corporations use surveillance to manipulate and control teenagers" (Connors, "'I Have a Kind of Power I Never Knew I Possessed'" 2).

Adult figures of totalitarian authority wield power to implement societal structures that undermine social cohesion. Unwilling to relinquish it, they go to great lengths to maintain it, even if it means acting in ethically insidious ways. Hence, as Antero Garcia proposes, "one major trope that appears is a contested grasp of power between youth and established adult authority" (71). Adolescents are the ones who

need to take over power to overthrow authoritarian figures and regimes, since adults are most often than not depicted as passive bystanders (those who are not passive bystanders want to replace the totalitarian system with one that serves their interests best). As Rebekah Fitzsimmons claims about the depiction of adults in YA dystopias:

> While previous generations of adults are responsible for the current shape of society through inattention, irresponsible behavior, intentional scientific advancements, or poor choices, [YA dystopian novels] demonstrate how adults also abdicate their responsibilities to fix the system. To become an adult, these books teach the reader, is to become an integral part of the system and to perpetuate the cycle of oppression. This creates a ticking clock for the young protagonist, who must race against the ageing process in order to complete rebellion before her or his coming of age. ("Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy")

The teenage protagonist must act before becoming an adult and, as a consequence, an integral (and complicit) part of the system. The rebellion against adults has positive consequences:

> The confrontation with the realities of the adult world may lead to a standoff between adolescents and adults that empowers young people to turn against the system as it stands and change the world in ways adults cannot, locating the utopian potential of dystopian scenarios within YA protagonists themselves. (Basu, Broad and Hintz 7)

Although relations of power between adolescents and adults represent an important facet of YA dystopian narratives because they are closely tied to the broader genre of YA fiction, YA dystopian fiction also explores and exposes concerns about how power is wielded and abused by institutional forces and how such power is imposed on powerless individuals – in this instance, female adolescent characters. Echoing the conventions of the Gothic tradition, YA dystopian fiction employs similar narrative devices and subjects to thematise power, such as physical and psychological violence,

surveillance, and entrapment (encompassing various forms of social marginalisation and imprisonment), and their repercussions on both characters and society.

2.1.1. The New Madwoman

And there's nothin' like a mad woman
What a shame she went mad
No one likes a mad woman
You made her like that
And you'll poke that bear 'til her claws come out
And you find something to wrap your noose around
And there's nothin' like a mad woman

Taylor Swift, *Mad Woman*

"Violence runs rampant in the Gothic" (Fall "Violence"). A critical characteristic of the genre, "[a]s an outgrowth of pagan vigor and Teutonic crudeness," Mary Ellen Snodgrass suggests, "violence surpassed mere threat in popular Gothic fiction" (353). In other words, violence is not simply hinted at or feared in the Gothic mode; it is very much explicit, not shying away from portraying scenes of emotional manipulation, murder, torture, and even rape.

From its inception, David Punter and Glennis Byron contend, the Gothic has provided a range of depictions and images of social violence (288) in order to interrogate and critique political, religious, and patriarchal structures of power that frequently employ violence as an instrument for maintaining social control (and, consequently, to hoard power). In these narratives, violence is usually ramped up against those who are socially and culturally understood as the other, including women – female characters are constantly placed in danger and subjected to brutal acts of violence. Gothic heroines experience various forms of violence, such as physical and emotional abuse,

manipulation, social repression, isolation and confinement. In, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily St. Aubert is taken to Castle Udolpho where she finds herself isolated and imprisoned. In *The Monk*, Antonia is drugged and raped by Ambrosio, who afterwards murders her to conceal the earlier crimes. In *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Lavenza is emotionally manipulated, denied the truth, and kept in a false sense of security until the Creature kills her; Jane Eyre from the eponymous novel is neglected in her childhood, being emotionally and physically abused by her aunt, and Bertha Mason is imprisoned in an attic; in *Dracula*, Lucy Westenra's body is, firstly, assaulted by a vampire and, secondly, subjected to invasive medical treatments, all against her will.

Violence is also a topic transversal to YA dystopian fiction. Nevertheless, "[i]t should be noticed that violence neither is new to recent young adult dystopias, nor exclusive to them: young adult fiction in general has a long tradition of expressly addressing themes such as war, suicide, persecution, exploitation, and immediate and personal physical and psychical trauma" (Heinze 33). Since YA dystopian fiction, Sean P. Connors and Matt Dingler propose, "is concerned with interrogating themes such as governmental authoritarianism, technological surveillance, and environmental degradation, it lends itself well to critiquing violence and the different forms it takes in society" ("'The Poor Get the Worse of It'"). To the authors, violence takes the form of personal (anatomical, physiological, and mental injury), structural (institutional violence), and cultural (beliefs, values, and ideologies that support personal and structural violence). Because of this, there is a sense of resignation in the inhabitants of YA dystopian societies. As they explain, "[l]ong-established violent realities carry a strong inertia, with the result that people may learn to understand violence as natural—that is, as simply "the way things are." This paradigm can manifest in feelings of hopelessness, as people resign themselves to accepting that what they assume are immutable laws of the world cannot be changed" (*ibidem*). In her study on Girls on Fire, Sarah Hentges contends "violence is the norm of navigating some of these future scenarios" and "[w]hile much of the violence in these novels is a matter of survival, violence also shows the inequalities and powerlessness" (121, 123-24). Those subjected to forms of violence often find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchical power

structure. Hentges further asserts that many Girls on Fire in YA dystopian fiction experience slow violence[74] (such as starvation and social marginalisation), which "makes change mandatory to survival if not also an improved quality of life" (126). Hence, the violence teenage girls experience in YA dystopian fiction does not simply encompass physical violence, extending to forms of slow violence. In the series explored, the protagonists experience as well as partake (in)voluntarily in a range of forms of violence (see table 2).

Table 2 - Types of Violence Witnessed, Experienced, or Caused by the Teenage Female Protagonists of the Main Corpus

Series	Main Character	Violence Witnessed or Experienced,	Violence Caused
The Hunger Games	Katniss Everdeen	Loss of father, sister, and friends; poverty; starvation; social repression; participation in the Hunger Games (burn injuries, attacks by Tributes and mutts); threats; exposure to Peacekeeper's violence; war; rebellion; bombing; attempted assassination.	Killing of Tributes, Peacekeepers, and a civil; participation in the rebellion; killing of Coin.
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Mary	Loss of parents and brother; eyewitness of her mother's transformation into an Unconsecrated; isolation; confinement in the Cathedral;	Killing of Unconsecrated; mercy killing of the boy she

[74] Rob Nixon coined the term "slow violence" in the book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). It refers to forms of violence that occur gradually and out of sight over the years.

		forced induction into the Sisterhood; threats; coerced into marriage; village destruction by Unconsecrated.	loves after he is bitten by an Unconsecrated.
Matched	Cassia Reyes	Forced matching; plague; loss of father (plague) and grandfather (poisoned by the Society); manipulation; cultural erasure; memory erasure; war.	Participation in the rebellion; inadvertently kills a boy by offering him blue pills
Across the Universe	Amy Martin	Conscious cryo-sleep; entrapment; near-drowning; marginalisation; sexual assault and attempted rape; stalking; drugging; threats; discovery of murder victims; loss of parents (eyewitness of their murder) and friends; gunfire exposure; colony war; kidnapping; forced hybridisation.	Resistance against Eldest regime; use of firearms.
Delirium	Magdalene "Lena" Haloway	Loss of parents; marginalisation; assault by authorities; confinement; betrayal; drugging; pursuit; starvation; witness of death in the Wilds (group elements	Self-defence killing; shooting of regulator; participation in the rebellion; participation in the Resistance attack on Portland.

		and authorities); kidnapping; loss of friends.	
The Chemical Garden	Rhine Ellery	Genetic virus; reproductive exploitation; loss of parents and sister-wives; kidnapping; shooting of fellow female captives; drugging; forced to marry; confinement; eyewitness of her sister-wives' death; pursuit; voyeurism; sexual assault; involuntary test subject in scientific experiments.	Emotional manipulation.
Divergent	Beatrice "Tris" Prior	Exposure to serums; dauntless initiation; bullying; sexual assault; loss off parents; gunfire exposure; persecution; pursuit; test subject in experiments; torture; bombing.	Dauntless initiation; killing of friend; shooting of mind-controlled Dauntless; participation in Faction war; release of memory serum.
Shatter Me	Juliette Ferrars	Parental neglect and abandonment; emotional abuse; mistreatment and ostracism by community; involuntary test subject; imprisonment; isolation; starvation; confinement; shot at; war; environmental catastrophe.	Accidental killing of a toddler; participation in the rebellion; killing during rebellion; killing of North America's Supreme Commander.

Legend	June Iparis	Loss of parents and brother; war; manipulation; exposure to torture; eyewitness of a massacre; pursuit; imprisonment; plague infection; test subject in scientific experiments to find a cure; attempted murder.	Service in the military regime; infliction of torture; patient zero of a deadly plague; execution order of Commander Jameson.
The Lunar Chronicles	Linh Cinder	Assassination attempt; social repression and discrimination; dehumanisation; marginalisation; emotional abuse; pandemic; forced into the Cyborg Draft; involuntary test subject in scientific experiments; manipulation; loss of her stepsister; imprisonment; interplanetary pursuit; persecution; public execution sentence; stabbing.	Bioelectrical manipulation (forcing individuals to hallucinate, bend to her will and/or drive them insane); instigator of Luna's rebellion; killing in battle; killing of Queen Levana in self-defence.
Under the Never Sky	Aria	Loss of mother and best friend; beating; exile; cannibalistic threat; poisoning; hostility from Outsiders; gunfire exposure; threats; exposure to torture; imprisonment; confinement; environmental catastrophe.	Self-defence killing; abandonment of friends in failing Pod.

Starters	Callie Woodland	Loss of mother; kidnapping of father; war; poverty; marginalisation; violence against unclaimed minors (Renegades and Marshalls); ageism; hunger; beating; self-destructive neurochip; attempted murder; kidnapping of brother; exposure to a political assassination plot; gunfire exposure; threats; drugged; institutionalised; explosion; imprisonment; bodily hijacking.	Use of gun; forced complicity in assassination attempt; sabotage of Prime Destinations; coercive control via neurochip; killing via neurochip.
The Selection	America Singer	Hunger; palace confinement; bullying; abusive competition; rebel attacks; exposure to friend being tortured; threats; patriarchal control; public humiliation; gunfire exposure; loss of father; recording of coercive propaganda; eyewitness of death of friends, rebels, and palace guards.	Provocation of political unrest; destabilisation of caste system via public dissent; participation in the rebellion; use of gun.
The Darkest Minds	Ruby Daly	Childhood kidnapping; emotional and physical abuse; isolation; torture; starvation;	Mind control; use of powers to torture; self-defence killing;

		child labour; death of friends, classmates, and Psi children; pursuit; sexual assault; bombing; betrayal; mental invasion and bodily control.	participation in rebellion; memory erasure.
The Programme	Sloane Barstow	Suicide epidemic; eyewitness of brother's suicide; emotional repression; forced confinement; sexual assault; forced medication; memory erasure; betrayal; pursuit.	Self-harm; physical attack.
Red Queen	Mare Barrow	Poverty; social repression; eyewitness of Silver violence against Red; conscription of brothers; confinement; threats; pursuit; eyewitness of brother’s death; imprisonment; torture; isolation; mental invasion; recording of coercive propaganda; war.	Self-defence killing; conspiracy to murder; kidnapping of newbloods; participation in rebellion; wartime killing.
Monsters of Verity	Katherine "Kate" Harker	Car accident; eyewitness of mother’s death; parental abandonment; exposure to monsters; mental imprisonment by monster.	Arson; threats; execution of monster; self-defence killing; creation of Malchai; monster hunting.
Arc of a Scythe	Citra Terranova	Multiple deadish experiences (broken neck, suicide, hypothermia, and hit by	Gleanings performed as Scythe.

	debris from an explosion); exposure to gleanings; forced to render her brother deadish; assassination attempt; sinking of Endura.

The violence these adolescent girls witness, experience, or even perpetrate subjects them to emotionally harrowing, stressful experiences. Consequently, in the aftermath, they experience trauma. The experience of the trauma resulting from governmental violence is central to the process of personal growth for these adolescent girls. Indeed, the traumatic journeys endured by these girls are an integral part of the construction of the plot of YA dystopian fiction. Trauma plays a crucial role in the representation of girlhood in YA dystopian fiction. Examined in the previous chapter, Gothic girlhoods are intrinsically connected to traumatic journeys. Although the violence in the selected YA dystopian narratives is analogous to that of the female characters of Gothic narratives, YA dystopian fiction protagonists are not passive bystanders of the violence inflicted upon them. They fight back, (in)voluntarily inflicting violence to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. Unlike the Gothic heroine, with whom their traumatic journey aligns, these adolescent girls engage in violence that permits them to resist becoming victims of the (patriarchal) political structure and restore societal order without relinquishing their agency in favour of perpetuating patriarchal norms that deem women vulnerable and submissive. Furthermore, the violence they partake in does not make them villainous, even when confronted with morally ambiguous situations that defy simplistic categorisations of right and wrong. Discussing the relationship between girl heroes and acts of violence, Catherine Driscoll and Alexandra Heatwole suggest that

> [i]t is to counter images of girls' passivity that all forms of action, including the most violent, are made available to contemporary girl heroes. Indeed, speculative genres make it easier for girls

> to act violently and remain heroic, as both their skills and the dangers they confront are unchecked by the realism required of other genres. ("Glass and Game" 277)

While female heroes, according to Maria Tatar, embody values of empathy, care, and connection, simultaneously, they are represented as participating in violent acts to counter traditional passive representations that female characters are associated with. In these instances, the female hero is depicted as occupying a liminal space between opposing binaries, such as nurturing and aggression and passivity and agency, embodying aspects of both (and, as a result, twisting gender expectations). Furthermore, as Hentges claims, "[i]n Girls on Fire novels, state violence is prevalent, individual violence is self-defence and survival, and collective violence is rebellion, even revolution—a means towards change" (126). YA dystopian fiction female protagonists use violence in their journey to bring positive change to their world. It is crucial to reiterate that scholars do not uniformly interpret the violence directed towards teenage girls in a positive manner. To Cristina Santos, as mentioned before, violence against the YA girl warrior is a form of containing her power and serves more broadly as an attempt to normalise violence against females. As Santos avers:

> With the success of the YA franchises *The Hunger Games* and *Divergence* [sic], Cinderella moves her quintessential transformation from the royal ball to the fighting arena where she is depicted as being capable of fighting along *with* and *against* the boys. In this case, the makeover/glow up is proposed as a feminist re-imagining of Cinderella, yet, upon closer analysis, it reveals itself to be nothing more than a manipulation of feminist ideals that ultimately allows violence to be committed on the female body within the permissible context of the "fair fight." (*Untaming Girlhoods* 185-6)

Nevertheless, as I have written, while I agree with Santos to a certain extent, it is imperative to highlight that YA dystopian fiction, rooted in the utopian tradition, serves as a critique of contemporary social-political issues by transporting them into future,

oppressive societies. Among these pressing and worrisome issues is the normalisation of violence against girls.

Given the pervasive representation of violence in the Gothic mode, the depiction of trauma is deeply entrenched in its narrative. Indeed, representations of trauma, even those extending beyond this mode, are often Gothic in their nature as trauma is depicted as an uncanny haunting: it remains ever-present, lurking at the edges of consciousness, awaiting to be evoked. Observing the relationship between the Gothic and trauma, Roger Luckhurst states that the latter is depicted in a somewhat Gothic language, explaining that "trauma psychology frequently resorts to the Gothic or supernatural to articulate post-traumatic effects" (98). In many fictions, may these be Gothic works or not, the psychological consequences of trauma are expressed through the usage of imagery and language associated with the Gothic mode, from the confrontation with a spectre, which is nothing more than "an absent presence, a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of trauma that characterise the Gothic" (Smith 147) and other supernatural beings to descriptions that evoke the darkly picturesque sceneries and heightened emotions characteristic of the Gothic. Luckhurst further contends that "[p]ost-traumatic experience is intrinsically uncanny, finding cultural expression in ghostly visitations, prophetic dread, spooky coincidence or telepathic transfer" (98). Fred Botting also notes the intersection between the Gothic mode and traditional psychoanalysis, claiming that due to the depiction of darker themes, it "becomes a fiction of unconscious desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies" (*Gothic 1st Edition* 18-9). In *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature* (2014), an exploration of the importance of Gothicism for children's psychological development, Michael Howarth writes that "the gothic suggests our deepest fears and desires, bruising our egos with its sublime power" (4). The Gothic mode is used to represent the deepest fears and desires in the human psyche. Unsurprisingly, it becomes a tool to represent an individual's trauma.

Gina Wisker contends that contemporary women's Gothic texts (and, in my view, Wisker's observations can be extended to Gothic texts written by women on the whole)

"deal with ongoing and vital issues: post-traumatic stress, hidden histories of abuse and neglect, the seemingly endless human potential for Otherising in terms of race, age, ability, identity, gender, potential, language, talent, geography or religion." (*Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 26). Hence, as Wisker articulates, the Gothic depicts forms of violence and its consequences, including post-traumatic stress. Emma Liggins also approaches the traumatic dimension that characterises the Gothic mode through discussing the ghost story, a subgenre of the Gothic. Female trauma is frequently addressed in the representation of Gothicised domestic spaces. These are haunted by the trauma female characters have experienced, including loss, death, and war, and become spectres of the past – as Liggins writes, "[f]atal rooms, witnesses to death and trauma, threaten the living with the secrets of the past, as the returning dead seek to repurpose domestic space" (199). Trauma, hence, is inexorably linked to the Gothic mode.

Trauma assumes a central role in both the Gothic mode and YA dystopian fiction. Because of this, it is important in this section to explore the concept of "trauma" and the evolution of relevant critical and theoretical frameworks within literary studies on the topic. I analyse in-depth representations of trauma and the coping mechanisms employed by protagonists in the following YA dystopian series: The Hunger Games, Shatter Me, Divergent, Red Queen, Monsters of Verity, and The Darkest Minds. I have selected these particular series for their varied portrayals of traumatic events and the protagonists' experience of a plethora of trauma symptoms – their experiences often intersect, as they share common symptoms and coping mechanisms, manifesting similar reactions to trauma.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922), Sigmund Freud coined the term "traumatic neurosis," which he used to refer to experiences that were similar to

> hysteria in its plethora of similar motor symptoms, but generally goes well beyond it in the very marked signs of subjective suffering that it displays – not unlike those in hypochondria or melancholia – and in the clear evidence it affords of a far more comprehensive and generalized enfeeblement and attrition of the individual's psychic capabilities. (50)

Freud posits that there is a persistent suffering pattern that has its origin in traumatic events: the traumatic experience repeatedly forces itself on the individual over and over again. In the nineties, with the publication of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth developed one of the first trauma theories in the literature, based on Freud's traditional model. In the classical model, Caruth claims that at the heart of trauma narratives is "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). At its root is a violent experience that confronts the human being with mortality. Trauma, Caruth states, is represented by a repressed, repetitive, disruptive, and dissociative experience; it "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Hence, trauma is experienced through successive acts of forgetting: "the experience of trauma repeats itself exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (2). The conscious access to the traumatic past is not possible because it is not traceable "in the simple act or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In the classical model, thus, trauma is an absence, a forgotten wound that can never be remembered and can only be witnessed unconsciously. As Freud affirms, the traumatic memory manifests itself in nightmares that take the subject back to the traumatic moment (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* 50).

Although Caruth's pioneering work is of vast importance and lays the foundations for all work on literary trauma theory, it has been disputed by critics such as Michelle Balev and Laurie Vickroy, who call for a pluralistic model of trauma.[75] They

[75] This model "suggests that criticism may explore trauma as a subject that invites the study of the relationship between language, the psyche, and behavior without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism" (Balaev, "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered" 4).

contend that trauma should be pondered across countless experiences rather than reduced to a unique universal response. As Balaev reasons, "a single conceptualization of trauma will likely never fit the multiple and often contradictory depictions of trauma in literature because texts cultivate a wide variety of values that reveal individual and cultural understandings of the self, memory, and society" ("Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered" 8). Contemporary fiction seeks to represent trauma[76] in a way that provides, Vickroy contends, "multiple perspectives that allows readers to meditate on the variety of human responses to shock." Indeed, as the author explains, "[t]he various traumatic responses beyond the notion of the unspeakable cultivate the subtleties of experience, which are expressed through behaviors, bodies, provisional identities, and survival strategies" ("Voices of Survivors in Contemporary Fiction" 130). Trauma is an individual and unique response to an emotionally painful and distressing experience that dominates an individual's ability to cope with everyday life. Most importantly, the subject can remember the traumatic past without reliving it repeatedly. Literary trauma representations are multi-layered and, contrary to Caruth's claim, the past is not only claimed but also not entirely forgotten, as much as the protagonists of these YA dystopian worlds would like to. Lena, the protagonist of the Delirium trilogy, longs to forget her past, which looms as an unwelcome presence, constantly haunting her:

> You may think the past has something to tell you. You may think that you should listen, should strain to make out its whispers, should bend over backward, stoop down low to hear its voice breathed up from the ground, from the dead places. You may think there's something in it for you, something to understand or make sense of.
>
> […] I know the past will drag you backward and down, have you snatching at whispers of wind and the gibberish of trees rubbing together, trying to decipher some code, trying to piece

[76] Contemporary trauma fiction "provides scenarios that confront readers with subjective endurance in the face of crisis and conflict, representing how defensive responses are created out of many types of wounding. […] These texts involve readers in the world that traumatized individuals try to construct for themselves, where they build psychological defenses against threats. Moreover, the books' narratives mimic aspects of traumatic experiences, such as fragmented thoughts or a dissociated outlook" (Vickroy *Reading Trauma Narratives* xi).

> together what was broken. It's hopeless. The past is nothing but a weight. It will build inside of you like a stone.
>
> Take it from me: If you hear the past speaking to you, feel it tugging at your back and running its fingers up your spine, the best thing to do—the only thing—is run. (Oliver, *Delirium* 176)

Fortunately, Lena does not follow her own advice, because confronting the traumatic past can provide healing – at least to the degree that healing is possible after everything these teenage girls go through.

To clarify, as it is not my aim with this investigation to claim YA dystopian fiction is Gothic fiction, it is also not my objective to categorise the main corpus of this research as trauma fiction. However, it is noteworthy that the presence of traumatised characters and the multifaceted representation of their experiences and responses to trauma are prominent elements in YA dystopian narratives. This prevalence is a consequence of the contexts in which these stories are situated, claustrophobic totalitarian environments, characterised by constant surveillance, wherein violence emerges as a defining characteristic. Authors of YA dystopian fiction depict signs of trauma as their characters navigate and respond to traumatic experiences within adverse, violent social environments. Quite interestingly, place and sociopolitical context are two important themes in the construction of trauma. "The trauma novel," Balaev writes,

> demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments. Novels represent this disruption between the self and others by carefully describing the place of trauma because the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of traumatic experience. The primacy of place in the representation of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context, and, in fact, organizes memory and meaning of trauma. ("Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" 149-50)

Analogous to the trauma novel, YA dystopian fiction positions place as pivotal to the occurrence of traumatic incidents. The intricate relationship between characters and place elucidates its significance to the development of trauma and the importance of the cultural and political specificities of place in the process of further traumatisation and/or recovery. Moreover, living daily in traumatic environments halts any chance of recovery, prompting in the characters the need for change – for rebellion – in order to find a semblance of stability that allows them to confront their ghosts. Hence, traumatic experiences are common to the main characters of YA dystopian novels since trauma is a catalyser for the plot. That is, it has a catalytic effect, driving the characters to confront those who are responsible for their trauma; the protagonists need to face those who damaged them emotionally if they want a chance to heal.

Within the corpus under analysis, the adolescent girls navigate deeply traumatic experiences arising from several forms of violence to which they are subjected, whether intentionally or unintentionally (although some of these forms of violence are accidental, such as losing one or both parents, they are ultimately produced by the dystopian conditions in which the characters live), such as, surviving a life-threatening event, killing another human being, witnessing or being the victim of acts of extreme violence and/or torture, and being incarcerated. As they experience trauma at a young age (many have been traumatised when they were just children due to, for instance, losing one or both parental figures and enduring poverty and marginalisation), trauma shapes their views of the world and, consequently, their behaviour and actions towards it and its inhabitants. Maria P.P. Root lists the multitude of behaviours by means of which trauma can manifest: “anxiety, panic, depression, multiple personalities, paranoia, anger, and sleep problems; tendencies towards suicidality, irritability, mood swings, and odd rituals; difficulty trusting people and difficult relationships; and general despair, aimlessness, and hopelessness” (229). All these girls manifest these behaviours to a greater or lesser extent. Their post-trauma response and healing are thwarted due to living in traumatic environments; that is, due to living in a totalitarian and violent context. This ongoing exposure not only intensifies the original trauma but also plays a significant role in maintaining it over time.

In The Hunger Games, Katniss is deeply emotionally scarred after participating in the Games. However, prior to stepping into the arena, Katniss has already gone through disturbing experiences. Her father died in a mine explosion, leaving her mother in a catatonic state, who therefore neglects her daughters to the point that they almost starve to death, thereby forcing an eleven-year-old Katniss to become the sole provider for her family. Due to these traumatic experiences, Katniss keeps her distance from almost everyone, her only friend being Gale, and is always suspicious of people's motives for wanting to help her. These behaviours aid Katniss in surviving in a harsh, oppressive environment. While in the arena, Katniss witnesses in-person the death of the other Tributes (after the death of an allied Tribute, Rue, she experiences signs of depression, being unable to move or eat, and later understands her mother's behaviour after losing her husband) and is forced to partake in this same violence to survive. After being declared the Victor, Katniss grapples with the emotional wounds of the Games, being haunted by traumatic memories. She manifests depressive behaviours and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Individuals "with PTSD have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares; they may feel sadness, fear or anger; and they may feel detached or estranged from other people" ("What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?"). These symptoms are not only experienced by Katniss but also by many YA dystopian heroines who find themselves struggling with PTSD due to their ordeals.

Before the Hunger Games, Katniss's dreams were haunted by her father's death. Afterwards, she has terrifying nightmares about everything that happened during the Games. As she reflects,

> [n]ightmares — which I was no stranger to before the Games — now plague me whenever I sleep. But the old standby, the one my father being blown to bits in the mines, is rare. Instead I relive versions of what happened in the arena. My worthless attempt to save Rue. Peeta bleeding to death. Glimmer's bloated body disintegrating in my hands. Cato's horrific end with the mutations. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 61)

As the narrative progresses, the appalling imagery of her nightmares intensifies:

> At some point, Clove, the girl from District 2, enters my dreams. She chases me, pins me to the ground, and pulls out a knife to cut my face. It digs deeply into my cheek, opening a wide gash. Then Clove begins to transform, her face elongating into a snout, dark fur sprouting from her skin, her fingernails growing into long claws, but her eyes remain unchanged. She becomes the muttation form of herself, the wolflike creation of the Capitol that terrorized us […]. Clove begins to lap the blood flowing from my wound, each lick sending a new wave of pain through my face. I give a strangled cry and wake with a start, sweating and shivering at once. (137)

After the overthrow of the Capitol, in a truly Gothic fashion, Katniss dreams of being buried alive:

> I'm lying at the bottom of a deep grave, and every dead person I know by name comes by and throws a shovel full of ashes on me. It's quite a long dream, considering the list of people, and the deeper I'm buried, the harder it is to breathe. I try to call out, begging them to stop, but the ashes fill my mouth and nose and I can't make any sound. Still the shovel scrapes on and on and on…. (Collins, *Mockingjay* 429)

Katniss is haunted by frightening nightmares that manifest her most profound fears as well as her guilt and grief over everyone she lost.

Similarly, Juliette in the Shatter Me series endures nightmares that also expose her emotional wounds. After unintentionally killing a three-year-old boy, who was being mistreated by his mother, with her touch, Juliette is forced into hospitals, law offices, and juvenile detention centres, where she is drugged and probed and suffers through electroshock therapy (Mafi, *Shatter Me* 151). Finally, she is sent to an asylum where she is confined (and starved) in isolation for over 264 days. Although Juliette is not insane, because of her experiences prior to and after her incarceration, she is mentally debilitated. The isolation she experiences drives her to the edge of madness – as Juliette

is told, she has lived on the edge of insanity all her life and has started to believe that she is crazy (134) – and she wakes every day hoping to die. As she understands in her healing process and looking at who she had been: "I lived in a really dark place […]. I wasn't safe in my own mind. I woke up every morning hoping to die and then spent the rest of the day wondering if maybe I was already dead because I couldn't even tell the *difference*" (Mafi, *Ignite Me* 244). When she sleeps, not only does Juliette wake up screaming, but she also has nightmares that are a repetition of the traumatic memories, as well as a manifestation of her fears:

> My dreams are bloody and bleeding and blood is bleeding all over my mind and I can't sleep anymore. The only dreams that ever used to give me peace are gone and I don't know how to get them back. […] All I know is that now when I close my eyes I see nothing but devastation. Fletcher is being shot over and over and over again and Jenkins is dying in my arms and Warner is shooting Adam in the head and the wind is singing outside my window but it's high-pitched and off-key and I don't have the heart to tell it to stop. (Mafi, *Shatter Me* 112)

The forms of violence Juliette undergoes lead her to experience several forms of trauma symptoms. For instance, she has a diminished sense of self (which I explore further ahead as it connects to her liminality and sense of monstrosity), believing she will never belong. Further, while living at Omega Point, the underground headquarters of the rebellion, Juliette reveals claustrophobic tendencies and struggles to remind herself that she is not a prisoner. She explains, "sometimes the old fears streak across my skin and I can't seem to break free of the claustrophobia clutching at my throat" (Mafi, *Unravel Me* 1). Juliette also experiences panic attacks: "Now I'm worried. Now my mind is a traitor because my thoughts crawl out of bed every morning with darting eyes and sweating palms and nervous giggles that sit in my chest, build in my chest, threaten to burst through my chest, and the pressure is tightening and tightening and *tightening*" (2). It is important to stress that Juliette's trauma shapes not only her psychological state but also her perception of identity and belonging, manifesting in both psychological distress and physical responses. In Shatter Me, trauma frames Juliette's journey of

recovery as an ongoing struggle to reclaim autonomy over both her body and mind. In The Lunar Chronicles, Cinder is also haunted by nightmares. Her most recurring nightmare stems from the traumatic experience she endured as a toddler, recalling the moment when she was nearly murdered by her aunt:

> She was lying on a burning pyre, hot coals beneath her back. Flames. Smoke. Blisters burbling across her skin. Her leg and hand were gone, leaving stumps where the surgeons had attached her prostheses. Dead wires dangled from them. She tried to crawl but was as useless as an upended turtle. She reached out with her one hand, trying to drag her body from the fire, but the bed of coals stretched off into the horizon. (Meyer, *Cinder* 76)

This frequent nightmare is a fragmented recollection of an event that Cinder does not remember clearly since she was very young at the time. It is a memory that, while inaccessible to Cinder's conscious mind, haunts her subconscious. Although this example illustrates Caruth's notion that the traumatic past is accessible through unconscious repetition rather than direct recall, Cinder never forgets these nightmares, even though she cannot situate them in her own life path. This instance suggests that the traumatic past that emerges unconsciously can be consciously remembered, refuting Caruth's theory.

Shifting back to The Hunger Games trilogy again, to punish the districts for being part of a new rebellion, President Snow, the leader of the Capitol, announces that in the 75th Hunger Games, the third Quarter Quell, tributes are to be reaped from the existing Victors. Learning that she will be back in the arena, as she is the only living female Victor from District Twelve, Katniss acts desperately:

> My body reacts before my mind does and I'm running out the door, across the lawns of the Victor's Village, into the dark beyond.
>
> …
>
> The next thing I know I'm on my hands and knees in the cellar of one of the empty houses in the Victor's Village. […] I'm cold and wet and winded, but my escape attempt has done nothing

> to subdue the hysteria rising up inside me. It will drown me unless it's released. I ball up the front of my shirt, stuff it into my mouth, and begin to scream. How long this continues, I don't know. But when I stop, my voice is almost gone. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 197-8)

When Katniss finally walks away from the cellar, she neither remembers how she got in there nor remembers shattering the glass window that resulted in her bleeding hand (200).

After the Quarter Quell, Katniss is classified as "mentally disoriented" and is on drugs to control her mood swings and hallucinations. The already-existing breach of her mental condition is augmented by her second stint on the Games as well as by the knowledge that her district was bombed by the Capitol and most inhabitants were incinerated. At this time, she develops a technique to keep herself grounded. Every time she feels she is losing control, Katniss tells herself: "My name is Katniss Everdeen. I am seventeen years old. My home is District 12. I was in the Hunger Games. I escaped" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 5). In the aftermath of the rebellion and her sister's death, Katniss stops talking. Doctors explain that her "silence has been brought on by emotional trauma" (395). A long time passes before Katniss utters another word. After realising Alma Coin, the leader of District Thirteen, was responsible for her sister's death, Katniss murders her instead of President Snow, and, subsequently, attempts to kill herself before Peeta stops her by taking away the night-lock pill. While she awaits trial for her actions, Katniss stops taking care of herself in hopes of dying. Eventually, she is "pardoned" due to her mental distress and sent back to District Twelve, where she starts recovering from the traumatic experiences she has endured. Nonetheless, Katniss never fully recovers. More than two decades after the fall of the Capitol, Katniss is still haunted by the Hunger Games and the rebellion. As she muses, while gazing at her children playing in the meadow that covers the bones of District Twelve inhabitants incinerated by the Capitol,

> one day I'll have to explain about my nightmares. Why they came. Why they won't ever really go away.

> I'll tell them how I survive it. I'll tell them that on bad mornings, it feels impossible to take pleasure in anything because I'm afraid it could be taken away. That's when I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I've seen someone do. It's like a game. Repetitive. Even a little tedious after more than twenty years. (438)

Katniss learns to co-exist with her traumatic memories, not by erasing them, but by finding strategies to endure their persistence.

In Divergent, after losing her parents, whose deaths she watched, and being forced to kill one of her closest friends, Will, who was under a simulation and could not be reasoned with, Tris not only freezes every time she picks a gun – initially, even a gunshot is enough to shut her down – but also, she can no longer hold one without feeling panic bubbling:

> I hold the gun out from my body, my arms straight, just as Four taught me, when that was his only name. I used a gun like this to defend my father and brother from simulation-bound Dauntless. I used it to stop Eric from shooting Tobias in the head. It is not inherently evil. It is just a tool.
>
> I see a flicker of movement in the mirror, and before I can stop myself, I stare at my reflection. *This is how I looked to him, I think. This is how I looked when I shot him*.
>
> Moaning like a wounded animal, I let the gun fall from my hands and wrap my arms around my stomach. I want to sob because I know it will make me feel better, but I can't force the tears to come. I just crouch in the bathroom, staring at the white tiles. I can't do it. I can't take the gun with me. (Roth, *Insurgent* 246)

Tris also experiences nightmares about and flashbacks to the moment she shot Will. Additionally, since she tries to bottle up her grief, it often causes her anxiety attacks. For instance, after dreaming of Will being pecked by a flock of crows, Tris wakes up rattled: "I gasp, pressing both palms to my chest. Now the monstrous thing [the grief] has its claws around my throat, squeezing my airway. I twist and put my head between my knees, breathing until the strangled feeling leaves me" (Roth, *Insurgent* 47). The

traumatic episodes cause Tris to face a detachment from her own life, experiencing suicidal thoughts. After confessing what she did under the effect of truth serum (even though Tris realises that she can fight the effects of the serum, she chooses to confess to shooting Will), Tris finds herself on a window ledge:

> I lean forward, into the air, holding on to the side of the window with one hand. Another few inches and my weight would pull me to the ground. I would not be able to stop it.
>
> But I can't do it. My parents lost their lives out of love for me. Losing mine for no good reason would be a terrible way to repay them for that sacrifice, no matter what I've done. (Roth, *Insurgent* 157).

Even though Tris does not jump, she sees her life as expendable. She reasons that "[w]e live in a dangerous world, and I am not so attached to life that I will do anything to survive" (289). Tris starts acting recklessly, putting herself in dangerous situations: from facing dangerous Dauntless members unarmed to giving herself to Jeanine, the main antagonist, to be studied and executed (even though she gives herself up due to Jeanine's threat of killing innocent people, Tris surrenders herself willingly, driven by the guilt that consumes her disguised as altruism). All because, as she recognises, "there is a part of [her] that wants to be lost, that struggles to join [her] parents and Will, so that [she does not] have to ache for them anymore" (212). Tris's suicidal rashness stems from a desire for absolution from her guilt and grief. While YA dystopian heroines confront a multitude of traumatic experiences in their journey that result in profound psychological scars, they rarely exhibit suicidal ideation (Katniss does plan to kill herself after murdering Coin, but only because she believes she will be executed due to her actions) or engage in self-harm behaviours. Nevertheless, The Program presents an exception through Sloane, who does indeed resort to self-harm. In the series, adolescents are compelled to suppress their emotional distress and exhibit emotional numbness to avoid the risk of being institutionalised. Emotional repression becomes paramount since the faintest indication of sadness is enough to send adolescents away. In her struggle to

conceal her emotions and maintain a façade of emotional detachment, Sloane engages in self-inflicted harm by burning herself:

> […] I need to do something before I break into sobs in front of them. There is a pamphlet for The Program sitting next to our phone in the living room—something every parent received when our high school became part of the experiment. But to me that paper is like a threat, always reminding me of the next step if I slip up. So I don't slip up. Ever.
>
> I look around the kitchen and my gaze rests on the gas stove. Walking over, I turn it on—the flames catching life in shades of blue and orange. I'm going to die if I don't cry right now. The sorrow is going to rip through my chest and kill me.
>
> But instead, I turn over my arm, the tender part exposed, and stick it into the fire. The burn is immediate and I scream out in pain, backing away as I cover the area automatically with my hand. (Young, *The Program* Part I: Uncomfortably Numb - Chapter Four)

Since she is not allowed to show grief, sorrow, or even mental distress over traumatic events, to have an excuse for crying due to the loss of her brother and friends, Sloane hurts herself.

In Across the Universe, akin to Katniss, Juliette, and Tris, Amy also has nightmares about the violent events she is put through. Amy travels to Centuri-Earth under an expedition organised by the Financial Resource Exchange (FRX), accompanying her parents to the colonising mission. Amy is put into cryo sleep to travel to Centuri-Earth, located three hundred years away from Earth. The entirety of the experience is distressing for Amy, from the years spent in cryo sleep, in an isolated in-between where she retained the capacity to think and dream, to her awakening inside a locked, watery coffin. Amy's awakening is described as agonising:

> Cold so cold it burns, but not with a burning that cauterizes, no, a burning that razes, decimates.
>
> …
>
> My stomach muscles seize. Can't vomit empty.

> Eyes see only blobs. Some bright. Some not. No focus.
>
> Mucus slips down my nostrils, down the back of my throat. Choke. Gag. Cough.
>
> Water sloshes in my ears, muffling the intonations of deep, male-voiced speech around me. Hands lift me from the slush of my glass coffin, and it feels as if they are rescuing me from quicksand. The cryo liquid clings to me, pulling me back into my watery grave, dragging cold fingers across my skin. (Revis, *Across the Universe* 77-8)

Not only does Amy endure the dreadful experience of nearly drowning within the cryo-sleep vessel, but the inadequacy of her awakening (being left locked inside the glass chamber, with no one to assist her until she is fully awake and drowning), leaves her body overwhelmed with pain. After it, Amy reacts negatively to the cryo-liquid (as a matter of fact, when she first takes a shower after waking up, she remembers how it felt almost like drowning): "the lingering scent of the cryo liquid brings bile to the back of my throat. I gag, my body remembering how it felt to drown in the sickeningly sweet liquid. I can't breathe, and then I'm breathing too much, and with every breath comes the scent of the cryo liquid, and that scent is killing me" (153). Amy's suffering is intensified by being locked inside the spaceship, *Godspeed*, as she starts experiencing claustrophobia:

> I think I will never like enclosed spaces again. When I was younger, before the freezing, I never felt claustrophobic. Now, even here, on the edge of a garden, outside, tight bands squeeze the air from my lungs, and my vision lingers on the walls that seem to constantly be pressing down on me. I close my eyes. If I let myself think about it, it's so, so much worse. (219)

Following her experience inside the enclosed cryo box and the threat of being confined until the rest of her days within the spaceship's walls, Amy frequently experiences panic attacks at the thought of being enclosed.

Amy's trauma is intensified by the predatory actions of Luthor, one of the ship dwellers, who attempts to rape her (221-3). Conversely, in *Divergent*, Tris experiences sexual assault as well; however, she does not outwardly exhibit the manifestations of

trauma typically associated with such an experience. In this instance, a group of initiates, including Peter, her nemesis, and Al, a friend, blind Tris with a strip of black cloth and drag her into the Pit, a deadly chasm in the Dauntless compound, attempting to throw her in. While walking to the Pit, Tris is groped. Jessica Seymour suggests that her attack is a consequence of "[t]hese characters perceive[ing] her as a threat to their masculinity and position in the social hierarchy and attempt to assert their dominance by objectifying and intimidating her" (644). Violence, both physical and sexual, is used against a teenage girl to diminish her and force her into a passive role. Returning Across the Universe, Amy has nightmares about Luthor (Revis, *A Million Suns* 162), and specific actions and touches trigger her, taking her back to when she was sexually assaulted. For instance,

> My hand clenches around my wrist. The bruises are long gone, but other hands once held my wrists, forcing me down to the ground.…
>
> I release my hand and suck in a huge breath of air. I won't let myself think of that. I can't let myself think of that. (32)

While the slightest contact with her wrists brings Amy back memories of being assaulted, in Red Queen, Mare experiences revulsion at being touched on her wrists as a result of her confinement, where she was forced to wear manacles of Silent Stone, a type of stone that nullifies the abilities of Silvers and newbloods and can kill when used during long periods of time.

In the aftermath of a failed mission in which everyone is captured, Mare surrenders herself in order to protect them from dying. Captured and incarcerated inside the palace walls by the illegitimate king, Maven, Mare finds herself constantly under the torturing influence of Silent Stone, whether it be the manacles around her wrists or the silences, Silvers with the ability to nullify other abilities, who keep her imprisoned. Due to months of incarceration, after being rescued, Mare considers how "[t]he weight of manacles is gone but not forgotten. I still feel them at my wrists and

ankles" (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 335). She finds herself recoiling at the slightest touch on the wrists. The touch itself makes her feel sick (421). Consequently, being under the influence of Silent Stone or under the power of a silence sends Mare into a spiral of fear and straight back to the period of her incarceration. When her powers are nullified by a silence, Mare is triggered and finds herself shutting down, unable to do anything to protect herself:

> I gasp weakly, barely able to move, let alone defend myself. Fear sends me spiraling, my vision going black for a second. I feel manacles again, Silent Stone around my wrists and ankles, keeping me prisoner behind a locked door. Chaining me to a false king, dooming me to a life of slow, wasting death.
>
> … I want to fight him. I should reach for the gun at my hip, still holstered. But my limbs won't move. Even my heartbeat feels sluggish. I can't even scream.
>
> The combination of crushing silence and fear keeps me still. All I can do is watch. The blade edges my skin, almost burning me with its cold. (Aveyard, *War Storm* 164-5)

Because of her traumatic incarceration, Mare finds herself struggling with her daily life. Within the narrative, it is heavily implied that Mare has PTSD. She recognises herself in Kilorn's words, her closest friend, when he tells her about soldiers that "come back whole in body, but missing something else. They can't sleep or maybe they can't eat. Sometimes they slide right back into the past—into a memory of battle, triggered by a sound or a smell or any other sensation" (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 421). The words deeply resonate with Mare's state of being and feeling: "I can't be alone in rooms with locked doors. […] I don't like things on my wrists. It feels too much like the manacles Maven used to keep me a prisoner. And I can't see anything for what it is. I look for deceit everywhere, in everyone'" (388). Mare becomes suspicious of those around her, unsure who she should trust. Her suspicion and questioning of other people's motives become a coping mechanism.

Familiar to those who experience trauma is the view of themselves and the world surrounding them being profoundly transformed. Indeed, catastrophic events have an

impact on identity formation because the trauma that arises from them “disrupts previous ideas of an individual sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society” (Balaev, “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory” 150) and can devastate convictions about one's own safety and one's view of the self. In Monsters of Verity, similar to Mare, Kate is unable to trust other people, constantly keeping her distance from anyone who might hurt or betray her. This behaviour emerges from the traumatic violence she suffered as a child. Besides having difficulty trusting others, forming bonds, and intentionally distancing herself from others, Kate sometimes behaves in reprehensible and unethical ways (she sets a building on fire and threatens her classmates at Colton Academy). Kate’s questioning actions reflect a broader pattern in traumatised characters, whose experiences of violence often manifest in harmful or reckless behaviour. Characters also adopt resistance behaviours that allow them to survive in austere environments, such as egocentrism and self-referencing, quickness to anger, social and emotional withdrawal, preservation, or shutting down (dissociation) (Root 248). All these teenage girls present these behaviours and reactions.

Kate’s trauma has its origins in a car accident that resulted in the loss of her mother and led to her to being sent away from Verity by her father, Callum Harker, who leaves her feeling abandoned. The accident, of which she has confused and indistinct memories, leaves Kate with psychological and physical scars (she has a scar on her face that starts at her temple and ends at her jaw, and she has also lost her hearing on her right side). While she hides the physical scar with her hair, the psychological scars are more troubling to keep hidden; to keep contained. After returning to Verity a second time, Kate realises there are “two kinds of monsters, the kind you hunted in the streets and the kind that lived in your head.” Kate understands that “she could fight the former, but the latter was more dangerous. He was always, always, always one step ahead” (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 30). While corporeal monsters can be physically destroyed, those monsters that reside in the mind are treacherous shadows that evoke distressing memories from which there is no escape.

To deal with her traumatic past and the violent reality of deadly monsters, Kate creates a game, “Where are you, Kate?”, in which she wonders about the existence of

other Kates, who inhabit worlds parallel to hers. This game became something that she often played "ever since she learned about the theory of infinite parallels, the idea that a person's path through life wasn't really a line, but a tree, every decision a divergent branch, resulting in a divergent you. She liked the idea that there were a hundred different Kates, living a hundred different lives" (Schwab, *This Savage* Song v-vi). In this game, Kate idealises worlds in which her mother did not die, in which Callum is not her father and she does not have to act like a Harker, and in which monsters do not exist. Kate imagines worlds inhabited by "Kates who had never returned to Verity and never begged to leave" (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 10); worlds in which Kates with pasts different from her own have followed different paths, made different choices, and become different people. After a traumatic event, Balaev argues, "the traumatized protagonist may experience a doubling or self-estrangement" ("Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" 162). Kate creates imaginary doubles to protect herself and bottle up her feelings and emotions.

In The Darkest Minds series, Ruby also experiences this doubling. After conceding to joining the Children's League,[77] to protect herself from what she must do under their supervision, Ruby splits herself:

> there were two of me now; split between everything I had wanted, and everything I would now have to be. One of me, the hardest, angriest part, would stay with these monsters and slowly find herself twisting into their shape. But there was another, secret Ruby. This one was as thin as a wisp of air, and had struggled for so long just to be. (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 517-18)

[77] The Children's League is an antigovernmental group "dedicated to helping children affected by the government's new laws." It is led by John Alban, who "was formerly an intelligence adviser to [President] Gray." After his daughter died, Alban "realized what was going to happen to the kids who survived [and] tried to expose all of the testing that was happening at the camps" (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 71). However, the organisation is not as altruistic as it seems: they only rescue from the camps children whose abilities can help their agenda and are useful to fight against the government. As Ruby is told, "[t]hey tell you a lot of lies in the Children's League, the biggest being that you're free […]. They talk about love and respect and *family*, but I don't know any family that puts a tracking device on someone and then sends them out to be shot up and blown away" (133-4).

Through the narrative, splitting becomes a coping mechanism for Ruby. She even attempts to split herself from her abilities: “One of the things I find most fascinating about you is that you’re somehow able to mentally separate your gift from yourself—like it’s a whole separate entity that you can beat back into submission” (Bracken, *In the Afterlight* 251). These actions are unsurprising as Ruby is taught to fear her abilities. At ten, she was incarcerated in Thurmond, a supposedly rehabilitation camp for children with abilities (psi) known for its viciousness and for conducting testing and experiments on pre-teens and adolescents. For six years, Ruby endures a tormenting existence characterised by torture, child labour, and mistreatment at the hands of the guards. For instance, each time someone is perceived to “misbehave,” the guards would activate white noise on a frequency that only psi kids can hear, causing them severe nausea and disorientation. To ensure the camp’s self-sufficiency, the children are obliged to cultivate and prepare their own food, clean the facilities, and fabricate their own uniforms and those of the guards. The terror and abuse that Ruby endures in Thurmond become haunting memories from which she cannot free herself:

> The mind is a strange thing, mine stranger than most. It’s selective about what it remembers and even pickier about which memories remain as clear and cutting as a shard of glass. Those were the ones that stayed with you, that a single sound or smell could drag out. I had forgotten so much about my life before the soldiers had picked me up, but I would be damned if I ever managed to banish one single black memory from camp. (Bracken, *Never Fade* 286)

When urged to talk about Thurmond, Ruby initially experiences what may be characterised as a panic attack, subsequently expressing her distress through an outburst of anger:

> My chest tightened with the effort of keeping silent. One by one, my fingers closed around the seat belt’s silver fabric until I was all but choking it.
>
> …

> "What?" The word exploded out of me. "What do you want me to tell you? You want to hear about how they tied us up like animals to bring us into the camp—or, hey! How about that time a PSF once beat in a girl's skull so badly she actually lost an eye? You want to know what it was like to drink rotten water for an entire summer until new pipes finally came? How I woke up afraid and went to bed in terror every single day for six years? For God's sake, leave me alone! Why do you always have to dig and dig when you know I don't want to talk about it?" (191)

Ruby's traumatic past is ever-present, yet she deliberately chooses to repress it, keeping it deeply buried within herself.

The protagonists of YA dystopian narratives often grapple with articulating the trauma they endure, frequently choosing to remain silent. Silent suffering is a typical response to trauma. Nevertheless, the silence exhibited by certain characters, who refuse to discuss their traumatic experiences, has been interpreted "as proof of trauma's unspeakability." However, Balaev asserts that "silence is a narrative strategy, rather than evidence for an epistemological void created by the experience of trauma" (*The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* 22-3). In this context, the teenage girls in YA dystopian narratives demonstrate acute awareness of their traumatic experiences, choosing to refrain from talking about them. Their trauma, therefore, is not characterised as an absence and, consequently, something unspeakable. Rather than verbalising their pain, they tend to engage in introspection. Ruby only blurts out her experiences in this passage after being persistently urged to do so.

Hence, Ruby grapples with the profound implications of confronting her past. Following a moment of loss of control, in which she inadvertently reveals the terror endured at Thurmond, Ruby recalls a piece of advice she received:

> Cate had told me once, a long time ago, that the only way to survive your past was to find a way to close it off behind you, to shut one door before passing into another, brighter room. I was afraid. That was the truth. I was terrified of the guilt and shame that would come flooding in when I retraced my steps, turned the lock, and found the girl I had abandoned. I didn't want to know what the darkness there had done to her, if she would even recognize herself in my face. (Bracken, *Never Fade* 192)

Here, once again, there is the imagery of splitting. Ruby is afraid of confronting a part of herself that she locked in the shadows of her past; she is afraid of confronting her unresolved trauma. The compartmentalisation of traumatic experiences in order to move forward is a common coping mechanism, since it allows individuals to separate themselves from conflicting experiences, thoughts, and emotions to prevent emotional distress. This coping mechanism further elucidates that the traumatic past is not a forgotten wound that can only be remembered unconsciously, since to compartmentalise a traumatic experience, one must not only acknowledge the existence of the traumatic past but also deliberately decide to disengage from it.

Despite the portrayal of trauma and its repercussions being central to the development of the teenage female characters – serving as a fundamental aspect of their navigation of girlhood – the mental distress they experience remains largely unidentified. Notably, the Delirium trilogy provides a direct instance in which the psychological distress the characters experience is explicitly recognised. Lena often experiences what she calls the Coldness, "a feeling that comes sometimes when I'm lying in bed, a black, empty feeling that knocks my breath away and leaves me gasping as though I've just been thrown in icy water" (Oliver, *Delirium* 40). In an emotionless society, where love, known as *amor deliria nervosa*, has become the most dangerous disease and citizens are forced into a surgery that erases all emotions, this panic feeling emerges inside Lena when she feels emotionally overwhelmed by rules, expectations and her childhood memories – her childhood is marked by her mother's grief following her father's death (the surgery never worked on her mother, so she still did experience feelings) and consequent loss. Unsurprisingly, Lena wants nothing more than to go through the surgery, as not only will it leave her an unemotional vessel, but it also allows her to become detached from her past – after the surgery, "the past and all its pain will be rendered as smoothly palatable as the food we spoon to our babies" (41). She will be able to detach herself from her childhood trauma.

Nevertheless, Lena falls in love with Alex, an Invalid,[78] and runs away into the Wilds, the vast, untamed land outside government-controlled cities. Lena refuses the procedure that would turn her into another cog in the governmental machine. She uses her trauma (losing her mother, the stigma of being the daughter of an uncured, being always afraid of catching *amor deliria nervosa* and constantly watching for any slip, seeing Alex being shot while they run into the Wilds) to fuel her rebellion against the system. In chapter 3, I focus on how the theme of trauma shapes the protagonists' journeys towards heroism. Rather than destroying these teenage girls, traumatic experiences empower them to resist and fight against those who perpetrate political and societal injustices, even though they endure the consequences of the traumatic events for the rest of their lives.

In addition to the various forms of violence listed, the experience of being under constant surveillance, particularly when individuals realise that surveillance mechanisms function less as a means of protection than as an instrument of social control, has a detrimental impact on these heroines' mental health. Surveillance methods used to regulate societal behaviour can threaten attempts to heal. In YA dystopian fiction, surveillance emerges not as a passive backdrop but as an active force of violence that both constrains and catalyses possibilities for change.

2.1.2. States of Surveillance

> Surveillance implies motive, suspicion, and ultimately, judgment.
>
> Neal Shusterman, *Thunderhead*

In the Gothic, surveillance manifests through various mechanisms, including spatial control, social policing and psychological pressure, which often culminate in hysteria and

[78] Invalids are individuals who live in the Wilds outside the government system and reject (or have escaped) the mandatory cure for love.

paranoia. The architecture of Gothic spaces is devised for secrecy and surveillance: Gothic spaces are filled with hidden corners and shadowy recesses designed for watching and, particularly in the case of female characters, being watched. "The interior of the castle," Catherine Sheldrick Ross affirms, "is provided with special architectural features: hidden passages, peep holes available for a hidden observer, a secret room or priest's hole, an underground crypt, a dungeon, or an oubliette" (70). Such structures create an architectural space founded on scrutiny; hence, it can be posited that the Gothic house is fundamentally designed for watching. The intricate arrangement of corridors, peepholes, secret rooms, locked doors and hidden chambers establishes a power system that depends on the ability to see without being seen. This spatial model is recognised as central to the Gothic mode, which "with its houses and castles riddled with peepholes and cloistered spaces, presents itself as overly concerned with the question of seeing and being seen" (Wester 37-8).

Thus, the Gothic plays with the oppositional binary of seeing and being seen, watcher and watched, presenting this dualistic view as a mechanism of control and a form of enforcing hierarchical power relations. Consequently, in these environments, there is an omnipresent sense of being watched – specifically pertinent to female characters, who are under the persistent gaze of patriarchal figures. In fact, Gothic heroines are constantly subjected to male surveillance, whether it be the eye of the patriarchy or the villain's voyeuristic tendencies. As addressed in the first chapter, domestic spaces are a metaphor for domestic incarceration; that is, the home becomes a carceral environment that restricts and regulates women's movements. In Gothic fiction, Ross suggests, "interior spaces become prisons for imperiled heroines or represent a domestic happiness from which the scarred male protagonist is excluded" (65). However, the relationship between women and interior, homely spaces is not solely one of confinement. Hidden spaces can also provide concealment for the Gothic heroine – and, most importantly for a character positioned as powerless, they offer her avenues for agency. These moments of female rebellion and subversion in the Gothic mode occur when Gothic heroines find themselves in hidden spaces, particularly underground, such as the subterranean passages (Isabella and Matilda from *The Castle*

of Otranto) or the secret chambers and remote passages (Emily from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*). As Maureen Gokey reflects, "the subversive space [the underground] produces and influences feminine power and interrupts the patriarchal narrative" (45). Within what Gokey calls "the womb of the earth itself," and temporally outside the gaze of patriarchal power, Gothic heroines become agents, gaining the capacity to act and decide by themselves. Mary Ellen Snodgrass also addresses this idea of concealed spaces offering respite to the Gothic heroine, noting that "[t]he heroine's preservation of life, sanity, and virtue from physical overpowering or sexual mastery often hinges on ingenious means of warding off intruders to the passages, a symbolic prolonging of virginity or postponement of response to normal sexual awareness and arousal" (96). In the same vein, the selected YA dystopian series describe societies which build complex surveillance systems to control and exert power over female protagonists. These systems are implemented across all of society to varying degrees, yet disproportionately target these girls, who are deemed dangerous to the social-political structure. Quite interestingly, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents a system of social surveillance and policing that is highly restrictive. For instance, the houses are "never locked nor bolted, so easy to be opened" (More 54). Meals are taken together "as nothing can be so secretly spoken or done at the table" (66) – in fact, while "no man be prohibited to dine at home, yet no man doth it willingly because it is counted a point of small honesty" (65). This way, every Utopian is constantly under watch. Any secrecy is prohibited, and any form of political conspiracy is punishable by death (56). Utopians are encouraged to monitor their peers, which is facilitated by the open houses that are shared by no "fewer than forty persons" (51). Despite the pervasive nature of social surveillance, More's narrative presents monitoring in a visible way, rather than using concealed methods as typically depicted in dystopian fiction. Furthermore, while in *Utopia* surveillance is presented as a means to construct the perfect society, in dystopian fiction, surveillance is presented negatively.

Before examining surveillance specifically, since it operates as one component of a broader plan by dictatorial structures to maintain power, it is important to observe the systemic control mechanisms that authoritarian regimes and figures implement to

compel individuals to conform to their will. In YA dystopian fiction, a panoply of control mechanisms is employed to render the population obedient and compliant – the enforced social control engineered by those in power, Sarah Hentges suggests, "shapes the conditions that define the struggles that the Girl on Fire will face" (126). For instance, in The Hunger Games, resource distribution is controlled by the Capitol, leaving the Districts impoverished and starving. In Matched, the Society employs pharmacological control as each citizen must always carry with them three pills: the green regulates emotions, the red erases any memory from the previous twelve hours, and the blue, initially believed to provide nutrition or sustenance in case of an emergency, causes the citizens to become paralysed and/or severely ill (it is later revealed that the blue pill is the trigger for a deadly virus) and die unless they receive medical attention from the Society. In both of these examples, authorities implement control mechanisms that leave citizens dependent on them in order to survive. In Across the Universe, every Eldest[79] mixes into the water system Phydus, a drug that "controls extreme emotions" and "takes away individual thought" (Revis, *Across the Universe* 337, 339), leading individuals into blind obedience. In Delirium, the government uses the medical procedure that cures individuals of love, ensuring the population remains emotionally numb and accepts its indoctrination. In Legend, the Republic implemented the Trials, a set of national exams that a child takes upon reaching their 10th birthday. Based on a 1500-point scoring system, the final score determines a child's future. However, this merit-based test is used to uphold existing hierarchies, ensuring the rich retain their privileges and the marginalised are kept in the poor sectors. The Trials also serve to identify those who may become a threat to the regime and who are not fit to survive and are considered a waste of resources. As June is told:

[79] "Eldest" is the title given to the leader of the spaceship, *Godspeed*. The title given to every leader ties into the idea of generational control (there is always an Eldest in control, suggesting an unbroken cycle of inherited power) as well as being used to deceive, hiding that every Eldest is the "same," that is, each Eldest is a clone of the previous one. The usage of the title makes it difficult to identify which Eldest ruled at which time and, consequently, to keep track of time and history.

> "The Trials were supposed to encourage hard work and athleticism, to produce more military-quality people—and they did. But they were also used to weed out the weak—and the defiant. And gradually, they were also used to control overpopulation. […] They were meant to entice the best and fittest to join the military. Over time, they shifted to being offered in all schools. That wasn't enough for my father, though … he wanted only the best to survive. Anyone else was, frankly, considered a waste of space and resources. My father always told me that the Trials were absolutely necessary for the Republic to flourish." (Lu, *Prodigy* 208)

Day, the main male character of Legend, who comes from the poor sectors, despite attaining a perfect score, is told that he has flunked the Trials and is removed from society, since he is deemed not only highly intelligent but also potentially dangerous – he is seen as a threat to the military regime. In The Darkest Minds and Red Queen, individuals are forced to register in databases, birth and wanted psi kids and blood databases, respectively. (Registration databases can also be classified as a surveillance method.) Further, in Red Queen, Reds are conscripted into a never-ending war to keep the Red population growth under wraps (although Silvers are in charge, there are more Reds than Silvers in society). Such control mechanisms rooted in these societies clearly show the viciousness implemented to dominate and dehumanise individuals.

Propaganda is another controlling mechanism used by those in power to shape citizen's beliefs and perceptions and influence their behaviours towards themselves and others. In Divergent, one of the main antagonists, Jeanine Matthews, the head of the Erudite faction, wishes to eradicate Divergent individuals because they cannot be controlled. To do so, she must first cease governmental control, which is under the Abnegation, the faction from which the leaders are chosen because they are selfless. Hence, Jeanine orchestrates a campaign to undermine the Abnegation faction, using fear-based propaganda that manipulates public perception. She uses newspapers to spread misinformation about the Abnegation, attacking their values and raising suspicion about their altruism, which leads the other factions to be suspicious of them and even turn on them. Tris finds herself mentioned in an article that aims to discredit her father and, consequently, all the Abnegation leaders:

"*The mass exodus of the children of Abnegation leaders cannot be ignored or attributed to coincidence* […] *The recent transfer of Beatrice and Caleb Prior, the children of Andrew Prior, calls into question the soundness of Abnegation's values and teachings*.

…

"*Why else would the children of such an important man decide that the lifestyle he has set out for them is not an admirable one?* […] *Molly Atwood, a fellow Dauntless transfer, suggests a disturbed and abusive upbringing might be to blame. 'I heard her talking in her sleep once,' Molly says. 'She was telling her father to stop doing something. I don't know what it was, but it gave her nightmares.*'

[…] "*However, perhaps the answer lies not in a morally bereft man, but in the corrupted ideals of an entire faction. Perhaps the answer is that we have entrusted our city to a group of proselytizing tyrants who do not know how to lead us out of poverty and into prosperity*." (Roth, *Divergent* 242-4)

Notably, the teenage protagonists in these narratives are used as central propaganda figures, becoming embodiments of propaganda themselves. In The Selection, as a punitive measure for her resistance to the King's authority, America is compelled to be the face of advertisements that are nothing more than pro-caste propaganda, which serve to encourage individuals, as America explains, "to be happy with [their] own caste, not to associate closely with those outside it" (Cass, *The One* 206). In Red Queen, Mare becomes a powerful instrument of propaganda for the Silver monarchy and the Scarlet Guard, a Red rebellious group. After Mare's powers are revealed on camera, even though she is actually a Red, the Silver King and Queen fabricate the story that she is a long-lost Silver noble girl. Her true lineage is hidden in plain sight, and the King and Queen use her to influence the public. Upon the emergence of the Scarlet Guard, the ruling powers force Mare to announce the Measures, repressive legislation designed to exert heightened control over the Red citizens:

"In his wisdom, King Tiberias has drafted the Measures, to root out this sickness of rebellion, and to protect the good citizens of our nation. They are as follows: As of today, a sunset curfew

> is in effect for all Reds. Security will be doubled in every Red village and town. New outposts will be built on the roads and manned to full capacity. All Red crimes, including breaking of the curfew, will be punished by execution. And […] conscription age has been lowered, to the age of fifteen. Anyone who provides information leading to capture of Scarlet Guard operatives or the prevention of Scarlet Guard actions will be awarded conscription waivers, releasing up to five members of the same family from military service." (Aveyard, *Red Queen* 293)

Maven, the younger prince who ascends to the throne after orchestrating the framing of his brother for their father's murder, also uses Mare as a tool for propaganda. He uses her to lure newbloods to the Silver court, diverting them away from the Scarlet Guard and thereby preventing their participation in the Red uprising. Maven coerces Mare into doing his bidding publicly via television, leveraging threats to ensure her compliance:

> "You'll never fight for us, I know that. But your kind . . . they're strong, stronger than many Silvers could ever be. Imagine what we will do with an army of them, combined with an army of mine. When they hear your voice, they'll come. How they are treated once they arrive depends on your behavior, of course. And your compliance. […] So I have two choices, and you get to pick which one I follow. Either you bring me newbloods, and they join with us, or I continue finding them on my own, and killing them." (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 67)

Mare finds herself with no alternative but to submit to his will. Nevertheless, she is also used by the Scarlet Guard. Not only do they convince her to become a spy during her initial stay in the palace, but they also turn her into their poster girl. Both Silvers and Reds exploit Mare's image: it is initially used to reinforce Silver supremacy and, later, as a symbol of hope and resistance. In this context, Mare's journey echoes that of Katniss, who the Capitol and the rebels instrumentalise as part of their propaganda apparatus. The Capitol manipulates Katniss's image, seeking to condition her behaviour during public interviews and appearances, particularly after she becomes a Victor, through threats (Katniss must do what the Capitol wants her to or risk losing her family and everyone dear to her). While the Capitol endeavours to craft Katniss into a mere puppet, the rebellion turns Katniss into the Mockingjay, a living emblem of resistance that unites

the Districts. Consequently, she becomes a central figure in propaganda campaigns designed to inspire the Districts and galvanise support against the Capitol.

"Surveillance practices," David Lyon asserts, "are probably basic to human society and start with any elementary watching of some by another in order to create an effect of looking after or looking over the latter" (*Surveillance Studies* 3). To ensure that the population complies with their laws and does not defy or avoid the control mechanisms, authorities apply surveillance mechanisms, which are the *sine qua non* of dystopian literature. In *Imagining Surveillance: Utopian and Dystopian Literature and Film* (2015), Peter Marks claims that "no single genre depicts and assesses surveillance with the creative vitality, social engagement and historical sweep of utopian texts."[80] He further explains that

> [s]urveillance is pervasive and consequential in contemporary life, constantly morphing and expanding as new technologies and social situations arise. The future arrives early, so to speak, and we need ways of thinking inventively about the challenges and questions surveillance continues to raise. Modern utopian works overwhelmingly project forward, initiating imaginative thought experiments that can feed into social awareness and discourse. (5)

Utopian texts contribute to a better understanding of surveillance and encourage thinking critically about it and its implications. A key narrative on the representation of surveillance in dictatorial societies, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Marks observes, "remains the most emblematic depiction of state monitoring in all literature, a still terrifying case study of the dehumanising effects of surveillance on individuals and groups, and a compelling warning against the type of society that might evolve, given a complacent, fearful or compliant citizenry" (3). Kerry Mallan likewise underscores Orwell's enduring relevance on the representation of surveillance, noting that "[t]he idea that we live under constant surveillance, that someone will always be watching

[80] Marks uses "utopian texts" in an all-encompassing way. In his discussion, the term refers to both utopias and dystopias.

everything we do, was explored by [Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*] where the ever-vigilant gaze was embodied in the figure of Big Brother" (1). Additionally, Mallan contends that "Orwell's coining of Big Brother provided a way of conceiving how individuals' privacy is threatened by almost constant surveillance and anticipated the possibility of new information technology for monitoring body and brain processes" (15). Big Brother prefigures the technologically mediated forms of monitoring that define contemporary societies. Because of the rapid technological advancement over the last decades, "[s]urveillance often is presented in terms of rapidly evolving technology and overwhelming, impersonal systems" (Marks 3). Technology permits surveillance to be omnipresent. However, as Brady L. Nash argues in their examination of the usage of technology in Cindy Pon's YA speculative fiction novels *Want* (2017) and *Ruse* (2019), technology can be both a facilitator of oppression and a set of tools for resisting oppression (689). Technology is represented as twofold in futuristic dystopian societies: it both oppresses and liberates.

Melissa Ames asserts that the post-9/11 socio-political atmosphere, principally the intensification of governmental surveillance facilitated by laws such as the Patriot Act, fed into the creation and widespread appeal of YA dystopias. However, Ames underlines, "[w]hile these texts do not always serve as direct allegories for 9/11, or draw attention to specifically post-9/11 concerns (although many do), they all provide social commentary that is relevant to society today" (4), including fears of intrusions into personal lives and authoritarian control. Hence, YA dystopian fiction "focuses on societies in which rogue governments and (increasingly) corporations use surveillance to manipulate and control teenagers" (Connors, "'I Have a Kind of Power I Never Knew I Possessed'" 2). Nevertheless, YA fiction on the whole "has for some time engaged with contemporary issues and concerns with respect to surveillance, loss of personal liberty and moral absolutism" (Mallan 2). That is to say, YA fiction has historically provided space for discussion of these themes prior to the rise of its dystopian dimension, often positioning adolescents within contexts that are strongly regulated by laws and norms and where they face complex ethical dilemmas. YA dystopian fiction draws on the

mentioned concerns, depicting new surveillance technologies designed to enforce Orwell's maxim that Big Brother is watching, thereby sustaining authoritarian regimes.

In the selected YA dystopian series, surveillance is sorted into two main categories: social surveillance and social policing, encompassing both technological and social methods (see table 3). For instance, tracking devices are either implanted in the body (The Hunger Games, The Chemical Garden, Divergent, and The Lunar Chronicles), or disguised in the hem of clothes (The Darkest Minds), and communication devices (Across the Universe) to continuously monitor the subjects' locations. An individual's data is thoroughly collected, recorded and monitored in order to allow authorities to determine life trajectories, from education to marriage prospects (Matched and Delirium), identify any traits in an individual that might endanger the system (Divergent and Legend), or track the number and whereabouts of existing individuals (The Darkest Minds and The Red Queen). Those in power have even developed technologies to supervise dreams (Matched).

Table 3 - Surveillance Methods Employed by the Authoritarian Regimes

Series	**Surveillance Methods**
The Hunger Games	Social surveillance (cameras; microphones; trackers); Social policing (Peacekeepers)
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Social policing (The Sisterhood and Guardians)
Matched	Social Surveillance (data recording and monitoring); Social policing (Officials)
Across the Universe	Social surveillance (traceable trackers placed in the wireless communication devices implanted in an individual's body); Social policing (*Godspeed* inhabitants)

Delirium	Social surveillance (data recording and monitoring; internet monitoring); Social policing (regulators, patrols, neighbours, family, and friends)
The Chemical Garden	Social surveillance (trackers); Social policing (sister-wives, mansion staff, and the Gatherers)
Divergent	Social surveillance (cameras; simulation recording data; serums; trackers); Social policing (Dauntless and Faction peers)
Shatter Me	Social surveillance (cameras; trackers); Social policing (Reestablishment soldiers)
Legend	Social surveillance (cameras; internet monitoring); Social policing (military; spies; the Trials)
The Lunar Chronicles	Social surveillance (cameras; spy cameras; traceable ID chips; traceable spaceships; identification tattoos); Social policing (Thaumaturges)
Under the Never Sky	Social surveillance (Realms; SmartEye[81])
Starters	Social surveillance (cameras; implanted neurochip in the brain); Social policing (Prime Destinations staff)
The Selection	Surveillance systems (cameras; The Selection recording crew); Social policing (contestants, maids, guards, and spies)
The Darkest Minds	Social surveillance (cameras; birth registration databases; trackers; internet monitoring); Social

[81] The SmartEye is a virtual reality eyepiece used by the Dwellers, people who live in the Pods, facilitating access to the Realms – immersive virtual environments that permit users to engage in various activities according to their desires. The SmartEye can also record and store information such as timestamps and geographical locations. It also continuously monitors users' biometric data and emotional states.

	policing (Psi Special Forces and skip tracers; National Guard and tollbooths)
The Program	Social surveillance (cameras in the Program facilities), Social policing (handlers, nurses and doctors in the Program; family, friends, neighbours and teachers)
Red Queen	Social surveillance (cameras; bloodbase; ID cards and blood tags[82]); Social policing (Sentinels; Silver guards, officers, and spies; Scarlet Guard spies)
Monsters of Verity	Social surveillance (cameras); Social Policing (Flynn Task Force and Sunai)
Arc of a Scythe	Social surveillance (Thunderhead; Scythe rings); Social policing (Nimbus agents)

There is rarely a moment of reprieve, surveillance having been extended into everyday life. As Cassia, the main character of Matched, realises, "[a]ll my life I've been watched. The Society saw me go to school and learn to swim and walk up the steps to attend my Match Banquet; they sorted my dreams; when they found my data interesting, as my Official did, they altered things and recorded my reaction" (Condie, *Crossed* 137). For authoritarian regimes and figures, this continuous scrutiny is essential to monitoring citizens and identifying and pre-empting dissent, preventing it from escalating into full rebellion. The constant surveillance in which individuals find themselves creates a hyperawareness of being watched, as Lena confesses: "Even though there's no one around, I have the impression of being watched. It's worse than the normal feeling of being observed in school and on the street and even at home, having to be cautious

[82] Reds must be painstakingly registered in the bloodbase, a blood database. Mare is explained that "[a]ny Red born within a hundred miles of civilization gets sampled at birth." The bloodbase "[s]tarted out as a project to understand exactly what the difference is between [Silvers and Reds], but it ended up just another way to put a collar on your people. In the bigger cities, Reds don't use ID cards but blood tags. They're sampled at every gate, coming and going. Tracked like animals" (Aveyard, *Red Queen* 279).

about what you do and say, the close, blocked-in feeling that everyone gets used to eventually" (Oliver, *Delirium* 58).

With the exception of The Forest of Hands and Teeth, where the community does not have access to technology, authorities install surveillance cameras under the pretext of protecting citizens. In Monsters of Verity, this manifests as a city-wide network of cameras, intended to safeguard people from the monsters roaming its streets. However, the surveillance system functions primarily as a tool to track down those who engage in violence that has nefarious effects. Of course, whereas in South Verity the recordings are used to identify criminals and bring them to "justice" (that is to say, to have their souls devoured by a monster), in North Verity the cameras are used to locate and bring monsters into Harker's domain to do his bidding. However, no matter how pervasive these systems are in these narratives, none is as all-encompassing as the Thunderhead in Arc of a Scythe, a sentient artificial entity whose sole purpose is to help humankind and which is programmed to act exclusively for human benefit. Although benevolent in purpose, the Thunderhead's omnipresence remains unsettling: it sees everything, everywhere, rendering its watchfulness both protective and profoundly disquieting. The latter was especially true in its early days:

> Back in the days when the world's digital network was called "the cloud," people thought giving too much power to an artificial intelligence would be a very bad idea. Cautionary tales abounded in every form of media. The machines were always the enemy. But then the cloud evolved into the Thunderhead, sparking with consciousness, or at least a remarkable facsimile. In stark contrast to people's fears, the Thunderhead did not seize power. Instead, it was people who came to realize that it was far better suited to run things than politicians.
>
> In those days before the Thunderhead, human arrogance, self-interest, and endless in-fighting determined the rule of law. Inefficient. Imperfect. Vulnerable to all forms of corruption.
>
> But the Thunderhead was incorruptible. Not only that, but its algorithms were built on the full sum of human knowledge. All the time and money wasted on political posturing, the lives lost in wars, the populations abused by despots—all gone the moment the Thunderhead was handed power. Of course, the politicians, dictators, and warmongers weren't happy, but their voices,

> which had always seemed so loud and intimidating, were suddenly insignificant. The emperor not only had no clothes, turns out he had no testicles either.
>
> The Thunderhead quite literally knew everything. When and where to build roads; how to eliminate waste in food distribution and thus end hunger; how to protect the environment from the ever-growing human population. It created jobs, it clothed the poor, and it established the World Code. Now, for the first time in history, law was no longer the shadow of justice, it was justice.
>
> The Thunderhead gave us a perfect world. The utopia that our ancestors could only dream of is our reality.
>
> There was only one thing the Thunderhead was not given authority over.
>
> The Scythedom. (Shusterman, *Scythe* 61-2)

Even though it is all-powerful, the Thunderhead does not control everything. The Scythedom, an institution that comprehends scythes from all over the world, lies beyond its reach, operating outside the Thunderhead's authority. The result of being under constant watch is self-surveillance; that is, individuals regulate their own behaviour according to what is expected so as not to incur punishment.

The act of recording is not always concealed; yet, even though visible, it still works to keep citizens compliant. Indeed, as Bill Hughes claims, "[r]eality TV is one manifestation of this submission to the panoptical eye" (46). Notably, the idea of surveillance is often rooted in Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a prison design in which a single guard could observe all inmates without being seen. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault expands on this concept, describing it as a model of internalised surveillance. Conceived as a technology of power to solve surveillance issues, the panopticon structure disciplines and controls those within it by instilling "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). The panoptical principle thus produces self-observation, compelling citizens to regulate their own behaviour. Lizzie Seal and Maggie O'Neill write that "[c]ontemporary YA dystopian fiction portrays heavily controlled and surveilled societies in which spectacle is a key means of subduing and entertaining the population"

(120). Both The Hunger Games and The Selection draw their premise from reality television – significantly, the series' titles are also the names of the fictional reality shows in which Katniss and America are obliged to participate. In these reality TV shows, teenagers are subjected to constant scrutiny for the public's amusement. Here, surveillance has become normalised as a form of public entertainment, transforming into a form of spectacle. However, this spectacle functions not only to control those who find themselves under the spotlight but also extends its control to the broader population. Whether the TV show is a battle to the death involving children and teenagers or a competition between thirty-five girls vying for the love of a prince and in order to become queen, these serve dual purposes. On the one hand, they distract the populace from the social-political machinations occurring; on the other hand, they function as instruments of propagandistic discourse, brainwashing the population and forcing them into compliance. As Katniss ponders, "[t]aking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 21). Nevertheless, controlling strategies are prone to yield unintended consequences. Mallan notes that The Hunger Games trilogy "extends Orwell's account of constant visual scrutiny by fusing it with the contemporary adulation of celebrity" (8). The citizens of the Capitol have developed an emotional attachment to the Victors, whom they watch annually on their TV screens, as they return for every game edition in their role as mentors. This adulation undermines the Capitol's authority during the 75th Hunger Games, as its citizens express discontent regarding the Victors' return to the arena:

> It's interesting, though, when I think of what Peeta said about the attendant on the train being unhappy about the victors having to fight again. About people in the Capitol not liking it. I still think all of that will be forgotten once the gong sounds, but it's something of a revelation that those in the Capitol feel anything at all about us. They certainly don't have a problem watching children murdered every year. But maybe they know too much about the victors, especially the ones who've been celebrities for ages, to forget we're human beings. It's more like watching your

> own friends die. More like the Games are for those of us in the districts. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 230-1)

A similar reversal occurs in The Selection, when America, a Five, unexpectedly becomes the audience's favourite contestant for future queen: "I turned the magazine right side up, finding half of the page full of pictures of the four remaining girls with a graph beside our photos. Above the image, an elegant headline asked *Who do YOU want as Queen?* Next to my face, a wide line shot out, showing thirty-nine percent of the people were pulling for me" (Cass, *The One* 90). The unanticipated adoration and idolisation from the public threaten the grip of the undemocratic entities on power. The pervasive desire to obsessively watch these reality television shows intersects with Gothic voyeurism. In the Gothic mode, characters often present aberrant behaviour – Snodgrass suggests that "[t]he peculiarities of behavior in Gothic literature derive from author intent to explain the perverse, cruel, and murderous tendencies in human nature" (1) – and voyeurism as the act of gaining (sexual) pleasure or power by watching others who are unaware that they are being observed, fits this label. Voyeurism is about "subjecting the object to a controlling and curious gaze" and it "acts as a power of spectatorship" (May 590). The voyeuristic gaze is not neutral, giving the viewer dominance over who and what is seen. If, in the Gothic mode, the voyeuristic gaze was exercised only by the villain, in these YA dystopian narratives, it is now perpetuated by the whole society. Once a transgressive form of look, the gaze that objectifies the body now assumes a complicit form.

Even though technology permits authorities to enmesh themselves in the citizens' everyday lives, those in power are not above using traditional forms of surveillance, such as peer-on-peer monitoring. Citizens are encouraged to monitor suspicious behaviour of family, friends, neighbours, and even strangers, and report it or correct others for breaking rules. In Delirium, besides the regulators, who enforce the eradication of love and ensure citizens' obedience, groups of people get together and create control points to ensure everyone complies with the curfew and keep an eye on strange individuals or movements. These individuals participate voluntarily, often with a sense of pride or civic duty, in practices of social surveillance. As Lena says, "[i]n

Zombieland, someone is always watching. There is nothing else for people to do. They do not think. They feel no passion, no hatred, no sadness; they feel nothing but fear, and a desire for control. So they watch, and poke, and pry" (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 81). In The Darkest Minds, psi children and teenagers who are not incarcerated in the rehabilitation camps are pursued and persecuted by skip tracers (bounty hunters) in exchange for money. In The Program, teenagers are forcibly removed from their homes and classrooms and taken into the program's facilities as a result of denunciations made not only by family and friends but also by teachers and neighbours. Citizens become not only passive observers but also active enforcers of the established order, taking it upon themselves to uphold the status quo and maintain societal control. In other words, they become both observers and enforcers of the existing social order.

Through the establishment of systems of surveillance, dictatorial regimes and figures aim to create docile bodies that perpetuate society's rules and indoctrinations. Indeed, "social and cultural control has often been enacted upon the body, as systems of power set forth laws, guidelines, and even implicit expectations that result in a conformity of not only action but experiences of embodiment more generally" (Day 77). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault also delves into the construction of docile bodies, arguing that transforming deviant bodies into normative subjects is accomplished through discipline (125). Discipline, Foucault explains, "produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies [and] increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body" (138). Through four disciplinary techniques, drawing up tables, prescribing movements, imposing exercises, and arranging tactics that fix the individual in time and space (167), the docile body is subjected, used, transformed, and improved to become entangled in the societal machine (137). Society generates powerless and passive bodies willing to submit to its rules. Expectedly, in YA dystopian fiction, most adult characters remain passive under authoritarian rule, their prolonged conditioning suppressing any impulse to dissent. Years of indoctrination render them complicit or apathetic, frequently accepting oppression as an immutable aspect of social order. By contrast, teenagers have yet to be completely conditioned.

Even though they have been exposed to the regime's ideological apparatus, they have not fully assimilated. This position allows them to perceive the contradictions and injustices in their societies. Furthermore, as liminal beings, adolescents occupy a liminal place between obedience and autonomy. They find themselves in an in-between that allows them to position themselves outside-yet-inside society's rules.

Foucault's insights into the construction of the docile body reveal how social systems and structures influence experiences of embodiment, shaping the subject's behaviour and defining a sense of morality. Docile bodies play a crucial role in authoritarian societies as they reproduce social conventions and preserve society's ideals and hierarchies without causing disturbance. Individuals, deeply intertwined in the system, hardly attempt to shift the paradigm, despite possessing the means to do so. As articulated by Foucault, "it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (217). Regardless of the disciplinary techniques to which the individual is subjected, a semblance of subjectivity can still endure. The docile body can still use its will and choose rebellion over conformism. As Lyon problematises, "the more stringent and rigorous the panoptic regime, the more it generates active resistance, whereas the more soft and subtle the panoptic strategies, the more it produces the desired docile bodies" ("The search for surveillance theories" 4). This resistance to the panoptic regime is represented, for instance, in The Darkest Minds, in which psi kids revolt against the dire conditions in which they live in the camps.

Furthermore, the process of creating docile bodies can be disrupted by the teachings implemented by the ruling authorities, since the instruments employed to discipline and control the body can equally serve to defy those in power. Subsequently, authorities not only construct docile bodies but also instil in them the potential for resistance against indoctrination, resulting in forms of defiance that culminate in rebellion and disrupt the social-political systems. Instead of becoming another cog in the machine, these teenage girls become agents of resistance, fighting against the political regime that seeks to keep them powerless. For instance, as part of the

Abnegation, Tris is raised to suppress selfishness: she is taught to put others and their needs above her own. When she decides to change factions and join the Dauntless, Tris learns combat and weapon training and strategic thinking. She leverages the skills and knowledge acquired from both Abnegation and Dauntless to resist and dismantle the system. In Legend, June is raised and educated by the Republic's militarised government, which trains her in military tactics, physical combat, and survival skills; that is, it trains her to become a loyal soldier and citizen. After discovering the Republic is responsible for her brother's death, in the process of unlearning its deeply rooted indoctrination, June uses what she has learned to evade the system and fight for a more just society. In fact, what she learned within the insidious system allows her to deconstruct the wrongness of the Republic and help build a fairer society. Ruby is taught by Clancy, one of The Darkest Minds' antagonists, an Orange and son of President Gray, how to control and use her powers consciously, and by The Children's League how to fight, strategise, and weaponise her powers, turning her abilities into a tool for survival and warfare. Ruby uses what she has learned to stop Clancy, expose the inherent corruption in The Children's League, and liberate the children captive in the camps. In other words, Ruby transforms their lessons in manipulation and militarisation into acts of resistance that make social-political transformation possible. Additionally, the oppressive conditions these girls are forced to endure within dictatorial social-political structures inadvertently foster the skills needed for their resistance. Katniss, driven by the necessity of survival amid the threat of starvation, perfects her hunting and survival skills, which she employs to outlast the challenges of the Hunger Games. In The Lunar Chronicles, Cinder, who is marginalised for being a cyborg, is forced to work as a mechanic by her guardian to support the household. She hones her mechanical skills that later enable her to evade the Earthen and Lunar forces that pursue her after she escapes prison. Hence, these girls' actions indicate that a "surveilled body can also be a resistant body" (Mallan 8).

In examining surveillance societies and the subject of surveillance in selected YA science fiction dystopian texts, Victoria Flanagan suggests that YA fiction is engaging in innovative discourses regarding the teenager's relationship with surveillance:

> The ubiquity of modern-day surveillance is intensely evident in the way that these narratives treat the concept of being watched and monitored. Rather than trying to escape or overthrow surveillance regimes, the most noteworthy aspect of these novels is their desire to educate readers about surveillance and its varied purposes. Such stories suggest that individuals can choose to be agentic – not interpellated – surveillance subjects, thus reshaping a concept that has conventionally been associated with disempowerment. (128-9)

In her observations, Flanagan uses the term "participatory surveillance," which is used "to describe an individual's willing submission to surveillance through online activities such as shopping and social networking" (128). In this idea, surveillance can be used to achieve the objectives of those being watched. Exploring Katniss's narrative arc, Mallan argues that

> Katniss refuses to become a passive subject. Rather, she is an agential subject who outwardly appears to play along with the ludic framework of the Games, while inwardly retains a moral subjectivity. Katniss realises that to survive the Games she must learn how to play to the camera, pretending to be the kind of personality that the audience wishes her to be, while all the time keeping a wary eye on her opponents. (9)

The author later concludes that "[t]he Capitol's power to implement a surveillant culture through its fluid panoptic gaze fails to strip Katniss of her agency and capacity for embodying a moral and empathic subjectivity" (12). During her stints in the game arenas, Katniss is acutely aware of being under constant surveillance, as illustrated in the following excerpt: "I'm glad for the solitude, even though it's an illusion, because I'm probably on-screen right now. Not consistently but off and on" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 177). Rather than recoil from Panem's omnipresent gaze, Katniss uses her awareness of the surveillance she is under to win the Hunger Games.

However, Katniss is not the only YA dystopian female protagonist who manipulates surveillance for their advantage. When Cassia begins to harbour secrets, such as her discovery of forbidden poetry and the act of learning to write, she

meticulously curates her behaviour and discourse to project an appearance of obedience. Lena initially internalises self-regulation, conducting herself as the government expects her not to be contaminated by *amor deliria nervosa*. However, she later uses her perceived conformity as camouflage to pursue a forbidden romance with an Invalid and escape into the wilderness. In The Chemical Garden, Rhine finds herself captured, coerced into a polygamous marriage, and confined to a mansion where her husband's father monitors her every action. In this oppressive environment, she must perform the role of a dutiful wife while secretly orchestrating her escape. Similar to Katniss, Rhine adopts a false persona to gain privileges and gather information she needs to flee. In The Program, Sloane must carefully regulate her behaviour to carry on in a societal landscape where showing emotions may result in institutionalisation. She willingly monitors herself to maintain a semblance of autonomy and freedom, averting being taken away. Under the watchful eye of the authoritarian structures, these teenage girls build versions of themselves that conform to the expectations of those in power. Here, surveillance operates not only externally but also through internalised self-regulation, which the girls can manipulate to their advantage once they become aware of its workings. In doing so, these protagonists demonstrate how, when strategically performed, conformity can become a means of subversion rather than compliance. Their carefully constructed façades allow them to manipulate and ultimately destabilise the very surveillance regimes that seek to contain them.

Nevertheless, escape becomes their only means of resisting the surveillance that confines them, shaping how they behave and where they can physically move. Surveillance thus functions as a mechanism of control and, crucially, as a force of containment, causing an overwhelming sense of claustrophobic entrapment. This sensation is reinforced by being physically entrapped in spaces surrounded by walls that keep individuals from leaving and transform their surroundings into spaces of incarceration.

2.1.3. Entrapment, Isolation, Trespassing

In Gothic narratives, entrapment "means to be confined or to be trapped in such a way that there is no way out" and "this sense of containment […] contributes to the claustrophobic psychology of Gothic space." It may be divided into three types: physical, that is, "being physically trapped by physical devices," mental, which refers to "being confined to a certain state of mind," and existential, "which takes the form of social entropy and ontological or epistemological entrapment" (Leong and Fall "Entrapment"). All these forms of entrapment produce a pervasive atmosphere of claustrophobia that defines the Gothic mode. Claustrophobia, Mary Ellen Snodgrass asserts, described as a "psychological dread of confinement, dungeons and prisons, insane asylums, premature burial, patriarchal marriage, and emotional repression, [is] a recurrent motif in Gothic literature" (59). Snodgrass further writes that in "Gothic conventions in the late 18th century, authors used cells, murder holes, and oubliettes to accentuate claustrophobia, mental torment, and terror" (96). These spaces share common characteristics: they are all confining and imprisoning spaces. In this way, such spaces function as instruments of entrapment, producing the overwhelming claustrophobia that characters experience in the Gothic.

Recalling Chris Baldick's definition of the Gothic, spatial confinement assumes a significant role in the Gothic mode, with the "claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (xix) being one of the two forces that create a feeling of inescapability and lead characters into a spiralling sense of disintegration and ethical and psychological collapse. In female Gothic, Snodgrass points out, "claustrophobic elements reflect the circumscribed world of women. Protagonists tend to be trapped by patriarchy and forced into social roles that give no outlet for unfettered friendships, curiosity, adventure, or artistic expression" (59). Enclosed spaces, such as dungeons and prisons, are "often aimed at women as a metaphor of suffocating social roles that paralyzed them and robbed them of self-actualization" (96). Gothic spaces are then commonly physically (and psychologically) ensnaring. Isolated castles and mansions, locked dungeons, labyrinths and asylums are represented as a trap for characters. In this way, these settings are incarcerating, particularly for female characters, who frequently find

themselves confined in domestic spaces. In Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas observes, "metaphors of entrapment and literal imprisonment frame the heroine's experience through powerlessness" (33). The Gothic heroine's constraints are mirrored in her physical surroundings, which are not neutral settings but rather extensions of patriarchal control; as such, these incarcerating spaces shape, define, and often seek to erase the Gothic heroine's autonomy. Hence, in the Gothic mode, the theme of entrapment encompasses rules, systems, and structures that are able to physically and psychologically entrap.

Gothic's entrapment can then be understood as the precursor to modern narratives of surveillance and control, such as is the case with YA dystopian fiction, where confinement moves from remote castles and mansions, dungeons, and asylums to a larger-scale social-political control that encompasses whole countries. Even so, this does not mean that these spaces are no longer portrayed in these narratives: in Shatter Me, Juliette is both confined in a mental institution as well as in a mansion that is the headquarters of Sector 45 of The Reestablishment; in The Chemical Garden, Rhine and her sister-wives are taken to a lavish estate that is nothing more than a gilded cage, keeping them captive and isolated from the outside world; in Red Queen, Mare is imprisoned and isolated in a bedroom that is nothing more than a cell in the Silver palace, a confinement orchestrated by Maven whose obsession with her requires her to be close. Nonetheless, females are still those who find themselves most commonly physically and psychologically entrapped and imprisoned. In YA dystopian fiction, those in power implement rules and systems that entrap the characters.[83]

Similar to the Gothic mode, entrapment confines individuals physically, mentally, emotionally, and/or socially through mechanisms that impose constraints on freedom and spatial mobility. The enduring prevalence of enclosed spaces continues to be one of the most effective instruments for achieving such restrictions. In this context, the wall is the most powerful symbol of constraint. In YA dystopian fiction, Sarah Hentges observes,

[83] The control mechanisms discussed in the previous sub-chapter also serve to trap individuals in the totalitarian system. Therefore, they can also be understood as mechanisms of entrapment.

"[a]lmost every book/series has some version of the wall. The intent is safety, the effect is illusion and often oppression" (118). The ubiquity of walls reflects the authorities' necessity to isolate individuals and sever them from the world beyond. As Rebekah Fitzsimmons outlines in her analysis of the structure of YA dystopian fiction, the wider world remains unreachable to the protagonist, rendered inaccessible by the systemic mechanisms of control that confine and incarcerate her. Among the most prominent of these mechanisms are walls. Societies are frequently enclosed by walls, such as electrified fences or towering brick fortifications. Although the ruling structures declare that these are built to protect the citizens from the dangers of the outside world, walls function to isolate, discipline, and contain individuals, as explored next, not to protect.

To ensure people do not transgress the borders, these walls are patrolled by the regime's enforcers. In Divergent, borders are controlled and patrolled by the Dauntless, whose responsibilities include guarding the fence. When Tris visits the fence as part of her initiation, she becomes troubled by the locked gates: "The Dauntless guards close the gate and lock it behind them. The lock is on the outside. I bite my lip. Why would they lock the gate from the outside and not the inside? It almost seems like they don't want to keep something out; they want to keep us in" (Roth, *Divergent* 128). In The Forest of Hands and Teeth, Mary's contemplations mirror Tris's: "Whether the fences were to keep the Unconsecrated out or the living in we no longer know" (Ryan 27). Societies are locked from the outside world, the fence ensuring that no one can leave. In The Selection, the palace's walls are heavily guarded to keep rebels outside and protect the royal family and the contestants. More insidiously, this protection can be seen as keeping the thirty-five girls within the palace walls, as they have become property of Illéa when chosen for the Selection (Cass, *The Selection* 59). In Monsters of Verity, the Seam divides North and South Verity. The Seam is a massive barrier,

> a three-story barricade cutting east to west through the downtown, warded with stripes of pure metal and studded with cameras. […] Three gates were punched out of the Seam to let people through, but they were monitored by armed men and the ever-watchful red eyes of the moving

> cameras, and everyone who passed through had to show identification while the scanning cameras verified them as human. (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 18-9).

The Seam is strongly secured to protect humans from monstrous creatures; yet security also tracks individuals' whereabouts. Further, there are control points outside the territories' borders that prevent humans (and monsters) from moving as they please. Since the Phenomenon,[84] travel in and out of Verity became restricted.

In despotic societies, walls enforce isolation, preventing individuals from uniting and rebelling. This mechanism is depicted in The Hunger Games, where Panem is divided into twelve Districts that do not interact with one another. During the Games, Katniss learns about District Eleven through Rue, having never heard anything about it or its people's predicament. As Katniss considers: "It's interesting, hearing about her life. We have so little communication with anyone outside our district. In fact, I wonder if the Gamemakers are blocking out our conversation, because even though the information seems harmless, they don't want people in different districts to know about one another" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 237). The less each District knows about the circumstances of the others, the better for the prevailing order. The Capitol sustains its control by enforcing geographical and communicative isolation, thereby ensuring that collective resistance remains impossible. In The Lunar Chronicles, similarly, Luna, a powerful kingdom that developed on the Moon after humans colonised it, is split into biodomes and individuals cannot travel or communicate with one another. (The aristocratic elite live in luxury in the royal city of Artemisia, while the lower classes endure harsh conditions in the outer sectors.) Faced with this scenario, Cinder comprehends:

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[84] As a result of Verity's violence, the Phenomenon took place: "Someone pulls a trigger, sets off a bomb, drives a bus full of tourists off a bridge, and what's left in the wake isn't just shell casings, wreckage, bodies. There's something else. Something *bad*. An aftermath. A *recoil*. A reaction to all that anger and pain and death. That's all the Phenomenon was really, a tipping point" (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 27). Monsters erupted from the shadows, and from that moment on, violent acts bred monsters.

> There was a reason Levana kept her people isolated from one another. There was a reason no one had attempted a cohesive rebellion yet, not because they didn't want to. It was clear from the government-sanctioned propaganda that Levana and her ancestors had sought to brainwash the Lunar people into a belief that their ruler was righteous and fated. It was equally clear from the tunnel graffiti and the people's downcast eyes that they no longer believed it, if they ever had. (Meyer, *Winter* 276)

The entrapment and isolation that emerge from this controlling mechanism impede the Lunars from overthrowing the tyrannical monarchy that rules them. In sum, division functions as a form of domination: by severing connections among the oppressed, the ruling entities prevent rebellion before it can even begin.

Additionally, governments close their borders to other countries, not only between their communities, granting total isolation from the larger world. In Delirium, Lena tells that

> [f]ifty years ago the government closed the borders of the United States. The border is guarded constantly by military personnel. No one can get in. No one goes out. Every sanctioned and approved community must also be contained within a border—that's the law—and all travel between communities requires official written consent of the municipal government, to be obtained six months in advance. This is for our own protection. Safety, Sanctity, Community: That is our country's motto. (Oliver, *Delirium* 42)

In some instances, isolation is not directly enforced, yet it is a consequence of the authoritarian, unethical policies that violate human rights that the governments implement. In Legend, the United States has collapsed and split into two major powers, the Republic and the Colonies, which are at war. Although the rest of the world still exists, the Republic is cut off from global cooperation due to being involved in war and disseminating censorship and authoritarian control within its own borders. The Patriots, the insurgent faction seeking to overthrow the Republic, reveal to Day how other nations view the Republic by showing him a news report:

> A woman's voice narrates, and right at the bottom of the screen is a running marquee of her translated words: "—to find new ways of negotiating with this heavily militarized rogue state, especially now that the transition of power to the Republic's new Elector is complete. African president Ntombi Okonjo proposed a halt today to the United Nations' aid for the Republic until there is enough evidence of a peace treaty between the isolationist country and its eastern neighbor—." (Lu, *Prodigy* 119)

However, even though the world's disapproval politically and socially isolates the Republic, citizens know little to nothing about the rest of the world because the Republic deliberately limits international communication. In Lissa Price's Starters, the Spore Wars, a biological war fought between the United States and the Pac Rim countries, during which the latter released airborne spores, killed the American population aged between twenty and sixty. Only the Starters, children and teenagers, and the elderly Elders survived the attack as they were vaccinated (Price, *Starters* 18). In the aftermath, fear of contagion prompted the other countries to seal their borders: "'Now nobody can leave the U.S. with the other countries paranoid about the damn spores. And no one will come here. Mexico, can you believe they built that wall so Americans couldn't cross over?'" (51-2). In this example, paranoia led to the closing of international borders. Similarly, in the world of The Darkest Minds, international borders are likewise closed due to anxieties surrounding the spread of an unknown disease. Children in the United States of America have developed Idiopathic Adolescent Acute Neurodegeneration (IAAN). The mutation is caused by a chemical agent that was produced to counteract and nullify a number of poisons, bacteria, and drugs, Agent Ambrosia, developed by the Leda Corporation, a medical corporation. Agent Ambrosia was added to the country's water treatment facilities in order to protect people from bioterrorism. The teratogen was consumed by pregnant women, and it affected the brain cells of their unborn children. The mutation remains dormant until children reach puberty, triggered by changes in hormone levels and brain chemistry (Bracken, *In the Afterlight* 424-5). By the age of ten, children either die or develop abilities. Since the knowledge of the reason behind the outbreak of IAAN is covered up, fearing it to be contagious, and that children

would be affected globally, the United States of America is isolated. Canada and Mexico built walls, Ruby is told, "to keep us out and them in" (Bracken, *Darkest Minds* 228). Nevertheless, this isolation is the President's own doing due to his authoritarian policies, such as establishing rehabilitation camps and using propaganda to hide the truth about what is happening to children in these camps, which are in reality prisons. Nevertheless, due to the country's dire circumstances, foreign aid, such as humanitarian daily rations and medication, is sent, yet the government hides it from the populace in warehouses (Bracken, *Never Fade* 335-6) in order to disseminate their indoctrination:

> All along, President Gray had been insistent in his weekly addresses that Americans were pulling themselves up by the bootstraps and taking care of themselves and their countrymen. He made it a point, time and time again, to nail the United Nations for the economic sanctions they put on the country. No one did business with us, so we would have to do business with one another. No one would send in financial relief, so the few people who hadn't lost the bulk of their fortunes when the markets crashed were the ones who would have to donate. Americans would help Americans.
>
> The United Kingdom, France, Japan, Germany—*they just do not understand the American way*, he once said. They weren't affected by IAAN; they didn't feel the razor's edge of our pain. (396-7)

The President's words function primarily as propaganda, designed to keep citizens in line by making them feel isolated and hostile towards the outside world.

Propaganda is often used by the government not only to brainwash citizens, as observed, but also to drill fear into them, which stops them from leaving society. The rhetoric of monsters – whether they are real or not – operates as a mechanism to instil fear and deter individuals from leaving the dystopian society. While exposing his thoughts on how the monster polices the borders, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defends that the monster is a political creation to keep people from moving from one place to another. Cohen claims that "[t]he monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimitating the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To

step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol (or worse) to become monstrous oneself" (12). For instance, in Across the Universe, the Plague Eldest's records, which should be regarded with scepticism, assert the existence of aggressive life-forms on Centauri-Earth, promptly classified as monsters. This finding is used to keep individuals trapped in *Godspeed*, preventing them from landing on the new planet. In fact, later generations, upon uncovering this information, grapple with concerns about landing – concerns that Amy quickly challenges:

> "The monsters? You're worried about the monsters, or whatever it is that's on the planet? […] That captain [Plague Eldest]? He was just scared. Or he didn't want to let go of his power. Look at him—he just assumed it would be bad and then hid all the evidence about the planet and set himself up as king of the ship." (Revis, *A Million Suns* 346)

In Delirium, Lena has spent her whole life in Portland, Maine, never having left her town. The town is surrounded by an electric fence that separates the cured world from the uncured, fabled monsters who did not accept the cure and exiled themselves in the Wilds. Invalids are compared to werewolves and vampires, "things that will rip into you, tear you to shreds. Deadly things" (Oliver, *Delirium* 168). The government uses monsters to implement a rhetoric of fear (and dehumanisation) that keeps individuals away from the Wilds – and the truth.

Furthermore, individuals do not cross the walls that separate their home from the wilderness due to the threat of being punished, imprisoned for life, or, worse, executed. Nevertheless, even though the threat of punishment hovers above their heads, some characters still cross the borders. After falling in love with Alex and deciding she does not want the cure, Lena crosses the fence that surrounds Portland, and as punishment, she is deleted from the governmental system. It is as if she has never existed: "Here, in this world, I have nothing: no family, no home, no place to go. Alex is gone. By now even my identity will have been Invalidated" (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 15). As long as the oppressor maintains their hold on power, Lena can never go back home. On the other hand, Katniss frequently trespasses District Twelve's borders, yet she is

always able to return home. Katniss does it because she is trapped in a starving district (she also becomes trapped in the Hunger Games arena, which is surrounded by electromagnetic fields), and to feed her family, she must cross the imposed borders. Katniss is aware of the punishment she incurs if she is caught, yet it does not stop her as she refuses to let her family starve. Nonetheless, despite Katniss crossing the physical fence into the wilderness to hunt and gather food, she remains confined in the coal mine district, with no possibility of leaving it by her own free will. Katniss is only granted the possibility to travel outside her district when she becomes a Tribute and later a Victor, albeit always under strict schedules and the watchful eye of the Capitol. Indeed, following her triumph in the Games, Katniss finds herself increasingly entrapped in an intricate web of political manipulation and in the ongoing performance the Capitol expects her to maintain.

Notably, trespassing is a theme close to the Gothic, particularly female Gothic, where "[f]or so many female gothic heroines, their distress and danger are due to the simple fact that they trespass where they are not expected and, for some, not wanted" (Montz 750). The dangers these teenage girls face too often stem from encroaching physical boundaries. In one of her incursions into the wilderness, Katniss finds herself trapped when the Peacekeepers unexpectedly reactivate the electrified fence. Although dangers are encountered due to crossing forbidden boundaries, this transgression becomes a catalyst for uncovering the falsehoods that power structures use to keep the population complacent. For instance, if not for trespassing, Katniss would not have encountered runaways from District Eight, Bonnie and Twill, and become aware that the Capitol is showing fake footage of District Thirteen:

> […] I unnerve everyone by turning on the television. Usually we only watch when it's mandatory, because the mixture of propaganda and displays of the Capitol's power—including clips from seventy-four years of Hunger Games — is so odious. But now I'm looking for something special. The mockingjay that Bonnie and Twill are basing all their hopes on. I know it's probably foolishness, but if it is, I want to rule it out. And erase the idea of a thriving District 13 from my mind for good.

> My first sighting is in a news story referencing the Dark Days. I see the smoldering remains of the Justice Building in District 13 and just catch the black-and-white underside of a mockingjay's wing as it flies across the upper right-hand corner. […]
>
> However, several days later, something else grabs my attention. [..] They cut to what is supposed to be live footage of a female reporter, encased in a protective suit, standing in front of the ruins of the Justice Building in 13. Through her mask, she reports that unfortunately a study has just today determined that the mines of District 13 are still too toxic to approach. End of story. But just before they cut back to the main newscaster, I see the unmistakable flash of that same mockingjay's wing. (Collins, *Catching Fire* 184-5)

Katniss begins to wonder whether District Thirteen has truly been destroyed. In a Forest of Hands and Teeth, while staying in the Cathedral, Mary discovers that the Sisterhood has been hiding information about the world beyond their fenced village. Through breaking into and venturing into restricted areas, Mary discovers that the Sisterhood has been experimenting on people, turning them into Unconsecrated (108-9). When Lena trespasses the fence that separates her town from the Wilds for the first time to see Alex's true home, Lena realises the Wilds are nothing like the version disseminated by the government. The blitz did not destroy everything, and is far from being deserted:

> The clearing is full of dozens of trailers, as well as more creative residences: tarps stretched between trees, with blankets and shower curtains to serve as front doors; rusting trucks with tents pitched in the back of their cabs; old vans with fabric stretched over their windows for privacy. The clearing is pitted with holes where campfires have been lit over the course of the day—now, well past midnight, they are smoldering still, letting up ribbons of smoke and the smell of charred wood.
>
> …
>
> As we progress through the clearing, Alex points out every "house" and tells me a little bit about the people who live there, speaking all the time in a whisper, so we won't wake anybody. Some stories I've heard before; others are totally new. I'm not even fully concentrating, but I'm grateful for the sound of his voice, low and steady and familiar and reassuring. Even though the settlement isn't that big—maybe an eighth of a mile long—I feel as though the world has

> suddenly split open, revealing layers and depths I could never have imagined. (Oliver, *Delirium* 290)

The world beyond the walls where she was raised is nothing like the lies that she was taught to believe. Although trespassing exposes these girls to danger as they find themselves in spaces they are not meant to be, it is also the very act that enables them to uncover lies that have moulded their lives. The exposure of hidden knowledge and secrets reshapes their understanding of their society.

While my focus thus far has been on walls that physically entrap characters and hinder their spatial movements, the concept of entrapment extends beyond the mere representation of claustrophobic physical surroundings. Clothing, which plays an important role in Gothic fiction, can also play a significant role in entrapping characters – particularly female characters. In *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (2004), Catherine Spooner explores the role clothing plays in the discourses of the Gothic. Spooner argues that "clothing has always played a vital role in the construction of Gothic narratives" and "is above all a means of inserting the self into social discourse, literary or otherwise" (*Fashioning Gothic Bodies* 2, 3). In Gothic narratives, "Gothic garments articulate the body in terms of a range of characteristic Gothic themes: sensibility, imprisonment, spectrality, haunting, madness, monstrosity, the grotesque. They fashion the body as Gothic subject" (4). That is, through clothing, the mentioned themes are visually reflected. For instance, tight and restrictive garments can symbolise imprisonment or control, while tattered and/or dark clothing might evoke themes of haunting or monstrosity. By wearing specific garments, a character's body becomes a site of Gothic meaning, expressing narrative themes. In other words, clothing externalises psychological or moral conditions, turning the character into a visible embodiment of Gothic tropes. Thus, clothing is not merely decorative; it shapes the Gothic identity of the wearer. In her concluding thoughts, Spooner points out that the "Gothic is not preoccupied with bodies so much as with clothes: clothes produce its most characteristic effects, and when the body does appear, it is usually to be defined through what it is wearing, or at least what it has taken off" (201). By analysing the TV series *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer (1997-2003), Spooner proposes that "[t]he new Gothic heroine has a more sophisticated understanding of gender politics, but she also possesses a more complex relationship with her clothes" (202). This is so because the new Gothic heroine is not defined by the clothes – as Spooner exemplifies, Buffy "slay[s] vampires while wearing a halter top and high-heeled boots" (202-3). The new Gothic heroine uses clothing as a form to express herself, rebel, and/or disguise herself. Consequently, clothing becomes not only a tool of empowerment and subversion but also a site of tension as it can both liberate and objectify the wearer. In other words, fashion serves both as a mode of agency and as a mechanism of control. All in all, in the Gothic mode, fashion embodies and manifests anxieties about the body and identity, especially those related to gender and social performance.

Amy L. Montz also delves into the relationship between fashion and the Gothic, particularly the female Gothic, proposing that

> [a] focus on fashion and dress in gothic novels, ranging from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, moves beyond mere description written for a housewifery audience – and, therefore, an assumed female audience – and well into the establishment of the transgressions of boundaries so common in the female gothic itself. Considering the national, social, gendered, and global implications of fashion, dress is as important to the female gothic novel as are other key aspects of the genre: haunted houses, spectral beings, and deceased or imprisoned first wives. (748)

"Fashion is essential in creating the female gothic," Montz argues, "because it is an important avenue through which the author works out the disturbances and concerns of the very gothic texts they are authoring" (749). Fashion functions as "an important instrument in the female gothic novel, and since its inception in the eighteenth century, the female gothic novel has discussed fashion and its concerns in important and varying ways, particularly in the discussion of female agency" (761). Agency is possible when female characters wear clothing that they identify with, instead of those that are imposed upon them by societal norms and expectations. Curiously, Montz also observes

that fashion “holds fast, like a villain in a gothic novel, sinister and predictable” (748); in other words, fashion is an omnipresent force from which there is no escape. In the Gothic mode, clothing functions as an entrapping mechanism, restricting Gothic heroines to prescribed roles and behaviours expected of them, even when these expectations clash with their individual identities and sense of self. This dynamic is exemplified by Montz’s analysis of *Jane Eyre*, wherein Jane finds herself torn between her desire to wear plain garments that reflect her modest upbringing and the garments desired by Rochester as she will soon become the new Mrs. Rochester: “[f]or Jane, construction of a fashionable self rings false, as she sees her makeover as something Rochester desires for her, not as something she desires herself” (751). In Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), Carmilla “demonstrates some of the same negative characteristics of a typical villainous female vampire, especially in her clothing choices and promiscuity, both of which are still visual shorthand for immorality in women” (Bell 77). Carmilla’s opulent black velvet dress and bloodstained nightdress symbolise both a façade and an unveiling of her monstrous feminine sexuality. Such clothing contrasts with Laura’s innocence, thereby positioning Carmilla as the embodiment of deviant and forbidden femininity. In *Dracula*, Lucy is always described in terms of whiteness and paleness. Although there is only a moment where her clothing is explicitly described as white – Mina observes that “Lucy was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock” (Stoker 75) – it is inferred that she dons white dresses and nightgowns, symbolising her purity and domestic role. Through her garments, Lucy becomes entrapped in a stereotyped model of Victorian womanhood. Even after her death, during her transformation into a vampire, Lucy’s body is covered with a white burial shroud (244). Here, the imposition of white clothing serves to show notions of innocence and purity, despite the shadow of “corruption” that looms over Lucy after being bitten. In Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Madeline Usher is also buried in a white dress, emphasising her virtue and vulnerability. However, upon her return from

the grave, her now bloody burial clothes[85] transform from symbols of docility into ones of terror and the uncanny.

In light of Spooner's and Montz's considerations, it can be argued that, in the Gothic mode, clothing serves, on the one hand, as a medium through which female characters negotiate their agency, and, on the other hand, as a force that exerts power over the female body, moulding its identity. Indeed, clothing is a powerful mechanism for constructing docile bodies. According to Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, who draw on Foucault's insights into the docile body, "[o]ne of the ways in which the body can be made docile is through clothing. Dress renders it analysable, either forcibly through required clothing, or voluntarily through self-selected garments; it becomes manipulable through the effects of being dressed" (75). Using the uniform as a case study, Warwick and Cavallaro exemplify how this piece of clothing can, in accordance with Foucault's assertions, subject, use, transform, and improve the docile body. They argue that the prison uniform subjects the docile body since it "nullifies the subject, preventing the establishment of an identity independent of that which the institution wishes to create" (75). The army and police uniform are used to indicate that the docile body "has been subsumed into a larger body." They further explain that through the use of the army and police uniforms

> people are distinguished from the mass, set apart by their dress. The uniform here speaks of a double valency, in that those uniformed are both subjects of power and also agents of power over the non-uniformed. A complex structure obtains, in which uniform can be seen not to be 'uniform' at all, but a subtle machinery of differentiation, as it is carefully distinguished by details that indicate rank and status. Uniform is not meant to make everyone look the same, but to produce a hierarchy in which those who need to know can make the necessary distinction. […] Power is enforced in an outward direction, as it presents itself as an unreadable blank of absolute similarity to the section of the population who are to be impressed by it. It is also enforced

[85] The narrator describes Madeline following her escape from her tomb in the subsequent manner: "outside that door a shape did stand, the tall figure, in its grave-clothes, of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white dress, and the signs of her terrible efforts to escape were upon every part of her thin form" (Poe 64).

> inwardly, as each member is a single case contained within the grid of organizational relations. (76)

The uniform transforms the docile body "as the flesh is re-created and re-presented within its casing of signifying fabric" and improves it since, for instance, "[t]he mad, the criminal and the pauper become clean, ordered and controlled. The soldier is drilled and trained in a programme of movements alien in their exaggeration or attenuation to the functioning of the natural body." Consequently, "[t]he improvement of the individual bodies through the mechanisms that foster docility improves the social body, giving it the gloss of order and propriety" (77).

In dystopian, totalitarian structures, clothing also plays a part in entrapping characters. Wanda Campbell observes that clothing has "always played an important symbolic role in utopian and dystopian works" (107), making it a central theme within these narratives. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, clothing is characterised by its simplicity and utilitarian function, embodying the author's ideals of equity and modesty. Clothing, as Margaret Atwood posits, "is always a feature, what is worn and what cannot be worn; what is worn in utopias and what cannot be worn in dystopias, and who is permitted to wear what" (11). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, colour-coded clothing serves to define an individual's social position and function within society, dictating their actions and spatial movement: the Handmaids wear red uniforms and white bonnets, the Wives wear blue, the Marthas wear grey, the Aunts wear brown, the Econowives' dresses combine red, blue, and green, Widows wear all black, including black veils, to name a few. Colour-coded clothing is featured in various dystopian narratives, serving as a visual language that reinforces social hierarchies and exerts ideological control. In Burdekin's *Swastika Night*, for instance, uniforms distinguish men by rank and religious devotion, reflecting a society obsessed with purity and order as well as male supremacy. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party uniform and the drab clothing of ordinary citizens reinforce strict social divisions and the suppression of individuality. In these imagined societies, clothing not only signifies an individual's role but also determines their access to social-political structures and spaces (here, clothing conditions spatial movement).

YA dystopian fiction continues this tradition, using clothing to signal identity and enforce social boundaries. In *Fashioning Character: Style, Performance, and Identity in Contemporary Literature* (2021), Lauren S. Cardon examines canonical literary works by Sylvia Plath, Jack Kerouac, and Toni Morrison, among others, to illustrate how American fashion has served as a vehicle for curating identities. In the final chapter of this study, Cardon considers fashion in fiction set in the future, analysing YA dystopian series – Scott Westerfeld's The Uglies, The Hunger Games, and Matched. In speculative fiction, Cardon states, "characters' dress is a good indicator of the governmental regime as well as other political, social, and environmental conditions," and "clothes tend to fall into three different categories: utilitarian, uniform, and decadent" ("Fashion and Fiction of the Future"). Although the selected YA dystopias feature clothing that can be classified into all three categories, my analysis focuses on the roles of the uniform and decadent attire. Cardon explains that uniforms "tend to connote a repressive regime that seeks to control identity and limit individual freedoms," that is, uniforms represent a life commanded by what one wears and a lack of choice under a totalitarian regime. Decadence evokes a "psychological statement about self-denial: those who follow even the most absurd trends blindly belie a lack of self-awareness, a greater concern with showing themselves to be on the cusp of the new and part of an insider group than with self-understanding" (*ibidem*). Teenage girls in YA dystopia fiction do not fall prey to the distraction these frivolous clothes provide (even if sometimes they are star-struck by them). They are still privy to and critical of the underlying injustices in their society, due to inhabiting the margins and their lower social status.

In YA dystopian novels, uniforms identify an individual's role in society, indicating not only one's role and principles but also one's place within the societal hierarchical structure. For instance, in Matched, Officials wear white uniforms, students wear "brown plain clothes" and those who have received their permanent work positions wear dark blue plainclothes (Condie, *Matched* 41). However, at their Match Banquet, teenagers can choose the colour and style of their clothing, even if the Society still restricts the options available to them. In Divergent, each faction's clothing reflects their core beliefs: Abnegation dresses all in grey to remain unobtrusive; Amity favours red or

yellow outfits, reflecting their goal of being happy and friendly; Candor dresses in black and white, symbolising their perception of truth as black and white; Dauntless dresses in black, with tattoos and piercings serving as markers of individuality. In Legend, within the militarised regime, soldiers wear uniforms that identify their military rank, thereby indicating their position in the hierarchical structure, while simultaneously distinguishing them from the civilian population. When June disguises herself as an escort in Las Vegas, it is revealed that the women who work at the clubs display visible tattoos that identify their ownership (Lu, *Prodigy* 10). In The Darkest Minds, the abilities the surviving children develop are classified by colour designations: Green (increased intelligence), Blue (telekinesis), Yellow (can manipulate electricity), Red (can control fire), and Orange (telepathy and mind control). Those locked up in the rehabilitation camps are forced to wear colour-coded uniforms that identify their abilities. In Arc of a Scythe, death has been conquered, and scythes are the only ones who can glean (that is, end lives) in order to regulate the population size. Scythes wear robes that identify them on sight – it is expected that individuals recognise a scythe so that they comply with the gleaning and offer hospitality, as the law requires. A scythe, as Citra reflects when Scythe Faraday walks into her home, "could choose the color of his or her robe—every color except for black, for it was considered inappropriate for their job. Black was an absence of light, and scythes were the opposite. Luminous and enlightened, they were acknowledged as the very best of humanity—which is why they were chosen for the job" (Shusterman, *Scythe* 14). The colour each scythe selects functions as a form of identification, as individuals can typically identify who the scythe is by the colour of the robe. In these dystopian worlds, clothing conveys social and political meaning and, as a result, entraps people within hierarchical social groups. As visual markers of control that categorise people and identify individuals within their group, clothing often hinders covert movements.

Female teenage characters in YA fiction frequently undergo a makeover. The makeover, or as Leah Phillips puts forward, the sparklemation,[86] underpins the legacy of

[86] Philips uses the term "sparklemation" since Cinderella's makeover is swathed in sparks and glitter.

Disney's Cinderella. The most iconic hero's prize, Cinderella, "rather than slaying the monster," Phillips argues, "is tasked with achieving a suitable appearance while joyfully attending to household duties and chores." If she does them correctly, "she is awarded with a makeover" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fiction* xi), which opens doors for Cinderella to become the hero's bride. Unfortunately, "Cinderella's sparkly, heightened, fantasy femininity as well as her cheery disposition in the face of hardship delimits what it means to be a girl, setting the standard for later versions" (xix). Cinderella's sparkly makeover represents a heightened, fantastical, superficial and exclusionary femininity (2). This standard can be found in popular female characters, that is, "mainstream YA's 'exceptional heroines' [who] have done little to change the girl's ancillary role, despite how often they save the day or how much they kickass" (xix). Besides, "[n]either girl, however, offers an alternative to the prize's narrow and limiting expectations. In fact, they heighten, intensify and internalize them" (xviii). Phillips suggests that mainstream YA's exceptional heroines, such as

> Hermione Granger [Harry Potter], Bella Swann [Twilight], Clary Fray [The Mortal Instruments], Tris Prior and Katniss Everdeen [are] smart. They can fight, hunt, be the face of rebellions and save their respective worlds. […] However, rather than offering any real intervention in heroic norms and standards, mainstream YA heroines – who overwhelmingly look and act like Cinderella, even as they kick ass and save the day – perpetuate the system of binary opposition at the very centre of Western thought. Mainstream or 'blockbuster' heroines offer an exceptional and expectational model of adolescent girlhood, offering the illusion of empowerment and equality because they look and act like Cinderella while kicking ass and saving the day. (1)

To Phillips, even though Katniss is praised as a feminist heroine, she is "still trapped in a scheme requiring [her] to look and act like Cinderella, only Katniss gets to deploy the hero's rugged, toxic masculinity" (16).

Phillips is not the only one who has noted the similarities between Katniss and Cinderella. Focusing on the trilogy as well as on the cinematographic adaptations, Kelly Oliver compares Katniss to a "dystopic Cinderella," writing that "in the course of The

Hunger Games films, and first and second volumes of the trilogy, Katniss goes from rags to riches. As the winner of the Hunger Games, she becomes a celebrity who is lavished with riches." Additionally, Oliver emphasises,

> [l]ike Cinderella, Katniss grows up among the ashes. In her case, it is the ash of the coalmines that are the staple of District 12 and in which her father was killed in an explosion. By the opening of the third book in the trilogy, she stands among the ashes of her former life, which was burned to ash by firebombs from the Capitol. Like Cinderella, Katniss is pulled from the ashes of her world by the love of her 'prince," who in this dark fairytale needs her for survival as much as she needs him. (131-2)

More broadly, Cristina Santos writes that the girl warrior hero "is a 'new' Cinderella who not only suffers through the specularisation of her adolescence, but that exchanges the glass slipper for combat boots" (*Untaming Girlhood* 124). Santos expands on this idea, observing that "[a]s girl warrior heroes, Katniss and Tris embody various Cinderella motifs as part of their hero's journey—a journey that does not culminate at the royal ball, but rather in their pursuit for justice for their communities that, once achieved, they are either reinscribed into the heteropatriarchal order or suffer a venerable death" (132).

The Cinderella model of selfhood is so ingrained in society that it often entraps YA heroines (and female characters). The makeover is no stranger to YA dystopian fiction. As discussed by Phillips, Oliver, and Santos, in The Hunger Games, Katniss experiences such a transformation. Throughout the series, outside the arenas of the Games, Katniss is often presented to the audience in dresses. At the Reaping Ceremony, she puts on a modest dress that belongs to her mother, which contrasts with her hunter persona. Later, at the Capitol, during the interviews, she is always wearing lavish dresses, ranging from extravagant gowns that spontaneously erupt in flames as she twirls to child-like, flimsy dresses after she wins the Games. While the former are designed to imprint a favourable impression of Katniss among the Capitol's inhabitants, as she becomes the Girl on Fire, the latter serve as a strategic measure to protect her

life after she challenges the Capitol with the deadly berries. (This choice of attire is an attempt to convince everyone that she is just a teenage girl in love.) In this context, clothing can be understood as being worn, on the one hand, to make Katniss stand out as a Tribute, while on the other hand, by donning ethereal and youthful dresses, it is used to manipulate the public perception; that is, Katniss wears girlish and innocent-like dresses to fit the social expectations of a young girl in love. Besides being put into clothes chosen by someone else (even though Cinna, her stylist, protects her and is supportive of her), Katniss also experiences physical changes to her body. For instance, only moments after arriving at the Capitol following volunteering in the Games, Katniss is taken to the Remake Centre, which, as the name itself indicates, is a place where she is recreated. As Katniss describes, the prep team has scrubbed "down my body with a gritty loam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, [turned] my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, [ride] my body of hair. My legs, arms, torso, underarms, and parts of my eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving me like a plucked bird, ready for roasting" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 71). At the Remake Centre, Katniss is transformed from an impoverished girl from District Twelve into a Tribute. After she is crowned the 74th Hunger Games Victor, Katniss is taken into the hovercraft, where the Capitol medical personnel attend to her injuries while she is unconscious. However, not only does the medical staff treat her wounds, but they also attempt to surgically enhance her breasts (Haymitch, a former winner and District Twelve's mentor, stops them from doing it) and remove all of her bodily scars: "I start to sit up but am arrested by the sight of my hands. The skin's perfection, smooth and glowing. Not only are the scars from the arena gone, but those accumulated over years of hunting have vanished without a trace" (410). Quite interestingly, Santos suggests that the erasure of Katniss's scars not only transforms her physical appearance but also influences her self-perception and cuts her ties to her past:

> In literally changing Katniss' skin, the bio-medical interventions change how she sees herself in the mirror since her body has now become, even more than before, a projection of how others want to see her. She has, in essence, been transformed both physically and psycho-emotionally

> into a brand for Snow's and Coin's political agendas. By removing Katniss' scars of childhood experiences, it erases her past links to nature, District 12, and her memories of life in the woods, of hunting, and even of her family. (*Untaming Girlhoods* 148)

I must emphasise that I find this interpretation to be overly categorical, as Katniss never truly severs her connections to her past. Despite the Capitol's efforts to erase the trauma she experiences during the Games from her body through biomedical interventions, what Katniss endures can never be removed from her mind. The same holds true for her memories of her childhood and District Twelve. Phillips approaches a similar concern in her analysis of The Lunar Chronicles, since Cinder's transformation into a cyborg has left scars on her body. Phillips indicates that scars "are central both to how the dominant narrative (hegemonic discourse) assimilates difference into its frame, […] and to how difference might, instead, reshape that frame. For one, scars offer a history. They are a kind of writing of the body's history on its surface. The absence of scars – the story of the body – makes 'sameness' even more pervasive" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fiction* 98). Scars function as visible markers of difference. They are a form of writing that records the histories on the body that the hegemonic discourse seeks to suppress. Consequently, they possess the potential to disrupt or reshape prevailing narratives by making hidden histories legible on the body; that is, they challenge normative frameworks by insisting on visibility. The erasure of a person's scars is an attempt to erase their past. Hence, the removal of Katniss's scars exemplifies an attempt to alter her history. As part of the Capitol's ongoing spectacle (that extends well beyond her participation in the Games), Katniss is deprived of control over her own body and her clothing.

Cassia experiences her Cinderella transformation for the Match Banquet – a banquet that echoes Cinderella's ball as the young teenagers attending it are about to find their happily ever after. Preparing for her Match Banquet, it is the first time Cassia wears a piece of clothing she has chosen herself, instead of the matching daily uniforms everyone wears, even if coloured differently. Of course, in a society of algorithmic

calculations, it was predicted that Cassia would choose a green dress. Choices are not really choices but probabilities according to the data collected over the years:

> I knew the moment I saw it that it was the one I wanted. When I made my selection, the woman at the clothing distribution center smiled after she punched the number—seventy-three—into the computer. "That's the one you were most likely to pick," she said. "Your personal data indicated it, and so did general psychology. You've picked things outside of the majority in the past, and girls like their dresses to bring out their eyes."
>
> I smiled and watched as she sent her assistant into the back to retrieve the dress. When I tried it on, I saw that she was right. The dress was meant for me. The hemline fell perfectly; the waist curved in exactly the right amount. I turned in front of the mirror, admiring myself.
>
> The woman told me, "So far, you are the only girl wearing this dress at the Match Banquet this month. The most popular gown is one of the pink gowns, number twenty-two."
>
> "Good," I told her. I don't mind standing out a *little*. (Condie, *Matched* 24-5)

Cassia is still thrilled to discover that she is the only girl to pick that precise green-hued dress for that month's Matching. She is given the choice to stand out and assert her individuality, albeit in a limited capacity, as Cassia articulates. In the dull daily uniforms, Cassia is merely one more cog in the Society's machine of algorithmic calculations. In contrast, in the "ice green, floating, full-skirted" dress, Cassia feels beautiful (6) – a feeling that is fleeting, as she is required to return the dress the day after the banquet. In this manner, while wearing a dress different from her peers, Cassia momentarily embraces her individuality. It must be stressed that, despite being presented with one hundred options, Cassia is ultimately confined to selecting only from dresses.

In The Selection, prior to their first television interview following their arrival at the palace, the contestants undergo a makeover. In a twirl of silks and sequins, face powder and lipstick, stylists enhance each contestant's attributes. Nevertheless, the trilogy depicts instances where America attempts to resist this transformation since she wants to remain herself, although she does find herself allured by the process:

"I'm not changing everything about me to cater to some guy I don't even know." Or like, I added in my head.

"Oh, my. Do we have an individual here?" he sang, as if I were a child.

"Aren't we all?"

The man smiled at me. "Fine, then. We won't change your image, we'll just enhance it. I need to polish you up a bit, but your aversion to all things fake might just be your greatest asset here. Hold on to that, honey." He patted me on the back and walked away, sending a group of women swarming my way.

I didn't realize that when he said "polish," he meant it literally. I had women scrub my body because I apparently couldn't be trusted to do a good enough job on my own. […] After they were done making me smooth and supple, attention was turned to my nails. They were trimmed and buffed and the tough little pieces of skin around them were miraculously smoothed away. I told them I'd prefer not to have my nails painted, but they looked so disappointed that I told them they could do my toes. The one girl picked a nice neutral shade, so it wasn't too bad.

…

My hair was washed, conditioned, hydrated, and smoothed. It was long and all one length when I came in—my mom usually cut it, and that was the best she could do—but by the time they were done, it was several inches shorter and had layers. I liked those; they made my hair catch the light in interesting ways. […] A very pretty-looking girl did my makeup. I instructed her to go light, and it was nice. Lots of the other girls looked a little older or younger or just nicer after the makeup. I still looked like me when I was done. […] I'd gone through most of this process in a robe, and once they were done fixing me up, I was led over to the racks of clothes. My name was hanging above a bar holding a week's worth of dresses. I guessed princesses-in-training didn't wear pants. (Cass, *The Selection* 90-3)

America's image is to be played with, so she can become whoever she wants to be; that is, the makeover allows her to become someone else, such as, suggested by the stylist, a temptress. Nevertheless, America prefers being herself, even if she still allows them to turn her into an enhanced version of herself. And, in fact, princesses-in-training do not wear pants. The palace provides each of the thirty-five girls with nightgowns and dresses in bright and dark-coloured fabrics, embellished with jewels, glitter, and tulle, in their wardrobes. Nevertheless, inside the closet, there are no pants. America finds

herself asking for trousers, and although Maxon, the prince, does assent to her request, he asks her only to wear them on Saturdays. Although frills and frocks are not particularly useful when one must escape the constant rebel assaults on the palace, dresses represent the attire deemed appropriate for a future queen to wear every single day.

However, makeovers are not always Cinderella-like; that is, they do not always entail feminine, sumptuous gowns and sparkly, colourful eyeshadow. For instance, when Tris joins the Dauntless, even though she undergoes a makeover, it is not a typical one. Tris ditches her Abnegation plain clothes, exchanging them for tight-fitting, practical, and made-for-movement black clothes, such as leather jackets, boots, dark pants, and tank tops. The Dauntless embrace a rugged, almost militaristic look, meant to signal fearlessness and defiance of conformity. Tris has the opportunity to express herself by wearing the clothes she wants (even if she can only choose from what the Dauntless deem to be markers of their daring lifestyle) and by embellishing her body with tattoos or dark eyeliner. Though Tris does not conform to the traditional model of femininity, she nonetheless experiences a form of entrapment. First, she is performing an identity that is at odds with her own (after all, she is Divergent). In her efforts to fit in with her new faction, Tris consistently performs behaviours that she believes are characteristic of the Dauntless. Lizzie Seal and Maggie O'Neil articulate this transformation, stating,

> Tris's metamorphosis into a member of Dauntless involves changing her appearance, behaviour and manner of social interaction. Self-policing of these elements is highly important in order to fit in and underlines how Tris's world is one based on a pervasive sense of surveillance, even where it is not enacted technologically. (123)

To achieve a sense of belonging and conceal her Divergent identity, Tris constantly engages in self-policing. Clothing serves as a tool that imposes an identity on those who wear it – they cannot show traces of other factions. Second, the makeover serves as a veiled way to force Tris to cut ties with her previous faction. Visual aesthetics play a

crucial role in maintaining divisions between factions, paralleling the walls and fences that entrap individuals.

In conclusion, in these societies, dresses function as signifiers of girlhood and as instruments for reinforcing patriarchal (and dictatorial) constructions of femininity. Hence, Katniss, Cassia and America become entrapped in conventional, externally imposed forms of femininity. These girls – and, to a certain extent, Tris – are entrapped by identities fashioned by others, identities that seek to erase their individuality and, consequently, critical thinking. Authoritarian regimes rely on the homogenisation of their citizens, a logic reflected in the uniform clothing mandated to eliminate visible differences. In this sense, clothing becomes a mechanism for the erasure of personal identity. Additionally, it is perceptible that both Katniss and America undergo transformations designed to appeal to the public eye. They both are asked to become someone else to please those who watch them. While America retains limited agency over her makeover, Katniss must endure this imposed transformation, as her survival depends on the Capitol citizens' perception of her and their willingness to see her as worth their patronage in the Games.

Importantly, not all walls are visible or material; they can often be psychological. Returning to the topic of trauma, these teenage girls construct barriers not only between themselves and others but also inside themselves. Such internal walls are built to cope with their traumatic experiences, allowing them to keep what haunts them deeply buried. In these instances, the mind becomes an imprisoning space. As the preceding analysis on trauma illustrates, psychological scars confine individuals within themselves. In the Gothic, "psychological prisons characteristically disintegrate under repeated mental strain, terminating in madness and breakdown" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 18). In the face of psychological prisons, YA dystopian heroines resist descending into a destructive, catatonic madness, despite often teetering on the verge of such a state. Following her rescue from the Quarter Quell arena, Katniss finds herself succumbing to mental instability. At the time, she recognises that "[m]aybe I'm already going crazy and no one has the heart to tell me. I feel crazy enough" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 436). Later in the narrative, the loss of her sister and the failed attempt to

take her own life after assassinating Coin confine Katniss in her own mind; yet, she does not succumb to despair and re-emerges into the world, still alive, even if scarred.

Within non-visible walls, social walls also exist – social segregation greatly entraps individuals by enforcing spatial and institutional separation. For instance, in the Selection, the caste system[87] acts as a social barrier. The caste system determines nearly every aspect of a citizen's life, encompassing social status, occupation, economic stability, educational opportunities, and marital options. The movement of Illéa's citizens within the caste structure is rare, occurring predominantly by marriage (even then, only women change caste) and conscription, as those selected for training as guards and soldiers are automatically classified as Twos. Social walls institute gender entrapment, a theme that is notably explored in the context of the (female) Gothic. Female characters are confined to roles and spaces deemed appropriate and acceptable for their gender, thereby becoming entrapped by gendered expectations that severely limit their autonomy and restrict their freedom to act and move in accordance with their own desires. The Gothic mode exposes this gender entrapment, dramatising it through the depiction of locked rooms, dungeons, and labyrinthine settings. Even though Gothic heroines may temporarily challenge or escape their confinement, they inevitably return to their state of entrapment – either through marriage, which signifies a return to the patriarchal structure and domestic sphere, or through the clothing they are expected to adopt.

However, even though walls are entrapping, imprisoning, and claustrophobic, "[a] wall or a fence or a dome or an enclave or whatever it is that is keeping the people inside safe and the people outside segregated will cease to exist" (Hentges 117). And I would add that a wall that keeps people inside, isolated, will also cease to exist. By the

[87] The caste system is divided in eight: One (royalty and religious figures), Two (celebrities, including athletes, singers, actors/actresses, and models, politicians, and protective forces, such as guards, firefighters, and military members), Three (inventors, teachers, philosophers, scientists, doctors, veterinarians, nurses, dentists, architects, librarians, engineers, therapists/psychologists, film directors, music producers, lawyers, and writers), Four (jewellers, real estate agents, insurance brokers, head chefs, construction managers, property/business owners, and farmers), Five (artists and performers), Six (workers), Seven (manual labourers), and Eight (mentally/physically unwell people, runaways, illegitimate, and the homeless).

end of her journey, Lena calls for the walls to be brought down (a passage that articulates the tradition of the critical dystopia):

> Take down the walls.
>
> That is, after all, the whole point. You do not know what will happen if you take down the walls; you cannot see through to the other side, don't know whether it will bring freedom or ruin, resolution or chaos. It might be paradise, or destruction.
>
> Take down the walls.
>
> Otherwise you must live closely, in fear, building barricades against the unknown, saying prayers against the darkness, speaking verse of terror and tightness.
>
> Otherwise you may never know hell, but you will not find heaven, either. You will not know fresh air and flying.
>
> All of you, wherever you are: in your spiny cities or your one-bump towns. Find it, the hard stuff, the links of metal and chink, the fragments of stone filling your stomach. And pull, and pull, and pull.
>
> I will make a pact with you: I will do it if you will do it, always and forever.
>
> Take down the walls. (Oliver, *Requiem* 391)

All walls must come down!

2.2. On the Past

> In order to master the future, it is necessary, in the first place, to turn it into the past (as it is based on the 'known,' the past does not scare), and, second, to sacrifice the present (which turns out from this future-directed perspective to be irrelevant, as everything is done 'for the bright tomorrow' and 'for future generations').

Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History : Museum of the Revolution*

The Gothic is obsessed with the past,[88] an obsession that critics often theorise. Allan Lloyd-Smith contends that the Gothic "is about the *return* of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself" (1). This assertion resonates with Catherine Spooner's claim that the Gothic "is profoundly concerned with the past, conveyed through both historical settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the present" (*Contemporary Gothic* 9). "The past," Spooner explains, "chokes the present, prevents progress and the march towards personal or social enlightenment" (18-9). In fact, Jarlath Killeen suggests, in the Gothic the past is never wholly finished with, having "a nasty habit of bursting through into the present, displacing the contemporary with the supposedly outdated" (48). The past, characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity, persistently irrupts into the present. The narrative interruptions Spooner refers to – that is, moments in which the past actively intrudes upon and destabilises the present – take numerous forms. Jonathan Dent enumerates them:

> [w]hether it is fragmented scripts, discarded documents, fractured histories, ancient artefacts, decaying architecture, confused ancestry, generational conflict, a preoccupation with origins or the presence of history through supernatural occurrences, the Gothic is obsessed with the nature of the past and our relationship with it. (2)

[88] The term "Gothic novel" itself, Maggie Kilgour explains, "is an oxymoron that reflects its desire to identify conflicting impulses: both towards newness, novelty, originality, and towards a return to nature and revival of the past" (17-8).

The Gothic explores the past through various recurring elements that highlight the intrinsic relationship between past and present and how history holds the present in its grip. For instance, the ominous and shadowy castles and asylums commonly featured in these narratives are haunted by the unspeakable actions of those they house(d). Undead revenants roam in the hallways, terrifying reminders of those who once inhabited these places and their deeds. As Fred Botting emphasises, "Gothic atmospheres–gloomy and mysterious–have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter" (*Gothic 1st Edition* 1). In haunted places, Barry Curtis pinpoints, "the laws of nature are suspended – time has been occluded by some traumatic incident that continues to exert a hold on the present through a persistence of energy that can continue to manifest itself," building "a timeless quality [and] resistance to the insecurity of perpetual change that characterizes everyday life" (55). The Gothic house "contains evidence of specific life histories: a skeleton stashed beneath the floorboards or locked in a chest, a prisoner shut away in a dungeon, a manuscript reporting a crime, an ancestral portrait revealing the hero or heroine's true lineage, the ghost of a previous occupant, an aged retainer who remembers certain sinister events of long ago" (DeLamotte 15). In other words, the Gothic house is a physical repository of the past, holding traces of earlier lives and buried histories. Thus, in the end, "[a]t the heart of the gothic house is a terrible, terrible secret" (Ross 65) – a terrible secret rooted in a macabre past. Furthermore, eerie, dead-ringer paintings and statues[89] from long-dead ancestors adorn mouldering walls. Crumbling, lost manuscripts, journals, books and letters, keepers of horrific truths, are hidden in every nook and cranny.

The motif of the found novel or manuscript has been a standard convention in the Gothic mode since the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*. Indeed, Gothic texts themselves are described as lost documents, represented as mouldering, decaying

[89] Dead-ringer paintings and statues are prominent in Gothic texts. James P. Carson explains that "[f]ascinated with liminal states or with an undecidability between life and death, or between human beings and artistic representations, Gothic novelists tend to include in their stories statues and portraits that bleed, move, speak, or show other signs of animation" (259).

manuscripts and sheets of paper. Spooner explains that the motif of the found manuscript is represented as

> the discovery of a lost or hidden document that reveals dreadful secrets concerning the fate of its author, before crumbling away just before the crucial point is made. This manuscript is often in poor condition, fragmented, missing important information [and its] narrator may be unreliable or inarticulate. It is often framed by supporting narratives that elaborate on or question the story told inside. (*Contemporary Gothic* 38)

In the same vein, Ann Davies contends that "the common device of the rediscovered manuscript [merges] a mystery over origins, and thus authority and authenticity, with the undeniable tangibility of a document. Yet that tangibility itself may be fragile as documents crumble and perish or are lost" (54). The author further suggests that the discovered manuscript "contains the ghosts of the past" – indeed, any book "which might offer some semblance of material reality to oppose the haunting, simply becomes the object of Gothic obsession and, once again, reveals the uncertainty of the Gothic manuscript" (65). In the Gothic mode, the past is also depicted "by a parent, long thought dead, but in fact imprisoned in a subterranean vault" (Kilgour 31).[90] In summary,

[90] The absent mother is a common trope in Gothic narratives. Gothic heroines, such as Isabella, Emily, Jane Eyre, and Mina, are motherless, raised by their male progenitor or, if he is also absent due to premature and unexpected death, by their closest male kin or a representative or keeper of the patriarchal order. Similar to their daughters, Gothic mothers are constantly in danger of being effaced. However, unlike them, they are more often than not obliterated by the patriarchy. Ruth Bienstock Anolik extensively discusses the figure of the mother in Gothic literature. By exploring the legal principles of *coverture* and primogeniture, Anolik examines how dangerous they are to a mother's survival in a Gothic narrative. The author remarks that "Gothic representations of marriage [are] dangerous and confining to the wife, and of motherhood [result] in the disappearance of the mother" (26). After serving their purpose to the narrative, wives and mothers die from fatal diseases or are imprisoned and/or murdered by the patriarchal society. Thus, as a rule, marriage and children in a Gothic tale are a menace to the survival of these women. If the mother does not perish or is not long dead by the time the plot begins, she is often vilified. This vilification relates to the fact that "the figure of the mother exerts social control and order, providing resistance to deviance that is beneficial to society but detrimental to narrative" (27). The absence of a protective, caring mother and a domestic structure is pivotal to the production of a Gothic tale, which features misadventures and several threats to the Gothic heroine's virginity and well-being. Hence, if Gothic fiction is perilous for the mother, mothers are also too dangerous for the Gothic narrative itself, and for that reason, they cannot be allowed to live. The fundamental cause mothers must be absent in Gothic narratives is that they are their daughters' doubles. Doubles cannot thrive if both the original (the mother) and the duplicate (the daughter) are alive. The mother must perish to give the daughter the

through these motifs and imagery, the Gothic depicts the reemergence of hidden histories, weaving them into the current narrative and enabling the past to haunt and influence contemporary experiences – the past bursts into the present through uncanny motifs, breaching and destabilising the present.

Two major themes deeply intertwined with Gothic depictions of the past are "the sins of the father" and "the return of the past." In the theme of the sins of the father, Botting claims, these "are visited on the offspring [manifesting] in the representations of the illegitimacy and brutality of paternal authority, the repetition of events, and the doublings of figures and names in successive generations" (*Gothic 1st Edition* 129). Gothic heroes and heroines are bound to discover family secrets, which have been forgotten and can be remembered only through hauntings. They must learn from their ancestors' past actions or be condemned to repeat the same mistakes.[91] This theme condenses "the unsettling idea of the child as possible 'double' of the parent" (Armitt, *History of the Gothic* 119). (The double is another theme of the Gothic that I later discuss.) The return of the past, represented through manifestations that intrude on the present, "concerns misfortunes and evil befalling one as a result of another's past actions" (Fall and Kapler "Hauntings"). Typically exerting an influence on the present, the past is frequently marked by elements of horror, violence, or death. However, it can also be represented as a benign force, advocating for truth and justice by rectifying injustices and ensuring that individuals receive their due recompense (Kirkland 3). The return of the past can take the "form of a curse, ancestrally or magically imposed, an obsession or a haunting" (Wester and Reyes 3). The curse or prophecy,[92] which promises

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possibility to grow and mature. Being motherless gives the Gothic heroine the freedom to leave the domestic world (even if she never gets too far from it) and experience adventures in a Gothicised world. Motherhood requires self-sacrifice, the destruction of a mother's identity to let the daughter flourish. Overall, through the depiction of the absent mother, the Gothic warns about the systems that prevent married women from having a separate identity from their husbands and from exercising custody over their children.

[91] In this instance, the Gothic functions "as a cautionary tale that registers the fall-out of progress should the lessons of the past, both personal and political, not be heeded" (Armitt, *History of the Gothic* 88).

[92] The prophecy "serve[s] to explain how the story's current action is rooted in some event of the past. In many cases, the prophecy addresses a past wrong and how it might be revenged or righted" ("Gothic Tropes: Prophecies and Curses").

to unravel a family line, embodies a heavy history that plagues the protagonists' memory. Obsessions usually personify the intense, recurring fixations that relate to forbidden desires, traumatic experiences, or unresolved histories. Last but not least, hauntings hold particular significance in the return of the past. In the "earliest Gothic novels—with their relatively clear-cut portrayals of wrongdoings—tend to employ haunting as a device for uncovering and redressing unlawful past deeds and thus render it an instrument of justice" (Janicker Introduction). Hauntings can manifest in myriad ways (both the curse and the obsession, in a sense, represent a haunting since they intrude upon and disrupt the present):

> might be literal, in the form of ghosts or supernatural entities, connected not only with historical pasts but originating in the beliefs of previous cultures and societies [or] may be documentary, involving recently discovered information concerning forgotten deeds which come to light through rational methods of investigation and research [or] may assume the form of uncovered objects pointing to some hidden injustice, a dusty skeleton evidencing violent crimes, or secret rooms revealing clandestine activities. (Kirkland 3)

When the haunting takes a physical form, such as howling ghosts, apparitions, or revenants, they depict the return of the dead, which reappear at times of personal and/or social-political turmoil. However, their return serves not only to destroy and turn the reality one has always known upside down. As Kilgour emphasises, although destructive, they are brought into the present to unveil the truth that has allowed those in/with power to commit misdeeds.

The female Gothic places considerable emphasis on the relationship between the Gothic and the past, highlighting its profound connections and implications. In *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses* (2016), Gina Wisker explores contemporary female Gothic literature, focusing on female voices which were once silenced by both patriarchal structures and colonial and imperial endeavours. These women used Gothic conventions in their novels to reveal hidden stories and buried versions of history; that is, to uncover historical realities that had

been suppressed, ignored, or forgotten. In these women's hands, the Gothic becomes "a daylight gate, a gap into otherness, a mirror that reflects back history, story, self and others with new perspectives and edges" (250). Hence, to Wisker, "[t]he Gothic enables us to recover and rewrite the past, reinterpret and even try and understand it" (236). In general, "Gothic stories play an important role in recuperating hidden histories, empowering those who have been marginalised and silenced" (92). Furthermore, quite interestingly, the author suggests that "Gothic representations of incarcerating spaces, the oppression of the domestic, indicated in clothing, interiors and domestic behaviours, enact the overwhelming stranglehold of the past" (221). The Gothic mode often represents the domestic world – its spaces and objects – to symbolise how women are trapped by the past and by restrictive cultural narratives.

The same fascination with the past is prominently found in contemporary YA dystopian fiction. Indeed, "[t]he problematics of cultural forgetfulness and fabricated memories are a major topic in dystopias" (Bastos da Silva, "Utopia and Cultural Memory" 317). The dystopian genre as a whole critically explores the impact of the erasure of the past, engaging with themes of memory, loss, and the cyclical nature of history, revealing a complex relationship between the past and the futures they envision. In canonical dystopian literature, those in positions of power do not preserve the past; they actively engage in its eradication. This is achieved through repeated attempts to erase or rewrite historical narratives to reinforce and propagate their ideology. As Winston, the protagonist of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, insightfully reflects,

> If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, it never happened – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?
>
> […] if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. "Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, "controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." (Orwell 40)

In this dystopian novel, Orwell portrays the inherent fragility of memory. History is rewritten by the Party countless times. By manipulating historical records, the Party

exerts control over the present and acquires the power to shape the future in accordance with its own agenda. The distortion and destruction of the past is customary in canonical dystopian fiction. For instance, in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), the One State reduces history to a state-approved myth. Although the past is not erased, as the Ancient House, a museum that exhibits objects from the past, can be visited by anyone who wishes to, history is used as propaganda, reinforcing the state's ideology, as they believe that citizens "would respond to the chaotic life of past generations with repulsion" (Gerhard 60). Consequently, rather than advocating embracing the past, the Ancient House functions "to show how much more organized and better their lives have become under the present regime and how less rationalized and savage-like people used to be" (61). In Burdekin's *Swastika Night*, following their conquest of the world, the Nazis rewrote the past and eliminated literacy among the masses. In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, books are banned and burned, and, as a result, critical thinking is abolished. History is altered, and the word "firefighter" takes on a new meaning: a firefighter is someone who starts fires. The former meaning is made obsolete by those in power. When questioned about the fireman being the one who puts out fires and who starts them (Bradbury 16), Montag vehemently contradicts this statement, denying that the word could ever have had any other meaning. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the government revises the recent past, particularly when it comes to women's rights and freedoms, portraying it as immoral and dangerous, while also manipulating scriptural texts to justify its ideological stance. Offred's recorded testimony on tape is one of the few available accounts of Gilead's past, reconstructed from fragmentary testimonies. As Margaret Atwood comments about the Historical Notes, it "is a commentary on the limited possibilities of authenticating the past, and also on the uses to which history can be put, and indeed has been put" (14). History, official or not, is a mere reconstruction. Analogous to the examples presented by Jorge Bastos da Silva, "the distortion of memory is a smoke screen that postulates a replacement historical teleology: whether or not they palpably deviate from what happened, officially sanctioned truths reveal what *had* to happen. Indoctrination relies on the illusion of infallible historical causation. Fake history is justified history" ("Utopia and Cultural Memory" 321). Controlling the

past is an effective tool for keeping the population submissive and consolidating an ideology, as Elsa Bouet states:

> Changing the past is one of the most powerful weapons a tyrant can hold. Altering memory is a way to ensure loyalty, but also redefine one's subjects through the dominant ideology. In dystopias, controlling memory is a way to ensure that the population believes that the way things are have *always* been that way, that there is and was no other way possible. This instillation of belief is a further way to ensure docility in the population, to avoid a rebellion, a revolution. Containing memory – as truth – outside the ideological wall is crucial in order to keep society in control, for power to remain in the hands of those who hold it. (40)

Thus, the past is systematically altered to produce passive individuals, consequently ensuring that society conforms to the rules imposed without dissent. Within these societies, any real knowledge of the past is dangerous because, as Raffaella Baccolini conveys, it "can give the dystopian citizens a potential instrument of resistance" ("'A useful knowledge of the present is rooted in the past'" 115). This fear is justified in the selected YA dystopian narratives, where their heroines must unearth the past in order to take down totalitarian regimes and figures. While "the protagonists, in classical dystopia, usually do not get any control over history and the past, in the critical dystopia [where the YA dystopian tradition inserts itself] the recovery of history is an important element for the survival of hope" (*ibidem*). Uncovering the past reveals the extent of the regime's manipulation, galvanising YA dystopian heroines to fight against the oppressive chains imposed upon them and their communities.

2.2.1. Unearthing the Past: Photos, Journals & Floppies

YA dystopian fiction employs strategies similar to those found in canonical works to critically examine the ways in which those in power exert control over the past. The past, encompassing both the personal, collective, and historical past, is frequently

transformed, manipulated and/or erased. The obliteration of the past is depicted through several mechanisms that guarantee society possesses a distorted or entirely absent understanding of its past. Among these mechanisms, there is the restriction of access to historical records and information (Matched, Across the Universe, The Selection, Shatter Me). Authorities censor or destroy any source of knowledge, controlling the narrative of the past. Not only do authorities rewrite collective history, but historical narratives are revised and falsified through the use of fabricated records and propaganda that legitimise power structures and uphold societal control (in The Hunger Games, the constant reminder of the destruction of District Thirteen through the broadcast of propaganda serves as a means to remind the populace of the repercussions of their insurgency).

Furthermore, due to technological advancements, authorities can also manipulate and/or erase one's personal memories. For example, they make use of neuropharmacology to produce substances that result in the repression and/or eradication of personal identity and sense of self. In The Hunger Games, Peeta, the male Tribute from District Twelve who accompanies Katniss, has his memories hijacked. Hijacking is a form of torture used by the Capitol. It is a type of fear conditioning in which the Capitol uses tracker jacker venom to manipulate an individual's memories (Collins, *Mockingjay* 201-2). Peeta's memories of Katniss are altered to such an extent that he perceives her as a threat and attempts to kill her. In Divergent, the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, responsible for controlling the Chicago experiment, in order to keep the cities under control, uses the memory serum, a drug that erases every single memory of an individual and of whole groups. To prevent the population in cities where things have gotten out of hand from rebelling or attempting to escape the city, the Bureau uses the memory serum to "reset" the experiments, thereby avoiding the need to shut them down and begin anew. In her last act of bravery before dying, Tris releases the serum inside the Bureau compound, driven by the belief that it is inherently unethical to erase an individual's memories and, by extension, their identity. Ironically, in her endeavour to thwart the Bureau's attempt to reset the Chicago experience, Tris does what they intended to do: erases their identity and moulds their beliefs. The serum induces a state

of amnesia in the Bureau personnel, causing them to forget their objectives and eliminating their prejudices against those considered genetically damaged. Their story is rewritten:

> Those lost in the memory serum haze are gathered into groups and given the truth: that human nature is complex, that all our genes are different, but neither damaged nor pure. They are also given the lie: that their memories were erased because of a freak accident, and that they were on the verge of lobbying the government for equality for [Genetically Damaged]. (Roth, *Allegiant* 495)

The Program also explores the erasure of personal memories, a theme that is central to the overall narrative. In this series, teen suicide is an epidemic. When teenagers started terminating themselves,[93] the leading cause was concluded to be that "the oversupply of antidepressants changed the chemical makeup of our generation, making us more susceptible to depression" (Young, *The Program* Part I: Uncomfortably Numb - Chapter One). To fight the outbreak, a treatment was developed known as The Program. A government-sanctioned mental-health initiative, The Program is a mandatory intervention for any teen suspected of being at risk of depression or having suicidal thoughts. It subjects teenagers to a memory-altering procedure that erases painful memories, along with most of their identity and emotional depth. However, it is ultimately revealed that those behind The Program are responsible for instigating the suicide outbreak due to the pressure exerted on the adolescents, who are forced to suppress their emotions and always be their happy selves since a moment of sadness or grief is swiftly conflated with depression. One of the doctors involved in the inception of The Program admits her findings regarding the suicide epidemic:

> "The closest I got was a small school outside of Washington, where three girls poisoned themselves at a sleepover. They were among the first, and other than being friends, there were

[93] "Terminating" is the term used to designate the act of committing suicide.

> no genetic markers or links. One of the girls—sixteen—had been on antidepressants since she was nine. She'd been diagnosed with a myriad of conditions, and was prescribed medications to help her function at school. In the end, I believe the medication cocktail is what led to her suicidal thoughts. Now, what she said to her friends, how they came to want to die—that's the real mystery. Because after that day, the outbreak pushed outward.
>
> "News stories, articles, copycats. It all happened so quickly that it no longer became the focus of why teens wanted to kill themselves, just how to stop them. It was a worldwide psychosis…." (Young, *The Treatment* Part III: No Apologies – Chapter Nine)

The suicide outbreak became a worldwide psychosis, and The Program's existence, instead of stopping it, led to more teenagers terminating or attempting to terminate themselves. At-risk teenagers would rather terminate themselves than spend six weeks at a facility where The Program takes their memories – that destroys their self – through therapy and by force-feeding pills. After the treatment, these teenagers, now called returners, become blank slates and are taken to a private school where they stay until their graduation, kept away from teenagers who never went through The Program (Young, *The Program* Part I: Uncomfortably Numb - Chapter One).

Although most older generations have come to accept the Program because it promises a one hundred per cent survival rate, most present teenagers are not so willing to accept the loss of their personal past. As Sloane quarrels, The Program steals memories, "[t]hey reset our emotions so that we're brand-new, never having been hurt or heartbroken. But who are we without our pasts?" (Part I: Uncomfortably Numb - Chapter Eleven). Through the erasure of memories, The Program builds compliant and submissive citizens; it creates docile bodies. Those who go through The Program are no longer themselves. Sloane has "never seen a returner go back to their old life. Or even want to. Whole sections of their lives have been erased; past relationships mean nothing to them. In fact, I think the past might even scare them" (Part I: Uncomfortably Numb - Chapter Two). After her brother and best friend terminate themselves, and her boyfriend, James, returns from The Program with no memory of her, Sloane starts exhibiting the grief and sadness that she had been bottling up, resulting in her forcefully joining The Program. However, before being taken, Sloane is able to bury mementos

from her past in her mattress: a ring James gave her and a photo of her brother and James. Sloane hides these tokens since, as part of the treatment, The Program sanitises the teenagers' bedrooms. It cleans the spaces, removing any personal items, such as clothing, jewellery, photos, and diaries; that is, it disposes of anything that might recall an erased past or that might allow the returners to reclaim their individuality and agency. Upon her return home, devoid of any recollection of the last years, Sloane encounters these reminders of her past. While she struggles to ascribe meaning to them, these items nonetheless become part of her journey towards self-reclamation. This discovery resembles the motif of the found novel, as Sloan's past returns in the form of fragmented mementoes.

YA dystopian narratives use the motif of the found manuscript (the term includes a panoply of records and not just actual manuscripts) to represent the return of the past. Timeworn documents (along with historical artefacts), whose wear and tear emphasise that the past has been suppressed or forgotten, inhabit these worlds, establishing a framework for supporting narratives that either expound or challenge the main story. In other words, these old journals, diaries, letters, recordings, or books create an additional layer of storytelling that defies the regime's official narrative by revealing suppressed truths and alternative perspectives. Although the subsequent analysis focuses on Matched, Across the Universe, and The Selection, where the discovery of these fragments of the past is particularly significant to the narrative, this motif is also present in other YA dystopian novels. For instance, in The Forest of Hands and Teeth, as observed, Mary learns about the Sisterhood turning people into Unconsecrated in a "thick book with its cracked binding [where] the words on the pages look wrong. That the pages themselves are too thick with writing. […] every blank space on every sheet, is filled with cramped writing" (Ryan 108). In The Chemical Garden, following the death of their parents in an explosion, Rhine and her twin brother, Rowan, decide to inter their parents' personal belongings, most precisely their research notes and journals. The past is unburied when Rowan digs up these documents after Rhyne's abduction. Within the materials lies the truth about Rhine's origins: she and her twin brother were born as part of an experiment known as the Chemical Gardens, aimed at curing teenagers and young

adults from the peculiar disease that runs in their DNA – due to the genetic modifications imposed on preceding generations in an attempt to eradicate all diseases, which were successful, new generations are doomed to a lifespan of only twenty years for females and twenty-five years for males. During her time at the Bureau of Genetic Welfare compound, Tris is given access to her mother's journal, which comprises fragmented entries. Through the journal, Tris uncovers her mother's past and her mission in Chicago and learns about individuals deemed genetically damaged. These individuals are mistreated by the Bureau, inhabiting the fringe, "a little colony made of tarp and aluminum in some of the postwar wreckage, living on scraps and burning old papers for warmth because the government can't provide, since they're spending all their resources trying to put us back together again, and have been for over a century after the war ripped us apart. Or they won't provide. I don't know" (Roth, *Allegiant* 188-9). In Legend, June discovers a secret code in her brother's journal that leads her to a website, "WWW FOLLOW ME JUNE BUG DOT COM," where she reads Metias' findings on their parent's death:

> Dad found out that the Republic engineers the annual plagues.
>
> …
>
> They [the Republic] pump that virus into the slum sectors through a system of underground pipes. Sometimes into the water supply, sometimes just directly into a few specific homes to see how it spreads. That starts off a new round of plague. When they think they've seen enough evidence for what that virus strain can do, they secretly prick everyone (everyone still alive, that is) in those sectors with the cure during a routine sweep, and the plague dies down until the next test strain. They also run individual plague experiments on some of the children who fail the Trial.
>
> They don't go to labor camps, June.
>
> None of them do.
>
> They die.
>
> […] They use the plagues to cull the population of weak genes, the same way the Trials pick out the strongest. But they're also creating viruses to use against the Colonies. They've been using biological weapons against them for years. I don't give a damn what happens to the Colonies or exactly what our Republic wants to inflict on them—but June, our own people are

> lab rats. Dad worked in those labs, and when he tried to quit, they killed him. And Mom. They thought they would tell everybody. Who wants a mass riot? Certainly not Congress. (Lu, *Legend* 236-7)

June's father resigned from his position within the Republic because he could not morally abide by the regime's atrocities. Since he knew too much about the plague's origins – that is, the Republic engineers a new plague every year, using their own citizens as test subjects – he was killed along with her mother in a car crash orchestrated by the Republic. In Arc of a Scythe,[94] Citra uncovers decaying sheets of paper from the journal of one of the founding scythes, Scythe Leonardo Da Vinci. The pages expose the origins of the Scythedom, highlighting the internal rifts and differing ideologies among the founding scythes. They reveal that the founders "murdered one another" (Shusterman, *The Toll* 547), and disclose the existence of a fail-safe mechanism in the event that the Scythedom's principles are not properly upheld or are corrupted. In Red Queen, even though in this instance the books are deliberately placed in Mare's cell to prevent her from destroying them, as they belong to Julian, someone she cares about, while incarcerated in the Silver Palace by Maven, Mare has access to knowledge previously unavailable to her. As she reflects on her readings, Mare observes, "[p]ages pass with the days. I work back through the histories, traveling through words that become less and less believable. Three hundred years of Calore kings, centuries of Silver warlords—this is a world I recognize. But the farther I go, the murkier things become" (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 174). Mare learns about a past she never knew existed, one that includes the persecution of Silvers by Reds for their differences – an account that challenges her previously held beliefs and images of the past. It is crucial to note that this knowledge is not bestowed upon her intentionally. The only reason Mare has access to these books is due to Maven's obsession with her, who inadvertently grants her access to the country's history by offering her the books of someone she cares about. Consequently,

[94] In Arc of a Scythe, chapters are interleaved with journal entries, written mainly by scythes. Through these, the reader has access to the intricacies of the worldbuilding as well as to the thoughts and actions of the scythes – Citra included.

Mare discovers a troubling history reserved for Silvers. It is commonly observed that access to history is predominantly restricted to those in positions of power. As I discuss further, the discovery of these hidden manuscripts, whether in the form of crumbling writings, photographs or video recordings, ignites a spark of personal rebellion.

In Matched, citizens have access to a restricted number of historical and cultural knowledge and artefacts. The Society decided that culture was too cluttered, and its Officials sorted through several historical and cultural objects, selecting only one hundred of each type from thousands. The Society's citizens only have access to, for instance, the Hundred Songs, Hundred Paintings, Hundred Stories, Hundred Poems, and Hundred History Lessons – the Society has even reduced to one hundred the dresses that teenage girls can pick for their Match Banquet. Everything that was not included in these collections was destroyed. As the Society explains, it was "*[f]or the best* [and] everyone believed because it made sense. *How can we appreciate anything fully when overwhelmed with too much?*" (Condie, *Matched* 29). In reality, the Society destroyed anything deemed subversive or disruptive to the system. They destroy anything that might cultivate and awaken rebellious thoughts. That is a work that is far from over. As a Restoration supervisor, Cassia's father deals with historical artefacts. It is his job to sort what is worth for the Society and what is no longer needed. When Cassia visits him at work, at the site of an old library, books are being thrown into incinerators, their words forever lost in the fire. While it should be expected that someone with the role of "Restoration supervisor" would restore objects, in this instance, the job is to destroy them. Although Cassia's parents see the destruction as waste, since those books could have other uses, Cassia recalls that "the higher Officials say some things are not worth saving. Sometimes it's faster and more efficient to destroy" (127). No element that has the potential to disturb the Society's way of life is deemed worthy of preservation, especially words that possess the power to foster critical thinking among passive citizens.

At her grandfather's Final Banquet, Cassia discovers that a piece of paper has been hidden in the compact he gave her. When her grandfather gives her back the compact, with the paper safely inside, he tells her: "'I am giving you something you won't

understand, yet. But I think you will someday. You, more than the rest. And, remember. It's all right to wonder'" (83). Fearfully, Cassia reads the words written on it:

> *Do not go gentle into that good night,* [95]
>
> *Old age should burn and rave at close of day;*
>
> *Rage, rage,* [sic] *against the dying of the light.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Though wise men at their end know dark is right,*
>
> *Because their words had forked no lightning they*
>
> *Do not go gentle into that good night.* (96)

Cassia realises the poem is forbidden because it "tells you to fight" (98), which the Society clearly does not desire its citizens to do. The stability of the dominant socio-political order demands that an individual be as gentle as possible. Enthralled by the power of these words, Cassia asks Ky, a boy labelled an Aberration[96] with whom she falls in love, to teach her how to write by hand. In a world where people are "not supposed to know poems or writing" (171), Cassia's desire to learn this forbidden skill and banned poetry is the beginning point of her resistance to the system and later total rebellion. Throughout the trilogy, Cassia starts writing her own words, her own poetry, and later displays them, as I analyse ahead. YA dystopian novels, Kristi McDuffie explains, "offer different models of literacy, from illiteracy to multiple versions of literate capabilities. A common theme of this genre is that in the future, due to significant technological advances, many people have lost traditional forms of literacy like writing by hand" (145).

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[95] Written by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914–1953), the poem *"Do not go gentle into that good night*" (1951) delves into the theme of defiance in the face of death, exhorting the reader to resist the inevitability of death and to live life to the fullest, even when confronted with hardships.

[96] The Aberration status is received if the person has committed an Infraction. Aberrations are not seen as full Citizens and do not get the privileges of being Matched, possessing an artefact, or having tablets. If a parent commits an Infraction, their children also become Aberrations. If a child commits an Infraction, the child alone becomes an Aberration. Aberrations are usually assigned to the Disposal Department, where they are poisoned and have a low life expectancy.

Under the Society's oppressive rules, writing by hand became obsolete. The written word is restricted to portscreens, which are subject to societal control. Learning to write by hand bends these rules, granting individuals the freedom to express their thoughts without fear of control or punishment. In Matched, it is emphasised that "print literacy, including canonical literature and writing, is a mechanism for knowledge and rebellion. Traditional literacy is presented as desirable and even necessary for personal agency" (McDuffie 149). Hence, literacy is depicted as a mode of resistance.

Objects are also depicted as threatening to the Society. The City Museum houses some of these mementoes, and some members of the Society possess items such as a compact, cufflinks, a non-working watch, and a compass. These objects, which people call artefacts, are registered, and individuals can keep them solely because they are seemingly harmless (unfortunately, to the Society, Cassia's compact kept neatly hidden forbidden poetry). However, the Society reverses their decision and takes the artefacts away from their owners after determining that the objects "promote inequality among members of Society." Or perhaps not as much inequality but individuality. Everyone is forced to "turn in their artifacts for catalog and display at the Museum in each City" (Condie, *Matched* 204). The Society confiscates artefacts and destroys books that serve as potential catalysts for action, thereby creating a passive community with no ties among its members. In an attempt to preserve the past, pages of stories and stanzas, as well as artefacts, are used as currency by people who call themselves Archivists. They preserve the past from the Society's destructive antics, emerging "when the Hundred Committee made their selections, [as they] knew the works that didn't get selected would become a commodity. So they saved some of them" (267). They are the guardians of the past. Quite interestingly, through writing, Cassia builds a community. She decides to exhibit her poetry in a structure of "unused pieces of the barricade out to this vacant ground near the lake" (Condie, *Reached* 159). In this space, called the Gallery, citizens begin to gather and share their artistic work, ranging from sculpture and pictures to painting and even singing. In fact, Cassia teaches those who wish to write printing letters (174). The Society's apprehension regarding the power of writing is justified; had it not been for writing, Cassia would not have been able to unite the community.

In The Selection, America's decision to rebel against the caste system is sparked by the discovery of the hidden diaries of Gregory Illéa, the country's founder. She comes across the diaries when she and Maxon are looking for the meaning of "Halloween." Maxon takes America to a safeguarded secret room in the palace. As she describes, "[b]ehind the painting was a door that didn't go all the way to the ground and had a small keypad on it, like the kind on a telephone. Maxon punched in a few numbers and then a tiny beep sounded." The room has shelves full of old books, some books with red slashes on the bindings. Maxon explains that the books with red slashes "are banned books [and] they may be the only copies that still exist in all of Illéa" (Cass, *The Elite 20*). Their search takes them to Gregory Illéa's diaries. America is intrigued by them:

> "How many of these diaries are there?" I asked.
>
> Maxon pointed to a shelf with a row of journals similar to the one we held. "About a dozen or so."
>
> I couldn't believe it! All this history right in one room.
>
> "Thank you," I said. "This is something I would never even have dreamed of seeing. I can't believe all this exists."
>
> He was beaming. "Would you like to read the rest of it?" He motioned to the diary.
>
> "Yes, of course!" I practically shouted before my duties came back to me. "But I can't stay; I have to finish studying that terrible report. And you have to get back to work."
>
> "True. Well, how about this? You can take the book and keep it for a few days."
>
> "Am I allowed to do that?" I asked in awe.
>
> "No." He smiled. (23-4)

Through the diaries, America gains access to a past that she knows so little about.

America first realises there is so much she does not know about her country's past in her history lessons at the palace. When the Selection contestants ask why the history that they are learning is not in a book, they are told that "history isn't something you study. It's something you should just know." However, what one girl knows differs

from what the other knows. They, like most citizens of Illéa, have only access to bits and pieces of their country's past. As America wonders, "I thought about that, how we all knew different things or had to guess at the truth. Why weren't we given history books?" (Cass, *The Selection* 211). The lack of written records allows those in power to construct and reconstruct the past as they wish, hiding what they see as unpleasant truths and maintaining their hold over the citizens. Besides, Illéa does not have newspapers. The only source of information about the country's affairs is the *Illéa Capital Report*, a weekly television programme that covers current events. However, the *Report* is controlled by the King, who filters and chooses what information can be shared with Illéa's citizens. Most of the population has no access to or knowledge of the past outside the government's official records.

Upon gaining access to the diaries, America learns that history has been manipulated. Gregory Illéa is far from a benevolent leader purportedly committed to salvaging the nation he professed to love. Through the diaries, America discovers that Gregory Illéa took advantage of the population's desperation, ultimately establishing the caste system designed to chain individuals and entrench societal hierarchies:

> In one place a rough diagram of the caste system was laid out, originally dreamed up with six tiers instead of eight. On another page he plotted to change people's last names to separate them from their pasts. One line made it clear that he intended to punish his enemies by placing them lower on the scale and reward the loyal by placing them higher.
>
> …
>
> What should my last name have been? Did Dad know?
>
> My whole life I'd been led to believe that Gregory Illéa was a hero, the person who saved our country when we were on the edge of oblivion. Clearly, he was nothing more than a power-hungry monster. What kind of man manipulated people so willingly? What kind of man hawked his daughter for his own convenience?
>
> …
>
> I felt nauseated. I stood and paced the floor, trying to wrap my head around it all.

> How had an entire history been forgotten? How was it that no one ever spoke of the old countries? Where was all this information? Why didn't anyone know? (Cass, *The Elite* 251-2)

Political agency and reading have long been linked. In fact, literacy in YA literature is central to political agency, fostering both critically aware and empathic political engagement. In her analysis of the YA dystopias M. T. Anderson's *Feed* and Patrick Ness's Chaos Walking trilogy, Elisabeth Rose Gruner argues that "active citizenship requires not only literacy, but resistance to being read, a form of deep critical literacy that is also aware of the literacies actually creating and controlling the protagonists' lives. These novels require a critical multiliteracy of both their implied readers and their protagonists" (146). Recent YA dystopian fiction, Gruner expands, "suggests that reading is not enough to form citizens. Indeed, reading itself operates in mutually exclusive ways, to help develop political agency and to diminish it, depending on who is reading, what they are reading, and how they are putting their reading to use" (162). In many YA dystopias, even though protagonists possess the ability to read, they lack access to texts that the government has not approved. Moreover, even when they encounter texts that can be considered subversive, these materials are now tools of propaganda for the government's ideology, as observed during Lena's evaluation. When Lena responds that William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) is one of her favourite books, the evaluators express surprise. The Shakespearean play is included in the list of mandated readings for health class and is taught as "a cautionary tale, a warning about the dangers of the old world, before the cure" (Oliver, *Delirium* 33).[97] However, instead of claiming that it is one of her favourite books because it is frightening, Lena says that the play is "beautiful [because] there's something so sad about it" (34). In this statement, Lena recognises aloud that love is not scary, but

[97] In Anna Carey's Eve trilogy (2011-13), *Romeo and Juliet* also plays a significant role in the regime's ideology. In this YA dystopian series, after the human population is annihilated by a plague, a new regime rises and orphan girls are taken to isolated schools where they are taught to fear men. These schools are nothing more than a ruse to drill fear into the girls so they can be easily manipulated and willingly accept becoming breeders for a society decimated by disease. In the module "Manipulation and Heartache," they study the Shakespearean play, learning that Romeo was a manipulative man who led Juliet to her death.

something that evokes other emotions, such as sadness. She recognises the emotional responses that emerge through reading that the government cannot control. Further, in this society, poetry has been banned. Indeed, Lena does not know the meaning of the word "poetry," never having heard it before. When she listens to Alex reading poetry, she confesses that it

> isn't like any writing I've ever heard before. I don't understand all of it, just bits of images, sentences that appear half-finished, all fluttering together like brightly colored ribbons in the wind. It reminds me, I realize, of the music that struck me dumb nearly two months ago at the farmhouse. It has the same effect, and makes me feel exhilarated and sad at the same time. (295)

Analogous to Matched, the banning of poetry reveals the government's fear regarding the ability of written words to stir strong emotions in individuals. This fear arises from the poetry's potential to inspire critical thinking, prompting individuals to question their circumstances and engage in acts of rebellion against the established order. Protagonists need to learn to read critically in order to overcome the interpretations imposed by those in power and become political agents.

Returning to The Selection, after reading the country founder's words, America decides not to ignore her newfound knowledge and uses it to transform the caste system, making life better for everyone, not just the upper classes. As part of the Selection, the competitors must present a philanthropic project they will fulfil if they become the princess. During her presentation on national television, America proposes to eliminate the caste system:

> "I know there was a time, when our country was new, when the assignment of these numbers helped organize something that was on the brink of not existing. But we are no longer that country. We are so much more now. To allow the talentless to have exalted privileges and suppress what could be the greatest minds in the world for the sake of an archaic organization system is cruel, and it only stops us from becoming the best we can be."

> I noted a poll from one of Celeste's discarded magazines after we talked about having a volunteer army, and sixty-five percent of the people thought it was a good idea. Why eliminate that career path completely for people? I also cited an old report we had studied about the standardized testing in the public schools. The article was slanted, stating that only three percent of Sixes and Sevens tested to elevated levels of intelligence; and since it was so low, it was clear they were intended to stay where they were. My argument was that we ought to be ashamed that those people are stuck digging ditches when they could be performing heart surgeries.
>
> "Perhaps our country is flawed, but we cannot deny its strength. My fear is that, without change, that strength will become stagnate. And I love our country too much to let that happen. I hope too much to let that happen." (Cass, *The Elite* 271-2)

America's proposal incites the King's disdain and rage, who promptly eliminates her from the competition (a decision later reversed).

As observed, Cassia and America lack cultural and historical knowledge. In fact, most YA dystopian protagonists typically lack this knowledge, since totalitarian systems use their power to restrict access to the past and to keep citizens oblivious. For both Cassia and America, the discovery of hidden histories and pasts functions as a pivotal awakening. The uncovering of the past not only prompts their personal transformation but also becomes the catalyst for social change. Although in Across the Universe, Amy is the only person with cultural and historical knowledge in *Godspeed*, similar to Cassia and America, Amy learns about all the mysteries and secrets kept in *Godspeed* through uncovering hidden histories. These were saved not only on paper (there are still surviving ship records) but also on floppies, portable screens that save digital data and can also read storage cards**,** which hold fragmented records of a puzzling past. Amy finds these floppies hidden inside books that have come from Earth, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943). Each time Amy discovers a new floppy, she learns about *Godspeed*'s past and its troubled voyage to Centuri-Earth.

Amy discovers that *Godspeed* has already reached its destination and has been orbiting the planet for two hundred years. There was never a Plague. Instead, "[t]he ship's crew did not see the logic of staying aboard […]. There has been significant loss of

life. My scientists, however, have developed a method of influencing them to obedience" (Revis, *A Million Suns* 341). To contain the mutiny, the captain, later known as the Plague Eldest, put people under the influence of Phydus and instilled the Eldest system, an authoritarian succession structure through which absolute power is maintained aboard for hundreds of years. It is later revealed, after Amy lands on Centuri-Earth, that the captain decided not to land against the crew's desires because the Financial Resource Exchange (FRX) had already built a colony on the planet and its inhabitants were being used in insidious ways. The truth is revealed through an old video recorder, which serves as a substitute for the decaying manuscripts of the Gothic, concealed inside the statue of the first Elder that stood in the midst of *Godspeed*. The authoritarian symbol must be destroyed in order to uncover the past. This time, the real reason why *Godspeed* did not land is brought to light: "Twenty years before we were due to land, we sent a probe to Centauri-Earth [and] Sol-Earth discovered that there were some valuable resources on the planet. And they figured out a way to make transportation there even faster. They landed first. They built a colony" (Revis, *Shades of Earth* 365). To control the colony and force them to constantly work to increase production rate, FRX created a vaccine with gen mod that supposedly "not only [would the] person be vaccinated against solar radiation for the rest of his or her life, but all of their descendants [would] be born immune as well" (367); however, the vaccine was "spiked" with Phydus: while "[w]hen taken orally or injected into the bloodstream, it makes a person temporarily obedient [, w]hen it's combined with gen modifiers, though, the condition becomes permanent." The first Eldest realises that FRX wants "[m]indless workers. Perfect slaves" (369), and, against his crew's desires, determined not to land in an effort to protect his people from the FXR, who sought to enslave them. Although his intentions are honourable, the system he ultimately implements causes the subjugation of the Shipborn and their descendants, mirroring the enslavement imposed by the FXR on the colony, wherein the workers were stripped entirely of their free will.

Fascinatingly, Amy is herself an embodiment of the return of the past and cannot be easily controlled. In futuristic worlds, where advanced technology often realises what is currently only envisioned today, YA dystopian heroines can become embodiments of

the dead past. After being woken up before the spaceship lands, Amy finds herself in a future where she is a memento from the past, "a living historical artifact" (McCulloch 79). Like mementoes from the past, Amy is unburied. She is awakened from her cryogenic box, which she compares to a coffin (Revis, *Across the Universe* 2), which was kept in the deepest areas of the spaceship, a secret that only Eldest knows about. Her presence evokes the same troubling feelings stirred by uncovering hidden, fragmented texts. Indeed, her physical difference (she has red hair, pale white skin, and green eyes), combined with her knowledge of the past and ability to think critically, destabilise the order in the spaceship. Amy intrudes into the present, disrupting and questioning the ship's society. Indeed, she reveals how everything has been twisted inside the spaceship: the mating season is not natural and people do not become insane with lust (230, 238); human beings have feelings and individual thought, and otherwise Elder believes they are not supposed to be obedient and complacent, happy without ever bothering with nothing, that is, mindless drones (259, 285, 298). Amy's presence compels those who are not under the effect of Phydus[98] to confront how twisted life within the confines of the spaceship has become, prompting Elder, the boy who is bound to lead those born aboard the ship, to question the longstanding paradigms of his society. As he grapples with the realities of the Shipborn's situation, Elder is ultimately driven to challenge the entrenched societal constraints that have governed their lives and to rebel against them. Amy works as a hidden manuscript, and because of that, she must be destroyed. To maintain the oppressive social-political structure, Eldest decides that Amy must be killed – something that is averted by Elder, who, having learned from Amy what has been concealed from him, decides to rebel. Like a hidden manuscript, Amy offers Elder the option to question the societal constraints that govern *Godspeed* and to rebel against them.

[98] When Amy tries to explain how people behave outside the spaceship, she is told by a friend she meets at the hospital that "we're the ones who aren't normal. It's us—who can't focus, who can't work together, who can't do Feeder or Shipper jobs—we're the ones who aren't normal. We're the ones who have to take the mental meds just so we don't go loons" (Revis, *Across the Universe* 259). Those who live in the hospital are given Inhibitor pills so they are not affected by Phydus, and because they cannot take direction or follow leadership, they must be kept away from the Feeders, who are always calm and content.

The act of rewriting history can inflict unimaginable social damage. It is not until the authentic history is reinstated that meaningful social transformation can happen. YA dystopian heroines must unearth and confront the past as it is fundamental for them to recognise the insidious nature of the regime and to develop the critical thinking necessary to rebel against it, paving the way for a new dawn. This is true even despite the fact that the past is reconstructed as authentically as possible, given that, similar to the Gothic mode, in which the relationship between the past and history is fraught, YA dystopian fiction lingers on the divergence between the past and the official version of history, as the latter is written and rewritten to authenticate the narrative of those in power.

Intriguingly, in addition to being a memento of the past, Amy is also a haunting figure, working in the narrative similarly to supernatural, monstrous entities that prevent the past from being buried and forgotten. YA dystopian worlds frequently feature creatures that serve as a poignant reminder of the protagonists' past. The representation of such beings – characterised or labelled as monsters – intersects with the theoretical framework surrounding the Gothic monster.

2.2.2. Monstrous Living Mementos

The monster's ominous presence is as undeniable in YA dystopian fiction, as in the Gothic mode, whose role has been explored in the first chapter, whether it be in the form of scientific experiments, such as the mutations engineered in laboratories by the Capitol, supernatural beings, like the monsters that inhabit Verity, or undead revenants, such as the Unconsecrated, a zombie-like creature, that wander the Forest of Hands and Teeth. As a society, human beings are obsessed with monsters, embracing them into their culture and depicting them in numerous ways – beyond everything, "we love our monsters because through them we indulge our desire for other worlds (after death, beneath our feet, out in space, all around us)" (Weinstock, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory" 20). Human beings love their monsters so much that these creatures

inevitably must be projected onto dystopian futures. In YA dystopian futures, the monster assumes a role similar to the Gothic monster: it is a somewhat grotesque embodiment of the past.

In this section, I focus on The Hunger Games, The Forest of Hands and Teeth, and Monsters of Verity,[99] since these texts depict creatures that are explicitly conceptualised as monsters. My analysis prioritises the physical monster over the immoral monster, which poses a significantly greater danger to society. The immoral monster, as I have argued in my MA dissertation, denotes individuals who engage in unethical behaviour and exhibit a profound lack of morality, manifesting actions that are at odds with ethical standards. Such individuals are characterised as cruel, immoral, and even inhuman. YA dystopian fiction features a panoply of immoral monsters who orchestrate totalitarian social-political structures and employ insidious mechanisms to assert their dominance. Some notable examples include President Snow and Coin in The Hunger Games, Jeanine Matthews in Divergent, Commander Jameson in Legend, Queen Levana in The Lunar Chronicles, and Scythe Goddard in Arc of a Scythe. Furthermore, social structures themselves can also be immoral monsters, as illustrated by the Sisterhood in The Forest of Hands and Teeth, the Society in Matched, and the Eldest system in Across the Universe. In the selected series, the monster, which also represents contemporary fears and anxieties projected onto the future, is a remnant of the teenage protagonists' past. The monster has the ability to haunt and dig into childhood fears, phobias, and traumas that these YA dystopian heroines try to keep buried deep inside themselves. This representation underscores how intrinsically connected the monster is to memory. As Eric R. Severson and David M. Goodman suggest, monsters "are interwoven with

[99] Physical monsters are a common trope in YA dystopian fiction because they open up discussion about what makes a monster and who is the real monster in a dystopian society – the monstrous creature or the human being. Although the following YA dystopian series were not selected due to the criteria chosen, they all feature monstrous creatures. James Dashner's The Maze Runner (2009-2010) features grievers, biomechanical creatures that hunt Gladers inside the maze, and Cranks, humans infected with the Flare virus – this virus slowly "eats" the brain of those infected, turning them into bloodthirsty and irrational beings with no memory of their past, who kill, torture, and eat human flesh. Julie Kagawa's The Immortal Rules (2012-2014), J.A. London's Darkness Before Dawn (2012-2014), and Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* (2013) both feature vampires, while Rachel Vincent's The Stars Never Rise (2015-16) depicts demonic entities that possess human bodies.

memories, experiences, or events that have been (mostly) forgotten" (1). Through the representation of the monster, past events intrude into the present, destabilising it in dangerous, violent ways.

Before embarking on this exploration, it is essential to observe the significant role that monsters play in YA fiction. Ildikó Limpár posits that monsters are ideal tools for exploring the various aspects of coming of age, a central theme in adolescent literature. According to Limpár, "[m]onsters may take various shapes, but their fundamental role in coming of age literatures is to allow the character who faces them to confront her/him with one's limitations, fears, and desires" (Introduction). As I previously discussed, the protagonists of YA dystopian narratives endure traumatic experiences caused by the violence of totalitarian regimes. Within this context, the monster, functioning as a manifestation of the return of the past, becomes a symbolic locus of unresolved trauma. Confronting this figure is essential not only for the adolescent protagonist to engage in rebellion against the dystopian order but also for the formation of a coherent sense of identity, enabling them to answer the foundational question of adolescence: "Who am I?"

The Hunger Games arenas are inhabited by modified creatures bred in the Capitol labs, such as wolf-like beings, tracker jackers, and jabberjays, commonly referred to as mutts. The Capitol itself becomes an arena during the confrontation with the rebels,[100] and mutts roam the sewers. These beings are used to terrorise the Tributes and viewers, turning the Games' spectacle into a horror show. As discussed, both the tracker jackers and the wolf-like creatures invoke the (traumatic) past into the present. The tracker jackers are golden-coloured creatures genetically altered to be larger than ordinary wasps and whose venom can be administered by humans to alter a person's memories. The venom of these creatures causes hallucinations – and, when injected in large quantities, can cause death. The hallucinations instigated by the poison are terrifying, being so vivid that they can drive a person insane. Engineering a plan to

[100] When shown a hologram of the Capitol and its numerous traps, Katniss and Finnick unmistakably perceive it as a Game arena. They utter, completing one another's thoughts: "Ladies and gentlemen […] Let the Seventy-sixth Hunger Games begin!" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 281).

escape the Career Tributes, Katniss deliberately severs a tree branch supporting a tracker jackers' nest, ending up stung by several of these creatures:

> I enter a nightmare from which I wake repeatedly only to find a greater terror awaiting me. All the things I dread most, all the things I dread for others manifest in such vivid detail I can't help but believe they're real. Each time I wake, I think, *At last, this is over*, but it isn't. It's only the beginning of a new chapter of torture. How many ways do I watch Prim die? Relive my father's last moments? Feel my own body ripped apart? This is the nature of the tracker jacker venom, so carefully created to target the place where fear lives in your brain. (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 228)

Katniss describes the hallucinations as entering into a nightmare where everything she fears the most becomes true. Nevertheless, her father's death is not a fear but a reality – she relives her father's last moments, even if they are only imagined. This is the first major traumatic event in Katniss' life, as previously observed, forcing her to step up, and any remaining childhood innocence she might still have is lost. The wolf-like mutts exhibit physical similarities to those of the twenty-one Tributes that have fallen:

> Then one of them, a good-size mutt with silky waves of blond fur takes a running start and leaps onto the horn. Its back legs must be incredibly powerful because it lands a mere ten feet below us, its pink lips pulled back in a snarl. For a moment it hangs there, and in that moment I realize what else unsettled me about the mutts. The green eyes glowering at me are unlike any dog or wolf, any canine I've ever seen. They are unmistakably human. And that revelation has barely registered when I notice the collar with the number 1 inlaid with jewels and the whole horrible thing hits me. The blonde hair, the green eyes, the number... it's Glimmer.
>
> …
>
> My head snaps from side to side as I examine the pack, taking in the various sizes and colors. The small one with the red coat and amber eyes... Foxface! And there, the ashen hair and hazel eyes of the boy from District 9 who died as we struggled for the backpack! And worst of all, the smallest mutt, with dark glossy fur, huge brown eyes and a collar that reads 11 in woven straw. Teeth bared in hatred. Rue…

…

> Their eyes are the least of my worries. What about their brains? Have they been given any of the real tributes memories? Have they been programmed to hate our faces particularly because we have survived and they were so callously murdered? And the ones we actually killed... do they believe they're avenging their own deaths? (289-91)

Their presence forces Katniss to face Rue's death once more (a death for which Katniss feels responsible and which left her in a catatonic state) as well as the deaths of the Tributes she had to eliminate in order to ensure her own survival during the Games. Although her thoughts are flimsy, as she is running for her life, because of facing these creatures, Katniss is reminded of the traumatic events the Games have imposed upon her. Hence, these creatures are a physical manifestation of trauma, forcing Katniss to confront all those events that left a traumatic imprint on her mind.

During the Quarter Quell, in one of the twelve areas of the Arena, Katniss encounters a flock of jabberjays. These mutts are "genetically enhanced male birds created by the Capitol as weapons to spy on rebels in the districts. They could remember and repeat long passages of human speech, so they were sent into rebel areas to capture our words and return them to the Capitol" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 105). That is, these birds possess the ability to memorise and reproduce entire human conversations. In the arena, Katniss hears her sister's screaming, which follows the sound only to discover it comes from a jabberjay: "There is nothing about the bird that suggests it's a mutt. Nothing except the horribly lifelike sounds of Prim's voice streaming from its mouth" (382). For a whole hour, Katniss is trapped inside the area, a transparent wall stopping her from leaving, listening to jabberjays reproducing the screams of those she cares about:

> And a carefully orchestrated chorus of horror begins to spill out of their mouths. […] I try to fight for a while. Emptying my quiver of arrows into the hated birds. But every time one drops dead, another quickly takes its place. And finally I give up and curl up beside Finnick, trying to block out

> the excruciating sounds of Prim, Gale, my mother, Madge, Rory, Vick, even Posy, helpless little Posy... (386)

The creature's voices echo one of Katniss' deepest fears: the people she cares about being tortured, hurt by the Capitol. In her encounters with mutts, Katniss is, on the one hand, transported back to a traumatic past (even though one traumatic experience is more recent than the other), while on the other hand, she is forced to face her greatest fears.

In The Forest of Hands and Teeth, the Unconsecrated represent what is left of loved ones who have been transformed. Mary loses both parents, who become Unconsecrated: her father, a Guardian, is bitten while patrolling the village, and her mother, consumed by grief, allows herself to be bitten by her undead husband when he gets close to the fence (she chooses to Return instead of being mercy-killed by a Guardian). The transformation of her parents – especially her mother's decision to become a flesh-eating creature – triggers a profound sense of guilt in Mary. The Unconsecrated serve as a constant reminder of Mary's perceived failures: her inadequacy in protecting her mother and her inability to safeguard her family as a whole.

Furthermore, the Unconsecrated remind people that they know nothing about the time before the Return; they do not know anything about how the zombie-like creatures came to be. As Mary ponders,

> There are various theories as to how our village came into existence in the middle of this Forest. The Cathedral and some of the other buildings clearly predate the Return and some people suggest that They carved this place out as a sanctuary. Others claim that we are a chosen people and that our ancestors were the best of their time and were sent here to survive. Who we are and why we are here has been lost to history, lost because our ancestors were too busy trying to survive to remember and pass on what they knew. What little remnants we once had—like my mother's picture of my many-greats-grandmother standing in the ocean—were destroyed in the fire when I was a child. (Ryan 27)

There is no knowledge of the collective and historical past. The presence of the Unconsecrated, with their insatiable hunger, around the village is a reminder of something they know nothing about – how the creatures came to be, how they ended up in the midst of a forest in a village surrounded by a fence, and whether there is anything more out there besides the isolation. However, the Unconsecrated push Mary to seek the world beyond the confines of the fence. In fact, after breaking into the village, they force Mary to leave the only place she knows and find whatever lies in the unknown. Moreover, they urge Mary to pursue her dreams, prompting her to leave the forest and witness the vast expanse of the ocean. In doing so, Mary redefines her identity not through what has been lost – namely, her village, her parents, and her first love – but rather through the choices she makes as she rebuilds her life.

Notably, leaving the village gives Mary a glimpse into the unknown past. After walking into an abandoned village infested by the Unconsecrated, Mary barricades herself in a house. When the creatures breach the building's entrance, Mary retreats to the attic, where she discovers mementoes from a bygone era:

> I crawl to the books. Photos are scattered everywhere […]. He tosses another book, one I hadn't seen before, and paper explodes from it as it careens across the floor, yellowed pages fluttering down around us. I reach for one with the words *USA Today* written in large block letters across the top.
>
> …
>
> […] One page lands on my foot and I carefully pick it up. The edges are rough, as if it was torn from a larger page. Across the top *The New York Times* is written in large letters. Below that, in equally large letters, it says: INFECTION SWEEPS THROUGH CENTRAL STATES: CITIZENS URGED NORTH.
>
> Below is a picture of a massive horde of Unconsecrated, taken from above as if by a bird.
>
> I hold the photograph closer, trying to ascertain the details in the graininess. It is more Unconsecrated than I have ever seen in my life. Stretching wide and deep and determined.
>
> I stumble dazed back into the attic, scattering the other pages on the floor, looking for more pictures. The large black words scream at me from every page: GOVERNMENT MOVED TO SECRET LOCATION; CDC UNABLE TO DETERMINE CAUSE OF INFECTION; LAST STAND AT ROCKIES FAILS;

> OUTBREAKS REPORTED WORLDWIDE; PREVIOUSLY CLEARED AREAS ENDANGERED BY FAST-MOVING INFECTED.
>
> My fingers shaking, I pick up one page that shouts NEW YORK CITY UNDER SIEGE with a picture of buildings taller than I could ever imagine. (236-7, 240-1)

Here, the motif of the found manuscript is also prominently featured, as the scattered newspapers and photographs function as haunting relics that disclose what the current social order, represented by the Unconsecrated and the Sisterhood, has buried. Curiously, this unearthing of a long-forgotten past occurs in an attic, a classic Gothic setting traditionally linked to hidden secrets. The act of ascending into the attic to escape the Unconsecrated symbolises a metaphorical descent into truth. In this narrative, the monster plays a crucial role in guiding Mary towards uncovering the past – the resurrected Unconsecrated reanimate the dead past.

In Monsters of Verity, the most representative of this theme, monsters inhabit the streets of Verity,[101] the city where the narrative mostly takes place, and, later, Prosperity. The violence that ravages the city has supernatural consequences, as monsters are born out of violent acts: "the Corsai seemed to come from violent but non-lethal acts, and the Malchai came from murders, but the Sunai, it was believed, came from the darkest crimes of all: bombings, shootings, massacres, events that took not just one life, but many" (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 177). Simply put, Corsai emerge from violent acts such as assaults and physical attacks – in fact, [t]here were rumors that the Corsai told secrets, that their nonsensical murmurings took shape right before they killed you. Others claimed they merely parroted the sins that made them, whispering

[101] In the wake of the Vietnam War, the federal government was disbanded, leading to the division of the United States of America into ten territories. Among these territories, Verity, Valor, Prosperity and Fortitude are the most densely populated, and because of this, they are referred to as supercities. Each supercity is symbolically associated with their vices: Verity is Violence, Valor is Greed, Prosperity is Malice, and Fortitude is Gluttony (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 123-7). Although it is widely known that monsters populate Verity, these beings have recently begun to manifest in Prosperity, the wealthiest of the four territories (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 4). In this supercity, monsters are not born of physical violence; rather, they emerge from financial corruption and embezzlement – crimes that slowly corrode and poison the fabric of society. Both the monsters of Verity and Prosperity mirror the sins of the human beings inhabiting the respective supercities.

atrocities, mimicking the gruesome sounds of metal against skin, breaking bones, muffled screams" (254) –, Malchai are creatures born of death, and Sunai emerge from massacres, that is, from tragedies that have stolen dozens and dozens of innocent lives. As a consequence of violent actions, Verity's monsters are all a remembrance of the past. The Malchai, particularly, have an intricate relationship with their creators' traumatic past.

While running away from her father's monsters, Kate accidentally murders a man in an act of self-defence. From the unintentional murder Kate commits, a Malchai is born – a Malchai that names herself Alice. When Kate contemplates the nature of the Malchai, she emphasises the connection between this being and an individual's own past:

> My father told me that Malchai take their names from our shadows. Our ghosts. Whatever haunts us most. Sloan was his right-hand man – not his first kill, but the first one to leave a mark […]. Alice was my mother. I pulled the trigger in that house, I shot that stranger, but Alice Harker was my first murder. I'm the reason we ran away. I'm the reason Callum sent his monster after us. I'm the reason she's dead. (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 426).

A Malchai is a memento of a past that an individual would rather keep buried, of the remorse an individual feels about a past action. It is a manifestation of their creator's inner demons. Alice is a memento of the traumatic past that Kate prefers to repress. By adopting the name of Kate's mother, who died in a violent car accident caused by her father's Malchai, Sloan, Alice personifies Kate's childhood trauma as well as the guilt she harbours regarding her mother's death. Alice's existence compels Kate to confront and relive a traumatic past. However, the Malchai is not the only type of monster that compels Kate to reflect upon her past and confront her repressed memories. The Chaos Eater and even August, a Sunai who befriends Kate (and the duology's other protagonist), have this power.

In Prosperity, there are two types of monsters: the Heart Eaters, which "had a Malchai's red eyes [and] a Corsai's sharp claws, but its skin was the bluish black of a

rotting corpse" and feed on hearts (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 3), and the Chaos Eater. The latter, Kate describes as "something shaped more or less like a person, at least around the edges, but made entirely of shadow" (97) with "only a pair of silver eyes set like discs into its empty face" (99). The Chaos Eater can insert itself into the minds of human beings, manipulating their thoughts and bringing out the worst in them - its influence brings to the surface a violence that turns innocents into murderers and generates the chaos it feeds on. The brutality the Chaos Eater feeds on transforms the monster from a mere shadow into something more physical. As Kate observes, "it seemed to grow more solid, more real, details etching themselves across the blank canvas of its skin" (97). The Chaos Eater turns Kate's peace in Prosperity into an ephemeral thing when it traps her in a web of violence and hatred. The monster infiltrates her mind, not only bringing Kate's wildest instincts to the surface (the monster's influence on her thoughts makes her want to commit violent acts and spill blood), but also forcing her to confront the monsters that live inside her and those that roam Verity. Through her memories, the Chaos Eater discovers the supercity where violence – chaos itself – thrives, forcing Kate to follow him back home. Much like the Malchai, the Chaos Eater drives Kate to confront her most painful memories, tainted by death and violence. The Chaos Eater burrows deep into Kate's memories, obliging her to relive the accident that claimed her mother's life and the murder she committed (151, 171).

Regarding the Sunai, when human beings are in their presence, they find themselves confessing their innermost secrets. Due to this ability, August explains, "when humans were around Sunai, they became…honest. […] Henry called it *influence*, but Leo had a better word: *confession*" (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 32). As a Sunai, August unwittingly makes Kate open up, but most importantly, brings to the surface her blurred memories about her mother's death:

> "The night she died," continued Kate, "she dragged me out of bed. Her mouth was too red, and she'd been crying."
>
> *Get up, Kate. We have to go.*
>
> *Where are we going?*

Home.

"She kept looking back. But no one stopped us. Not when we snuck through the penthouse. Not when she took the car. Not when the city blurred past."

He's going to be mad, Mom.

Don't worry, Kate. It's going to be okay. Sit back. Close your eyes. Tell me where you are.

…

She squeezed her eyes shut, but before she could come up with a place, she heard the skritch of claws on metal, saw the sudden flash of headlights. The horrible shift of gravity before the crash. The deafening screech of metal and tires and breaking glass and then . . . silence. Her mother's face, cheek against the wheel, and in the glass behind her mother's head, the fractured light of two red eyes. (278-9)

August's presence compels Kate to reveal the feelings, emotions, and memories she has long kept locked inside herself, guarding them to avoid appearing fragile or fractured. Unintentionally, August forces Kate to confront her past and the truths she has buried within.

The Lunar Chronicles also depicts monstrous beings. As I explore in detail in my discussion of the depiction of liminality in the selected corpus (see chapter 2.3), the series engages with the oppositional binary of human/non-human, featuring cyborgs, androids, and, of particular relevance to this discussion, genetically modified wolf-like Lunar operatives. The latter beings evoke the concept of the monster (the relationship between cyborg and monstrosity is taken up in the next section through Cinder's liminality). Unbeknownst to Earth, Queen Levana has stationed Lunar special operatives in its cities. To force the Earth to bow to her will, Queen Levana orders their activation, and the special operatives transform into wolf-like creatures:

A guttural cry ricocheted across the tavern. Beyond the officer, the man with the blue eyes moved to stand, but then collapsed over his table. The table legs snapped from the weight and he crashed to the floor. The other customers pulled away from him, everyone's attention

> diverted. Cinder glanced at Thorne, who was watching the spectacle with his hands locked behind his back.
>
> The stranger snarled. He was crouching down on all fours, saliva dripping from his mouth. Beneath dark eyebrows, his eyes had taken on an eerie luminescence and a crazed, bloodthirsty expression that twisted Cinder's stomach. He curled his fingers, pulling his nails across the hard floor, and peered up at the terrified faces surrounding him.
>
> A growl rolled up from his throat and his lips curled, revealing teeth that came to a fine point, more canine than human. (Meyer, *Scarlet* 356)

Functioning as a pack, such creatures are controlled by Thaumaturges through the manipulation of bioelectricity. These Lunar soldiers are genetically modified, and those transformations not only change them physically but also make them more violent; that is, "[t]hey appear to be Lunar males whose physical makeup has been combined with the neural circuitry of some sort of wolf hybrid" (Meyer, *Scarlet* 427). While the operatives on Earth still have a semblance of human beings, those on Lunar are closer to wolf-human hybrids, undergoing extensive physical transformation. When Cinder faces the mutant operatives, she describes them as beastly and grotesque: "[t]he bones of their jaws were misshapen and reinforced to fit enormous canine teeth; their arms hung awkwardly at their sides, as if their spines were unaccustomed to the weight of their new muscles and extended limbs" (Meyer, *Winter* 433). Quite interestingly, Cinder compares the wolf-like operatives to her cyborg condition – she realises that "[t]hey were both unnatural. Only, instead of being pieced together with wires and steel, these creatures were a jigsaw of muscle tissue and cartilage" (434). Forced to be genetically modified, these male Lunars are used and abused in warfare, their actions never their own. Here, the monster is used to pinpoint the mistreatment of the powerless. Additionally, the monster is proof of Queen Levana's dictatorship; that is, it represents her sins – just as the Corsai, Malchai, and Sunai represent their creators' sins.

2.3. On Liminality

Folklorist Arnold van Gennep introduces the anthropological concept of "liminality" in *Rites of Passage* (1909). Van Gennep builds the concept around sacred rites of passage,[102] arguing that all human beings are bound to undergo a liminal period of experience, which might be brought about, for instance, by adulthood, social puberty, marriage, pregnancy, parenthood, death, and funerals. Around each of these preliminary or permanent rites of passage, "there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (van Gennep 3). The folklorist categorises ceremonial rites of passage into three categories: pre-liminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation). While pre-liminal rites refer to rites of separation from a previous world and post-liminal rites to rites of integration with a new world, liminal rites explore the transition from one state to another. In essence, liminal rites occur in the in-between space between rites of separation and incorporation. Moving from one defined position to another requires the subject to stand in an ill-defined position for a time. Victor Turner, developing from van Gennep's tripartite theory, focuses on the liminal stage, arguing that van Gennep's liminal period must be regarded "as an interstructural phase in social dynamics" (*The Forest of Symbols* 98) where the characteristics of the subject (liminal *personae*) who moves in the liminal space are ambiguous. To Turner, liminality "is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence" (*The Forest of Symbols* 106). The freedom the subject finds within liminality to understand their existence and the world around them permits them to find a space to reflect on society's order, rules, hierarchy, and structure. This reflection may serve as a catalyst for the emergence of rebellious thoughts rather than creating subjects who behave according to strict social norms without questioning, as is often depicted in YA dystopian fiction. In a later

[102] In his exploration of rites of passage, van Gennep concludes that "an individual is placed in various sections of society, synchronically and in succession; in order to pass from one category to another and to join individuals in other sections, he must submit, from the day of his birth to that of his death, to ceremonies whose forms often vary but whose function is similar. Sometimes the individual stands alone and apart from all groups; sometimes, as a member of one particular group, he is separated from the members of others" (189)

publication, Turner summarises his ideas about liminality and the liminal subject. The scholar asserts that

> [t]he attributed of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (*The Ritual Process* 359)

Liminality is therefore a paradoxical space. Van Gennep's and Turner's considerations enable the establishment of a connection between adolescence as a liminal stage. YA media (such as books, films, video games, and series) also occupy a liminal space. Indeed, this liminal space that YA media inhabits must be pondered when exploring and developing YA theoretical frameworks. Leah Phillips argues that YA media stands in a liminal space between binary oppositions.[103] Binary oppositional pairs, Phillips expounds,

> require a well-defined and blank space between [them] lest the opposing sides bleed into one another. The blankness or emptiness of this split is essential. There can be nothing in the gap between because that which exist in-between displays characteristics of both sides, complicating opposition. YA is such an in-between phenomenon, and in addressing the adolescent, it also concerns the in-between. That is, YA is both in-between as a body of literature, and it depicts the in-between. ("Part 1: What is YA?")

[103] Throughout this section, I focus on the terminology "binary oppositions" and "binary pairs." My considerations follow Claude Lévi-Strauss's binary opposition theory, who argues that many cultures organise their understanding of the world around fundamental pairs of opposites. These binary oppositions are not just linguistic or conceptual but are also deeply embedded in various cultural practices and rituals. To Lévi-Strauss, binary pairs, "particularly binary opposites, form the basic structure of all human cultures, all human ways of thought, and all human signifying systems. If there is a common 'human nature' or 'human condition,' from this perspective, it's that everyone everywhere thinks—and structures their worlds—in terms of binary pairs of opposites […]. Even more importantly, in every binary pair, one term is favored and the other disfavored" (Klages 16).

YA is an interstitial space where realities intermingle into a mixing of realities, where borders are blurred.

YA fiction itself is a liminal singularity, both in structure and content. It is a liminal body of literature which falls between, rather than within, the familiar boundaries of accepted categories and media. As observed, it is not only between children's and adult fiction but also depicts an in-between stage of life, adolescence. As a liminal literary form, YA fiction disrupts the binary child/adult as well as the binary children's literature/adult fiction. YA fiction produces an impossible space between binaries – a space in which opposing binaries bleed into one another, as Philips explains above, to build betwixt and between stories about adolescence and adolescents. Through inhabiting an in-between space, "YA fiction offers a charmed liminal space for the consideration of choice, values and a movement forward for [adolescents] to take responsibility for themselves, others and the planet" (Wisker, "Gothic and Young Adult Literature" 390). Its liminality becomes a tool to challenge and destabilise fixated boundaries, considering world views that do not depend on binary oppositional pairs but rather on the space between them, which, making use of Phillips's terminology, is neither well-defined nor a blank space.

While YA is an in-between literary phenomenon, the Gothic mode itself is fundamentally grounded in liminality. The Gothic breaches established boundaries, allowing whatever the borders were keeping apart to trickle into one another. Carolyn Lambert states that literary Gothic "operates in liminal spaces, in the interstices between the real and the fantastic, the psychologically stable and the emotionally disturbed, often oscillating between these extremes" (37), and is frequently inhabited by liminal characters and settings. In Gothic literary narratives, transgression and subversion frequently occur within liminal spaces or bodies "situated either on or at the recognized borders or boundaries of subjective experience" (Garner 401). Liminality, encompassing both temporal and spatial dimensions, is crucial to conveying the Gothic's disturbing effect. Indeed, as Manuel Aguirre states in "A Grammar of Gothic: Report on

a Research Project on the Forms of the Gothic Genre"[104], liminality appears to be a ruling principle in the construction of the Gothic. By enumerating a set of rules, Aguirre demonstrates that liminality is essential to Gothic fiction, serving to construct the plot, settings, and characters. For instance, the first rule that Aguirre discusses expresses that the Gothic creates a world that consists of the human cosmos, "a domain of rationality and relative order," and the realm of the Numinous, "characterised by its incognoscibility" (Aguirre, "A Grammar of Gothic" 126-7). A threshold materialises where these two worlds meet,[105] and its crossing "is perhaps the prototypal deed in Gothic fiction." Notably, versions of crossing the threshold include "not just the hero's journey but also transformation, transgression, imprisonment, haunting, escape and pursuit" ("Thick Descriptions" 301). Here, Aguirre reasserts the relationship between transgression and the liminal in the Gothic, in which, like transgression, crossing the threshold permits the problematisation, reconstruction, and transformation of socio-political structures and values.

Additionally, Gothic characters are in danger of being permanently in a liminal state since they often find themselves in the middle of a process, such as a forthcoming marriage or a newly awakened love interest, which is unexpectedly interrupted, or are subjected to an exceedingly prolonged process, such as imprisonment or persecution. In these instances, "the liminal stage of the passage threatens to lengthen forever, and to engulf them" (308). The Gothic mode explores the liminality of the human condition and the potential human have to change. Consequently, Gothic characters find themselves in a liminal space, where they are transformed. Aguirre explains that "[t]hey acquire numinous features and may come to resemble such denizens of the limen—ghosts, monsters, demons—as exhibit a non-rational (compulsive, excessive, repetitive, mindless, bestial) behaviour" ("A Grammar of Gothic" 131). One such example of a

[104] "A Grammar of Gothic: Report on a Research Project on the Forms of the Gothic Genre" (2013) is a report for the *Northanger Library Project* (2006-2009). By applying methodology for the study of fairy tales, the project concludes that the patterns of Gothic narratives are a modification of those found in folk and fairy tales.

[105] The crossing of the threshold that materialises between these two domains, as the second rule asserts, "*takes place whereby either characters enter the Numinous domain or else their ordinary world acquires numinous traits*" (Aguirre, "A Grammar of Gothic" 127).

liminal stage that endures forever is becoming a vampire. For instance, in *Carmilla*, the eponymous vampire exists in a perpetual state between life and death, and she shows signs of predatory comportment. In *Dracula*, after being bitten by the Count, Lucy transforms into a vampire, becoming a denizen of the limen, and exhibits non-rational, bestial behaviours, feeding on children. Interestingly, in the YA series with Gothic contours, Twilight, Edward and his family, even though they turn into vampires and acquire numinous features, do not engage in non-rational behaviours (they choose to feed on animal blood rather than human blood). However, they decide to attend high school, moving to a new one every so often, repeatedly engaging in teenage rites of passage, such as prom and graduation. These teenage rites of passage are nothing more than liminal rituals, if van Gennep's and Turner's definitions are taken into consideration. Aguirre concludes that "Gothic protagonists are (or become) liminal figures uneasily straddling two worlds, caught midway between past and present, or between antithetical states of being, often painfully conscious of their imminent or recent fall" ("Thick Descriptions" 308). In the Gothic, young female characters are often represented as liminal, may it be bodily (such as, as commented on, Lucy, who is a vampire, and Matilda in Lewis's *The Monk*, a demon; in fact, as young and female, Gothic heroines are all in possession of liminal bodies) and psychologically and/or morally (Gothic heroines are often positioned in-between obedience and rebellion, sanity and madness, reason and imagination, and girlhood and womanhood, to name a few).

In Gothic fiction, liminal spaces and bodies are represented as thresholds where binary relationships, such as moral and immoral, proper conduct and unruliness, real and unreal, supernatural and natural, and past and present, destabilise. Gothic stories are often set in haunted, isolated spaces, such as medieval castles, abbeys, dungeons, family mansions, asylums, and even boarding schools,[106] surrounded by graveyards and

[106] The earliest Gothic novels are set in topographically displaced settings, specifically in distant regions of Continental Europe, which are far removed from the English landscapes familiar to the authors. These writers favoured countries such as Italy, Spain, and France as the backdrops for the pursuits of their villains and the quests of their heroes and heroines. The authors' choice was deliberate since historical and geographical distancing "made it much easier for a sensitive reading public to accept the excesses found in these tales," but most importantly allowed them to tackle down "taboos and transgressions *because* it was easy to dismiss them as aspects of life in a bygone time and place" (Hillard 690). Away from

endless forests.[107] These sites have become quintessential Gothic sites, often described as "decaying," "ruined," "corrupted," "haunted," "cursed," and "isolated." Hence, clearly, "[t]he Gothic sensibility thrives on margins – the places where the law is at its weakest and destruction and reconstruction is in progress" (Curtis 120). Thus, margins function as liminal places. Within these spaces, the boundaries between past and present frequently emmesh – an entanglement that causes Gothic spaces to be haunting spaces, conveying the past that refuses to fade away into the present.

As previously articulated in the examination of the relationship between the Gothic mode and the past, the ubiquitous presence of ruins and crumbling structures conjures a profound sense of historical weight and decay, thereby invoking the haunting spectres of the past that permeate the present: collapsing structures suggest a sense of loss and nostalgia, acting as reminders of the past's enduring influence on the present. The transient nature of spaces in the Gothic mode reinforces its liminality, enabling the negotiation between binaries that should have remained separate, yet enmeshed, allowing characters to confront their fears, desires, and the ghosts of their pasts. Although crumbling ruins have a haunting aura, the spaces are far from empty. Liminal, Gothic spaces are home to villainous, murderous bandits, ominous ghostly or monstrous creatures, such as ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and undead revenants, and everything

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civilisation, these dwellings seem to gain a life of their own. Sites are anthropomorphised, becoming characters of the narrative. In *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, "throughout the novel the very fabric of the castle comes to supernatural life until villainy is defeated" (Mullan "The origins of the Gothic"). In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the family mansion is imbued with a sense of sentience. It is intricately linked to the family's decline such that its final collapse mirrors the extinction of the Usher bloodline. In Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Hill House is rendered as an organism with its own malignant will – its architecture warps space in ways that suggest conscious malevolence. In Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), the hotel is depicted as an anthropomorphic malignant entity, drawing power from the traumatic events that occurred inside its walls. The anthropomorphisation of Gothic spaces intertwines with the theme of haunting.

[107] The forest is a significant Gothic setting, having been part of the literary Gothic since its inception. (In *Otranto*, Isabella hides in the forest after running from an unwanted marriage with Manfred.) As Elizabeth Parker points out, the forest "has always been a mainstay of the Gothic – as common, though less remarked on, as the graveyard, the castle and the abbey [and is] widely recognised symbolic archetype in the Western imagination. As a site of trial, trepidation and terror, it is one of the most persistent and pervasive images in our fictions" (23). It is not just what might be found hidden or looming in the darkest deeps of the forest that evokes dread. The forest itself emanates terror and stirs awe. It is capable of provoking dreadfulness on its own – there is no need for monsters or beasts to inhabit it (although they do) in order to provoke bloodcurdling fear in its visitors.

superstitious. It is crucial to emphasise that the monstrous creatures are embodiments of liminal states of being, standing between life and death, between human and animal. Essentially, they straddle thresholds, destabilising and transgressing seemingly fixed boundaries. As Patricia Kennon observes, beings "that inhabit the liminal territory between human and inhuman provide a compelling *tabula rasa* for constructing and projecting Gothic concerns about death, monstrosity and loss of personal autonomy" ("*Zombies vs. Unicorns*" 22). Furthermore, as liminal spaces,[108] Gothic spaces are liberating places of fluidity for the characters – mainly for the female characters, who, as considered, become free from the constraints of society and can express their true identities rather than those imposed and controlled by patriarchy and its representatives.

The Gothic mode uses intricate spatial dynamics, where settings are not merely backdrops but serve as integral components that shape characters' experiences and amplify its themes (such as confinement, isolation, and entrapment). Similar to Gothic works, YA dystopian fiction features spaces, bodies, and psychological states of being that assume a liminal status. In the selected dystopian series, liminality is often portrayed as a source of danger, unease, and uncertainty. However, it also creates spaces within and outside the self that question an individual's identity and, consequently, offer empowerment and agency. In this study, liminal spaces are conceptualised as physical sites that enable the transformation of YA dystopian heroines. In these spaces, teenage girls encounter numerous forms of violence, including torture, pursuit and entrapment, and they transgress established social rules and norms, enabling a transformative process that results in character growth – these girls increasingly comprehend the insidious ideologies upheld by authorities and/or recognise the imperative to rebel against the existing system. It is essential to emphasise

[108] There are different liminal spatial dimensions. Taking on van Gennep's work as a starting point, Bjorn Thomassen suggests that there are three spatial dimensions of liminality. It can relate to "specific places, thresholds (a doorway in a house, a line that separates holy from scared in a ritual, specific objects, in-between items in a classification scheme, parts/openings of the human body)," to "areas or zones (border areas between nations, monasteries, prisons, sea resorts, airports)", and to "countries or larger regions, continents" (26).

that in the liminal spaces identified in the selected YA dystopian narratives, oppositional binaries enmesh into one another, creating a dynamic that not only invites a critical examination of these binaries but also fosters the transformation of worldviews that have historically relied upon them.

2.3.1. Deadly Arenas, Suffocating Spaceships & Comfy Palaces: Dangerous Yet Empowering Liminal Spaces

Rebekah Fitzsimmons writes that "[l]ike a utopia, a dystopia often exists in an isolated or insulated place, separated from other societies either by space (an island, a distant planet) or political reality (wars, closed borders, censored communication technologies)" ("Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy"). Dystopian societies are isolated, an isolation enforced by authorities at both micro and macro levels – society is often divided and, as argued earlier, most citizens cannot move freely. Amidst a society with stringent rules, some spaces exhibit liminal characteristics. In these in-between places, traditional binary relationships are subverted and transformed. YA dystopian fiction constructs spaces that share similarities with the Gothic mode: isolated, decaying spaces, surrounded by ominous forests and an atmosphere of terror and persecution. These spaces can manifest in various forms, such as abandoned buildings, desolate wastelands, forests, or urban environments that blur the line between safety and danger, past and present, civilised and uncivilised, and life and death. Hence, YA dystopian heroines cannot escape inhabiting and/or walking into physical liminal spaces, which are central to their development. As Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz articulate, the female protagonists of YA dystopian fiction occupy liminal spaces in order to understand their place in the world and who they are (see chapter 1.4).

Quite importantly, there is a potential danger associated with bodies that exist in liminal spaces, since the behaviour of those who

> reside in a liminal zone that is not a part of that society's legitimate ritual code … cannot be meaningfully explained by the governing myths. If their actions are assigned meaning outside the mythology of the dominant social structure, then their liminal existence constitutes a threat to the social order. Efforts will be made to prevent this significance. Their actions must either be interpreted within the social structure or be denied meaningfulness. (Rothenbühler 68)

Members of society standing in liminal zones threaten social order. For instance, in the Hunger Games, taking advantage of the liminality of the arenas, Katniss engages in behaviours perceived as acts of rebellion that fall outside the so-called mythology of the dominant social structure. When Rue, the female Tribute from District Eleven, is fatally wounded, per her request, Katniss sings to her, comforting Rue until her last breath. She shows compassion to a Tribute she should have killed. With Rue's dead body lying on the grass, Katniss thinks of Peeta's confession the night before the games began: "Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to…to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 276). With Peeta's words in mind, Katniss beautifies Rue's corpse with flowers and "press[es] the three middle fingers of [her] left hand against [her] lips and hold them out in [Rue's] direction" (277). At the end of her first games, after the Gamemakers reverse the decision of two winners, Katniss holds a handful of poisonous berries to save her and Peeta's life, threatening the Games to end without a Victor, which is something she was aware the Gamekeepers could not let happen. Although Katniss did not intend her actions to fuel a rebellion, both discontented citizens, rebels, and President Snow see them as socially deviant – indeed, President Snow sees her actions as threatening to social order.

The YA dystopian worlds under analysis feature numerous physical liminal spaces (see table 4). However, I focus on the series in which spatial liminality more powerfully and significantly shapes and (re)defines the heroines and their journeys: The Hunger Games, Across the Universe, The Chemical Garden, Divergent, Shatter Me, Under the Never Sky, and The Selection.

Table 4 - Physical Liminal Spaces Featured in the Main Corpus

Series	Physical Liminal Spaces
The Hunger Games	74th and 75th Hunger Games arenas; cave; The Capitol.
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	The Forest of Hands and Teeth.
Matched	The Hill; the Carving.
Across the Universe	*Godspeed* (spaceship); cryo-sleep vessel.
Delirium	37 Brooks; The Wilds; underground cell.
The Chemical Garden	Ashby's residence (the Wives' floor, the basement laboratories); Carnival.
Divergent	Fear landscapes.
Shatter Me	Headquarters of the Sector 45 of The Reestablishment; Omega Point facilities; Warner's living quarters.
Legend	Poor sectors and quarantine areas; the warfront.
The Lunar Chronicles	Quarantine areas (Warehouse District of New Beijing); New Beijing Palace (research laboratories); Rampion (spaceship); Luna.
Under the Never Sky	Realms; the Death Shop (outside world)
Starters	Prime Destinations (body bank).
The Selection	Palace; safe/secret rooms in the palace.
The Darkest Minds	Rehabilitation camps; Black Betty (van).
The Program	Treatment centres.
Red Queen	Mare's prison cell.
Monsters of Verity	Verity; monster-infested zones.
Arc of a Scythe	Revival centres; the Scythedom.

The Hunger Games arenas function not only as carceral spaces that exhibit traces of isolation, entrapment, and claustrophobia akin to Gothic spaces, but also as in-between spaces, manifesting liminal characteristics. The arenas are physical, fixed structures; however, at the same time, they are unpredictable due to the influence of the Gamemakers, who can alter the environment at their discretion. During the 74th Hunger Games, they create a wildfire, change the weather and the day-night cycle, while in the 75th Games, once the Tributes figure out the arena is engineered to function as a clock, the Gamemakers activate a mechanism that rotates the arena in order to disorientate the Tributes. Both spaces are populated by the genetically modified creatures generated in the Capitol labs. Some, according to the physical descriptions presented earlier, inhabit liminal positions. Furthermore, in these arenas, Katniss and the other Tributes straddle psychological and societal thresholds. As stated previously, Katniss is stung by tracker jackers, finding herself in a psychological in-between where reality and illusion intertwine, and she cannot distinguish what is real from what is not.

Regarding societal rules, within the arenas, they do not apply to the Tributes. While atrocities such as torture and murder are penalised outside the dome (despite being utilised by the Capitol to control the populace and maintain power), inside the arena, teenagers can perpetrate murderous acts without the threat of punishment. Indeed, they are censured by keeping their distance and refraining from killing other Tributes. An illustration of this is when Katniss finds herself amid a Gamemaker-made wildfire. Katniss swiftly concludes that the fire is created because "[t]here is the Career pack and then there are the rest of us, probably spread far and thin across the arena. This fire is designed to flush us out, to drive us together" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 202). The Gamemakers' intend to compel the Tributes to engage in violent combat, putting on a spectacle for the Capitol audiences. Nevertheless, although in a liminal space where societal rules do not apply, there are still lines the Tributes should not cross since certain behaviours and actions can be distasteful for the Capitol audience and might lead to their planned death. In her contemplation of Peeta's wish not to be owned by the Capitol, Katniss recalls another Tribute, Titus. She surmises that Peeta will likely

> turn into one of those raging beast tributes, the kind who tries to eat someone's heart after they've killed them. There was a guy like that a few years ago from District 6 called Titus. He went completely savage and the Gamemakers had to have him stunned with electric guns to collect the bodies of the players he'd killed before he ate them. There are no rules in the arena, but cannibalism doesn't play well with the Capitol audience, so they tried to head it off. There was some speculation that the avalanche that finally took Titus out was specifically engineered to ensure the victor was not a lunatic. (166-7)

Although there is freedom to transgress societal rules, if behaviours move towards what is seen as animalistic and counter-nature, authorities can still ensure control in the liminal spaces. The arena's liminality allows for the interrogation of societal boundaries. However, this liminal space is still watched by both Panem's population and the Gamemakers, who, by standing outside the arena, are not part of it. Outside, the rules still apply and even though the Capitol audience gets excited by watching teenagers murdering each other, cannibalism (or any other behaviour the audience might find reprehensible or distasteful) is questioned and must be dealt with. Liminal spaces allow transgression; however, they remain under constant surveillance, subjecting individuals to both direct and indirect punishment. Such repercussions may occur during the Games themselves or in their aftermath. For example, following Katniss's "stunt" with the berries, she is threatened by President Snow as her actions have catalysed an uprising – she must convince him that she is genuinely in love with Peeta or those she cares about will suffer the repercussions. These liminal spaces can infiltrate the structural world through vigilance – social surveillance is everywhere.

In Across the Universe, the spaceship *Godspeed*, as a Gothic space, conceals numerous secrets, including hidden sections that must be uncovered, as well as latent violence. Most importantly, it oozes Gothic liminal characteristics, very close to those of the Hunger Games arenas. First and foremost, the spaceship is an in-between space. It stands on the threshold between the world left behind – a world to which *Godspeed* is now severed, as history has been altered and communication cut – and the new world that its passengers hope to reach. *Godspeed* oscillates between a temporary (as it was always meant to be) and a permanent home. Additionally, within its bowels, travellers

from Earth are in cryo sleep while they await the spaceship's arrival at its destination. The cryogenic chamber is an exemplary liminal zone, as those who came from Earth are between life and stasis. When Amy wakes up, she is confronted with the reality that she is still inside the generational spaceship, and it has yet to land on Century-Earth. She has a panic attack, overwhelmed by the fact that she is enclosed (Revis, *Across the Universe* 219).

Locked up inside the spaceship, Amy is often overtaken by a sense of claustrophobia. The first time Amy steps outside the hospital to which she was taken upon awakening, she states, "I run with my back to the closest wall, straight out into the green fields. This ship's level is vast, but not so wide that I cannot see the wall on the other side. […] Still, it's small enough to make me claustrophobic" (133). To Amy, the spaceship is a cage, crushing her into a claustrophobic existence (Revis, *A Million Suns* 290). The experience of claustrophobia emerges as a typical response from YA dystopian heroines when they find themselves trapped in liminal spaces. The claustrophobia experienced by female characters is also intricately entangled with the Gothic mode. Although classic Gothic literature predates modern psychology, many Gothic heroines experience episodes that closely resemble panic attacks, often manifested as fainting, hysteria, terror, overwhelming dread, or claustrophobic fear. In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance, Emily experiences intense fear and near-fainting episodes when faced with the claustrophobic castle corridors (as well as threatening male authority figures). A similar portrayal can be found in Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), where Ellena di Rosalba constantly experiences fear during her confinement in the convent. This characteristic remains evident even in contemporary Gothic literature. In Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, its protagonist, Noemí Taboada, experiences claustrophobic terror within the oppressive and patriarchal environment of the Doyle family home.

In The Selection, the palace is represented as a liminal space. Although the palace is neither crumbling nor mouldering, it nonetheless possesses Gothic characteristics. Beyond its gilded walls, an aura of corruption hangs in the air – numerous nefarious secrets surround the royal family. During her stay in the palace throughout the Selection,

America finds herself under the scrutiny of cameras, isolated from the outside world, and surrounded by guarded walls. Within this site, the patriarchal gaze remains ever-present, manifesting both in the guise of spies, maids and guards and surveillance systems that meticulously record the movements of the contestants participating in the contest. Feeling claustrophobic and trapped after her arrival, America describes the palace as a "beautiful cage" (Cass, *The Selection* 116). In fact, on her first night at the palace, America feels unwell and finds herself fleeing from her bedroom to the garden (a space she is only granted access to because Maxon orders the guards to let her out):

> My vision got blurry. I didn't even register that I'd started crying. I couldn't breathe. I was shaking. I jumped up and ran to the balcony. I was so panicked, it took me a moment to open the latch, but I did. I thought the fresh air would be enough, but it wasn't. My breaths were still shallow and cold.
>
> There was no freedom in this. The bars of my balcony caged me in. And I could still see the walls around the palace, high with guards atop the points. […]
>
> …
>
> I was staggering quite a bit, but I didn't care if I looked less than graceful. I just needed to be outside. […] I collapsed in front of a small stone bench and sat there […] and my head resting in my arms on the seat.
>
> My body didn't have the energy to sob, so the tears that came were quiet. Still, they took all my focus. How did I get here? How had I let this happen? What would become of me here? Would I ever get back any piece of the life I'd had before this? I just didn't know. And there wasn't a damn thing I could do about any of it. (110-3)

Surrounded by gilded walls that should instil a sense of security, America experiences an overwhelming sensation of entrapment and helplessness. The weight of her circumstances becomes increasingly oppressive, culminating in a panic attack. Echoing Baldick's definition of the Gothic, America is consumed by a claustrophobic sense of confinement within this liminal space. This feeling is intensified when she discovers that Gregory Illéa established a tainted social system. This sense of claustrophobic entrapment escalates with the rebel attacks on the palace, leaving America with

nowhere to go and forced to seek refuge in the palace's secret rooms – it has hidden passages, "doors and panels everywhere" (Cass, *The Elite* 60). As America ponders upon encountering one of these concealed passages, "Anne pulled me out into the hallway and pushed on a section of wall. It turned, like a hidden passage from some mystery novel. Sure enough, behind the wall, a stairwell awaited me" (Cass, *The Selection* 300). Besides concealing secret passages and rooms, the palace also hides dark family secrets: the King reveals himself to be a villain who violently beats up his son (Cass, *The Elite*, 384), and mistreats and threatens America. He holds on to power, having no interest in letting it go (Cass, *The One* 16-7). The righteous King is nothing more than a farce.

The mansions in which Rhine (The Chemical Garden) and Juliette (Shatter Me) are confined also have liminal characteristics. The mansions Rhine and Juliette are taken to place them in an in-between – they are neither captive nor free. These spaces may offer material comfort, yet they are nothing more than gilded prisons, just like the palace in The Selection. The Gothic mansion is frequently depicted as a threshold space – a space suspended between oppositional binaries, such as safety and danger, past and present, natural and supernatural, where boundaries blur, and standard rules wane. In the haunted mansion, "[r]emoteness is a sign of its liminal nature and a hint that it might be annexed to some even more marginal place" (Curtis 54). In Gothic literature, the mansion often serves as a reflection of the Gothic heroines' psychological state – for instance, locked doors symbolise repressed memories, while echoing halls can signify feelings of loneliness or paranoia. For these heroines, the Gothic mansion acts as a threshold between sanity and madness and between freedom and constraint. The Gothic house also frequently mirrors the instability of social roles, representing a state of social liminality for these women: Gothic heroines navigate these spaces as wards or subordinates, assuming positions of ambiguity, existing neither as servants nor as equals. Consequently, the mansion becomes a site where conventional social categories blur, and the heroine's status remains precariously unsettled. It is essential to emphasise that Gothic heroines often occupy (both figurative and literal) liminal spaces where past and present interact, since they find themselves in a limbo, caught between old expectations and new possibilities (often severely judged if they choose one path or

another). Similarly, YA dystopian heroines occupy analogous liminal zones, navigating environments where past traumas and future possibilities enmesh, standing in the space where one is intricately woven into the other.

In The Chemical Garden, the Ashy residence functions as a domestic Gothic prison – in her new bedroom, "[t]he wallpaper is made up of vertical vines budding roses," reminding Rhine "of the bars of a prison cell" (DeStefano, *Wither* 9-10) –, wherein Rhine finds herself poised between luxury and captivity. Trapped on the upper floors, Rhine is unable to escape her captivity due to the elevator's restricted access, which operates solely with an access card. This card is granted to her only upon her becoming the First Wife, allowing her to move freely outside the mansion and plan her escape from it. During a power outage incident, the elevator mistakenly stops in the basement, where the laboratories are located. While walking down the shady hallways, looking for a way back to the mansion's upper floors, Rhine is engulfed by a sense of panic:

> The main hallway branches off to other, darker hallways and closed doors, and I'm sure I don't want to know where they lead. I never want to see this floor again. It's triggering something very bad in my memories, in the place of nightmares, where the murdered girls in the van reside, where the Gatherer thief cups his hand over my mouth and presses a blade to my throat. Something about being here makes my palms sweat. And then I realize it. This is where the doctor was, the afternoon before the wedding. Deirdre brought me to this hallway, led me to a room where a man stuck me with a needle and I blacked out. (94-5).

Before her wedding to Linden, Rhine was drugged in order to be "inspected" and unknowingly implanted with a tracking device. Her maid reveals to her that the doctor examined her for "fertility [and] you were implanted with a tracker so that the Housemaster could always know where you are [because] you and your sister wives are his property" (DeStefano, *Fever* 303). In the basement laboratories, Vaughn, her husband's father and the Housemaster of Ashby mansion, is developing a cure. However, his research practices stand on the threshold of science and monstrosity, and

life and death. The basement veils horrible secrets, as Vaughn uses orphan children as test subjects and the bodies of his son's dead wives to experiment on:

> A body covered by a sheet. Rose's blond hair trailing out around the edges. And her cold, white hand, with fingernails still painted pink.
>
> …
>
> "Where are they taking her?" I gasp.
>
> […] "Housemaster Vaughn must be planning to study her," he says. "He's been looking for an antidote for years." (DeStefano, *Wither* 96-7)

The Housemaster experiments with artificial insemination, having "found a way to speed up fertility and gestation, so girls can bear children before natural puberty" (DeStefano, *Fever* 290). This treatment physically ages the bodies of the orphan girls and often results in the death of the infants and female children. Vaughn even uses his first grandchild for his experimentations – a malformed baby, Vaughn lies about the baby's death and uses the baby in his work. Due to her heterochromia, Rhine quickly captures his attention. As a result, initially unknowingly and later to protect those she loves, Rhine becomes one of his test subjects, a process that not only dehumanises her but also inflicts significant psychological harm. Confined to a bed during the testing procedures, Rhine confesses her distress by stating "I feel like something less than human. An experiment. A cadaver" (292).

In Shatter Me, Juliette is brought from the asylum where she was confined to Sector 45 of The Reestablishment compound. The compound is a mansion transformed into a militaristic space. Although ostensibly a place of comfort, the mansion offers Juliette neither solace nor freedom. For example, her bedroom is constantly under surveillance with cameras omnipresent, save for the bathroom, becoming a site both protective and threatening. Although Juliette is no longer locked up in the asylum, where she was hidden and kept away from society, her autonomy is still compromised within the mansion due to incessant scrutiny. Hence, the headquarters functions as a liminal

zone, a space where Juliette exists in the interstitial space between safety and peril, visibility and invisibility. This predicament resonates with the experiences of Gothic heroines, who often find themselves simultaneously freed to roam in the places they find themselves, yet perpetually observed. However, the mansion also serves as a transformative space for Juliette, allowing her transition from being and feeling a prisoner to becoming an agent. During her first stay in the headquarters of Sector 45 of The Reestablishment, Juliette builds up the strength to act by herself and plan her successful escape from it – a feat echoed in Rhine's own successful flight from the Ashby mansion. In her second stay at the mansion, no longer seeing herself as a prisoner nor the mansion as a prison, Juliette's perception of herself shifts significantly. This transformation becomes evident when she recognises her change from a frightened girl into someone who can have an effect on the world. Abandoning her prior self-image as a threat, as I discuss further ahead, Juliette realises that "I trust myself […] to be strong enough to do what's right. […] We can't just sit back and watch people die when we have the power to make a difference" (Mafi, *Ignite Me* 227). In the mansion, Juliette concocts a plan to take down the Reestablishment.

Here, the mansion's liminality is reinforced by its role as a sanctuary whose boundaries are threatened by outside forces. A similar dynamic can be observed in Omega Point's headquarters, which also embodies this tenuous balance between sanctuary and threat. The underground facilities of Omega Point provide Juliette with a degree of protection, functioning as a sort of safe haven. However, she remains under threat from the outside world. In fact, even internal forces are a threat, since Omega Point has security measures, including cameras and guards, monitoring her every movement (notably, Kenji, a character endowed with the ability of invisibility, is assigned to shadow her). Within these liminal spaces, Juliette reworks her identity, which remains in a state of flux. Remarkably, the arenas, the spaceship, the palace, and the mansions discussed here are liminal zones wherein the YA dystopian heroine's identity is unstable; that is, within these liminal spaces, their identity is neither static nor fully articulated, existing in a state of suspension. Their identity stands in the interstitial space that lies

between opposing binaries, where boundaries are blurred, and the characteristics of both opposing binaries intermingle and coalesce.

In the selected YA dystopian series, liminal spaces are frequently thresholds between life and death. The YA dystopian heroines constantly find themselves on the threshold of life and death; that is, they find themselves at sites where life and death enmesh. For instance, the Hunger Games arenas are a threshold between life and death: whoever walks in is alive yet already dead, as the arenas are a limbo from where only one Tribute can return alive. In The Forest of Hands and Teeth, the world has been taken over by the living dead. While the village is a place where boundaries are well defined (such as teenage girls must marry or join the Sisterhood), that is, where social rules and order are maintained, the forest allows for the deconstruction of oppositional binaries, especially of the binary life and death. In Monsters of Verity, the whole city is a threshold between life and death, where violent actions often lead to death, giving rise to monsters. Quite interestingly, these monsters form in the shadows – in fact, the Corsai are made of shadows – and shadows embody a Gothic in-betweenness: shadows are neither light nor darkness, standing on the threshold of visibility and invisibility.

The social-political conditions of the dystopian society can also place individuals on this threshold. In Divergent, Tris undergoes a rigorous initiation process to become a Dauntless member, during which she is administered the fear serum that thrusts her into a simulation (her fear landscape), forcing her to confront her deepest fears. The simulation functions as a liminal space, occupying the thresholds between reality and fantasy, between consciousness and unconsciousness, and between the physical world and the psyche. Inside this liminal zone, Tris gains insight into her core fears – fears that are deeply rooted in internal moral conflicts rather than in physical danger. For example, in one of her fear landscapes, Tris is attacked by birds in an open field. Through this encounter, she comes to realise that “it isn’t about the birds. It’s about control” (Roth, *Divergent* 384). She is terrified of losing control. In another fear landscape, Tris finds herself trapped in a water tank, prompting her to recognise that her fear is not related to drowning. Rather, she articulates, “it is about my inability to escape the tank. It is about weakness” (385-6). This scenario can also be interpreted as a manifestation of her

fear of entrapment, which conveys a sense of claustrophobia. Upon her escape from the tank, Tris finds herself in the open sea, which further emphasises these fears: "I must not really be afraid of the water. I must be afraid of being out of control. To face it, I have to regain control" (387). Additional fear landscapes include being set on fire by her nemesis, Peter, intimate moments with Four, and the experience of being kidnapped. The latter fear emerges after three male initiates drag her into the Pit, in an attempt to kill her – as Tris thinks to herself when she finds herself surrounded by men in the simulation, "[t]hey are here to take me, like Peter and Drew and Al; to kill me. I know it" (391). Tris is also confronted with being obliged to kill her family. These fears collectively expose Tris's struggle with loss of agency, revealing her deep apprehension regarding not having control. In this liminal space, Tris attains a deeper understanding of her identity, particularly in relation to her Divergent nature, as her fears are situated in the interstitial midst of Abnegation and Dauntless; that is, in-between the binary selflessness and bravery. It is essential to highlight that the faction system engenders unique oppositional binaries that not only shape the societal order but also delineate the ways of being for each Faction.

In Under the Never Sky, the Realms are virtual places created with computer programming that feel physically real to the user – "*Better than Real*" (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 6), as the slogan promotes – yet they are not part of the physical world. As Amy explains, she can access them with her Smarteye and

> "I could go to any part of the world and beyond too, [w]ithout going anywhere. There are Realms for times that have passed. Last year the Medieval Realms were champ. You'd be great in one of those. And then there are Fantasy Realms and Future Realms. Realms for hobbies and any kind of interest you can think of. […] The Realms are multidimensional. If you go to a party, you feel the people dancing around you, and you can smell them and hear the music. And you can just change things, like choose more comfortable shoes to dance in. Or change your hair color. Or choose another body style. You can do anything you want. […] The Realms are the only places we *can go*. They were created when the Pods were built. Without them, we'd probably go insane with boredom. And they're pseudo, not fake. They feel exactly real." (130-1)

It is crucial to stress that, while initially the Realms were created because individuals were confined in Pods (the Pods were created to keep selected humanity safe from a natural catastrophe) with nowhere to go, their existence now prevents Dwellers from perceiving their actual surroundings. Reverie, the Pod Aria inhabits, is in a state of deterioration, a realisation that dawns upon her when her Smarteye is forcibly removed:

> She noticed cracks and streaks of rust along the walls. Reverie had stood nearly three hundred years, but she had never seen signs of its age until now. She'd spent her whole life in the Panop, Reverie's vast and immaculate central dome. […] Aria had never seen a single crack in the Panop, not that she'd bothered to search very hard.
>
> The design was purposely repetitive and uninteresting to promote maximum use of the Realms. Everything in the real was kept bland, down to the grays they all wore. […] she couldn't help wondering how many other parts of the Pod were deteriorating. (46-7)

Individuals who engage in this liminal zone remain oblivious to the fact that the Pods are collapsing.

The Realms exist in-between reality and simulation, thereby destabilising the boundaries between the oppositional binary real and artificial. Within these Realms, individuals are impervious to harm: "pain was just an effect, sprinkled in to boost the thrill" (15). Emotions and sensations manifest as authentic, while societal rules may be bent or disregarded, permitting individuals to act according to their own desires. Hence, while in the Realms, Aria occupies a liminal state, existing in both the real world and a virtual reality. Due to its in-betweenness, in the Realms, an individual's identity is fluid and/or unstable. Nonetheless, the identity constructed in this liminal space can be understood as a performance, one that is readily altered with the emergence of the next Realm. An individual's identity is thus moulded by the specific Realm they choose to be in. In other words, an individual's identity shifts depending on the Realm to which they "fraction." Once Dwellers log out and step beyond these Realms, however, they may experience a sense of disconnection from the identities they embody within these virtual environments. Furthermore, because in the Realms consequences are absent,

Dwellers are not compelled to engage in ethical decision-making, confront emotions such as fear, or experience physical pain. The lack of repercussions for their actions creates an environment in which identity development is hindered; indeed, the process of identity formation is rendered impossible. Consequently, Dwellers lack an authentic identity. For Aria, as a Dweller, the outside world (excluding the tribes' hamlets) constitutes a liminal zone – a threshold space produced by ideological and environmental boundaries that separate the virtual predictability of Reverie from the perilous living of the Tribes. It is only by engaging with the outside – the environmental space that the Dwellers call the Death Shop because of its altered environment affected by Aether storms – that Aria can construct her subjectivity and identity. Aria must move in this liminal space in order to unsettle the artificial stability of her former identity. Outside, where Aria experiences real emotions, acquires survival skills and learns how to navigate pain and fear, she has the opportunity to construct an authentic identity – as well as an identity that is not rooted in oppositional binaries, a theme that I explore later in this section in discussing Aria's liminal body.

Liminal, physical spaces are inherently ephemeral, and their literal destruction is inevitable,[109] mirroring the fate of Gothic sites. For instance, Katniss deliberately shoots an electrified arrow at the force field of the Quarter Quell arena, triggering a system malfunction that results in the destruction of the arena. The Capitol, which transforms into an arena to defend itself against the rebels, is consumed by fire as explosives fall from the sky. Additionally, the arenas, which were formerly sites of tourism for the citizens of the Capitol, "have been completely destroyed" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 437). Elder collides *Godspeed* against the space station that facilitated FXR's travel to and control over the slave colony located in Century-Earth. The impact triggers an explosion, resulting in the incineration of the liminal, incarcerator space – Amy reflects, "*Godspeed*'s engine was nuclear; who knows what fueled the biological weapons. But

[109] This destruction often occurs through fire, as is frequently represented in the Gothic mode. In the Gothic "house fires are employed as a means of destroying the central setting [and] the house's destruction signals an end to the horrors that have been happening within" ("Gothic Tropes: Burning Houses").

they explode together. In space, they don't make the familiar mushroom cloud. They don't make the boom! of an exploding bomb" (Revis, *Shades of Earth* 407). Interestingly, *Godspeed* is anthropomorphised, similarly to Gothic sites. Glancing one last time at the empty spaceship, Elder reasons that "it *seems* hollow in the same way a dead body looks soulless," concluding that "*Godspeed* is dead" (402). Following the exposure of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare's unethical practices, the Chicago Experiment is shut down, leading to the termination of the simulations. In the aftermath, Chicago, no longer under the Bureau's control, rebuilds outside the Faction system, rendering the simulations obsolete. The escalating frequency of Aether storms undermines the integrity of the Pods' infrastructure, leading to their collapse. As the Pods and their technology start to fail, the Realms begin to glitch. In the absence of the Pods, which served as the foundational infrastructure for the maintenance of the Realms, they cease to exist. Quite interestingly, the mansions here analysed remain intact. The Ashby mansion endures despite the demise of Housemaster Vaughn, the patriarchal figure accountable for the unethical experimentation and the confinement and trauma experienced by the girls, who is ultimately murdered by one of his son's wives. His execution signifies the termination of the conditions that rendered the space liminal, resulting in the house's loss of its liminal characteristics. Similarly, the mansion serving as the headquarters for Sector 45 of The Reestablishment also loses its liminal qualities when, at the end of the rebellion, it transforms into a space imbued with hope, no longer dangerous or confining. In these narratives, the destruction of the liminal spaces permits the regeneration of the system, eventually undermining the totalitarian regime.

In spite of all the disturbing constraints imposed on the self, liminal spaces allow YA dystopian heroines to act outside familial and/or societal authority, finding the agency that totalitarian authorities seek to purge them of. This distancing from society and authority (akin to that of Gothic heroines who wander labyrinthine castles and mansions beyond the patriarchal gaze) empowers YA dystopian heroines to wield their agency and challenge the injustices of their surroundings. Hence, liminal spaces can also serve as sites of liberation. Within them, the opposing binaries of freedom and confinement and empowerment and vulnerability become entangled, their

characteristics oozing into one another, producing a space where the strict constraints of reality may be bent, if not entirely dissolved. As a result, through navigating these liminal environments, these teenage girls discover their sense of self and new ways of being.

America describes her experience in a liminal place as follows: "It seemed so funny that the palace—the beautiful cage—was the only place I could actually let myself open about everything I'm feeling" (Cass, *The Selection* 198). America can only construct her true self in a liminal space. Crossing the Forest of Hands and Teeth, a life and death threshold, fosters a new sense of being in Mary – traversing the forest opens a whole new world to her, even if a dangerous one, as she moves away from the constraints of the Sisterhood. In the simulated fear landscapes, in-between reality and simulation, Tris learns about herself through her fear. More significantly, she learns to navigate her Divergent status, which is itself an in-between state of being; that is, it represents a liminal condition of existence. Kate can begin to construct her personal identity only after returning to Verity – she can do so only by inhabiting a life-and-death threshold. It is within this liminal space that Kate is able to confront her past and critically deconstruct her previously held beliefs about herself, her parents, and Verity and its monsters. By positioning herself on the threshold between life and death, Kate can develop her sense of self. In liminal spaces, YA dystopian heroines can renegotiate identity and power in restrictive social-political systems that aim to destroy individuality. These spaces allow characters to explore their identities outside of the rigid structures imposed by their societies. In other words, the fluidity of these environments can prompt experimentation and rebellion, enabling characters to redefine themselves. As they navigate through these Gothic-infused spaces, they encounter echoes of the past – remnants of former lives, cultural histories, and oppressive regimes – all of which contribute to their journey towards autonomy.

Furthermore, within these liminal sites, there are pocket spaces where guards and/or cameras rarely have access – and seldom do authorities have knowledge of these pocket spaces. In The Selection, these are the secret rooms royalty and servants use to hide and keep safe when the palace is under attack by the rebels. Within one of these

secret rooms, when America hides with Maxon, without anyone around to watch or hear them, she confesses how she feels about everything, revealing her hesitations about becoming queen and being in love with someone who might not be hers. This place, where societal expectations and control are torn down (even if only for the time they are inside), can be understood as a heterotopian space. In the context of dystopian literature, heterotopias "represent a kind of haven for the protagonists, and are very often found in their memories, their dreams, or in places which, for some reason, are out of the reach of the invigilation system which normally prevails in those societies" (Vieira 18). Set apart from the established social-political structures, heterotopian spaces are liminal, neither entirely inside nor outside the dominant system, and introduce an order that is completely different, even opposite, to that of real spaces. They are a convergence point for two seemingly separated worlds – within these, they juxtapose oppositional binaries, such as shelter and danger, and intimacy and surveillance. YA dystopian fiction does make use of such places in order to give its teenage female protagonists some respite from their vicious worlds, as well as to allow them to discover and transform themselves in worlds that often try to squash them through their controlling methods. In Delirium, 37 Brooks, a decaying house located in a neighbourhood that became a ghost town after several inhabitants were arrested and executed for being accused of sympathising and harbouring Invalids, also has the characteristics of a heterotopian space. In this abandoned house, Lena and Alex find a safe space where they can be together and bend society's rules: there, away from prying eyes, they can explore the love deemed an illness. In Shatter Me, inside the headquarters of Sector 45 of The Reestablishment, Warner's bedroom/office and training room provide Juliette with a safe environment after the Omega Point underground base is annihilated. Hidden (Warner's rooms are not under surveillance), Juliette experiences personal growth, understanding herself and her abilities. As a result, Juliette decides that "I will be unapologetic. I will live with no regrets. I will reach into the earth and rip out the injustice and I will crush it in my bare hands." (Mafi, *Ignite Me* 305). Accepting herself, Juliette is able to finally contain her power and gains the possibility to choose. After rescuing an injured Peeta, Katniss finds a cave where they

both hide from the other Tributes. This cave is a heterotopian space, a temporary refuge from the Games. Inside the cave, not only do Katniss and Peeta have a lull from the Games' butchery, but they can also share personal stories, building a relationship. Nonetheless, they are still under the watchful eye of Panem, and Katniss acts for the Capitol citizens to receive their patronage. In the cave, for Katniss, the boundary between performance and genuine feeling becomes increasingly blurred. Heterotopian spaces in these narratives offer possibilities to experience romantic love, to act against social rules and to understand oneself better, away from the constraints of an unforgiving society.

Hence, liminal spaces in YA dystopian fiction represent a transformative threshold in which identity is deconstructed and reconstructed. Drawing on van Gennep's and Turner's conceptual frameworks, it can be asserted that the in-between spaces featured in these narratives are crucial for personal transformation and fostering communitas, defined by Turner as "a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared" (*The Ritual Process* 138). Such a transformative experience leads to the disruption of the dictatorial, hierarchical structures prevalent in totalitarian societies. Within liminal spaces, YA dystopian heroines, who embody liminality themselves, exist in a transitional state key to developing their identity and discovering their yearning to reconfigure the social-political order.

2.3.2. Cyborgs, Hybrids, and Super-Powers: Teenage Liminal Bodies

Sometimes I feel like everybody is a sexy baby
And I'm a monster on the hill
Too big to hang out, slowly lurching toward your favorite city
Pierced through the heart, but never killed.

Taylor Swift, *Anti-Hero*

Besides occupying liminal spaces, female protagonists of YA dystopian fiction experience a liminal existence within their own bodies. The complexity of this liminal experience results from the interplay of several factors. Firstly, the teenage body is often characterised as liminal. In fact, adolescence itself is delineated as a liminal period, during which its liminality "is expressed in troublesome, transitional moments, testing time, [and] identity crisis amidst social and environmental crises" (Wisker, "Gothic and Young Adult Literature" 390). Teenagers find themselves in the process of self-definition, standing on the doorsill of oppositional binaries such as moral/immoral, victim/threat, stability/instability, outsider/insider, and powerful/powerless, to name a few. Between childhood and adulthood, the adolescent body serves as a liminal site for exploring identity and understanding one's place in the world. In this context, adolescent bodies are othered, placed outside and still inside society's norms**.** The liminal status of the teenage body offers a site of resistance and disruption. After all, resisting categorisation permits teenagers to actively engage, discord, and transform the world they interact with while seeking their self and a sense of belonging. That is, through being perched in the liminality of adolescence, YA dystopian protagonists are constantly constructing their identity, changing their understanding of themselves and the world around them, which allows a movement from passive to agent subjects.

Furthermore, as examined previously, adolescence is represented as a Gothic site, where the grotesque and terrifying aspects of coming of age are described as liminal experiences. The transformation the adolescent body goes through mirrors anxieties about liminality related in part to monstrosity: "Young adult bodies become monstrous as they resist categorisation as either child or adult" (Smith and Moruzi, "Introduction" 7-8). As a matter of fact, due to their liminality, teenagers commonly identify themselves as the Other, as the monster. In YA media, adolescent monstrosity is often represented by presenting othered protagonists whose bodies stand in-between the oppositional binaries natural/supernatural, human/nature, human/machine, and human/animal. In YA dystopian speculative fiction, the teenage body enmeshes with the supernatural (such as in Kagawa's The Immortal Rules, J.A. London's Darkness Before Dawn, and

Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*), technology (such as in Across the Universe and The Lunar Chronicles), and/or nature (such as in Stacey Jay's *Of Beast and Beauty* and Rory Power's *Wilder Girls*).

Secondly, the female body is categorised as liminal. It is not confined to binary oppositional boundaries, standing in an in-between. Interestingly, the female body is a pervasive theme in the Gothic mode.[110] The female Gothic body is represented as unruly and transgressive (Mulvey-Roberts, "The Female Gothic Body" 107), and it is associated with the monstrous. The construction and depiction of the female body as monstrous has been prevalent since time immemorial. Monstrosity, embedded in the female body since they are born, can be traced as far back as Aristotle, who claimed that a "woman is literally a monster: a failed and botched male who is only born female due to an excess of moisture and of coldness during the process of conceptions" (qtd. in Ussher 1). In this one-sex model, which lasted until the introduction of a two-sex system of complementary difference, "women's bodies were seen essentially as inferior versions of male bodies" (Craciun 3). Barbara Creed's theory of the "monstrous-feminine" also delves into female monstrosity through the analysis of horror films. "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine," Creed contends, "of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (3). This concept, "as constructed within/ by a patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration" (4). Besides, the monstrous-feminine "speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity" (8). Creed's theory suggests that femininity and female corporeality have long been associated with abjection and horror in Western narratives, reinforcing a symbolic linkage between female biology and monstrosity.

[110] The liminality of the body is a staple of the Gothic discourse. In the Gothic mode, monstrous creatures inhabit thresholds, standing between life and death, supernatural and natural, human and animal. For instance, Frankenstein's Monster and Count Dracula embody a physical, liminal state of being. They stand on the threshold of life/death, human/nonhuman, and human/animal.

The female body experience is also recurrently Gothicised. That is, the transformations the female body undergoes are described using Gothic language. As Anna Jackson, Roderick McGillis, and Karen Coats argue,

> [k]ey moments of feminine transition—menarche, marriage, childbirth, etc., marked as they are by blood, submission, loss of a firm sense of one's former identity, and loss of control—are potentially moments that are best represented with Gothic motifs. That is, they are moments when symbols of dark labyrinthine tunnels, monstrous trolls, ghosts, wayward fluids, murder, etc. are the best symbols we have for the bodily and social changes wrought by menstruation and the possibilities it closes and opens for women's subjectivity. (5)

Hence, YA dystopian female protagonists stand on a liminal threshold, on the one hand, due to their status as adolescents and, on the other hand, due to their female bodies. Analogous to bodies that occupy liminal spaces, liminal adolescent bodies are dangerous to social order – the threat they pose increases when those bodies are described as adolescent, female, and liminal. Within dystopian, totalitarian worlds, the female teenage body is represented as a threat to the authorities because of its liminality.[111]

Some female protagonists in YA fiction whose liminal bodies diverge from what society believes to be normal experience a complex transition. They are not only in the in-between transition from child to adult but also stand at the threshold of human/machine, human/superhuman, and human/monster – a liminality that often generates a sense of monstrosity within these girls. It is fundamental to stress that these bodies are not only liminal but also posthuman. In light of current posthumanist scholarship,[112] which decentres the human subject, exploring the close relationship of

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[111] Notably, YA dystopian heroines embody the "ambiguity, mystery, liminality, violence, and monstrosity" that Margarita Georgieva attributes to Gothic children (xii). As teenagers, these girls embody an ill-defined role, and they are torn between accepting their world and rebelling against it. They find themselves moving in a world of violence (both inflicted upon and/or by them) and where literal and figurative monsters must be fought. Further, they also become Georgieva's embodiment of the Gothic child as they grow up and reside on the margins.

[112] See N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Cary Wolfe's *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010), Pramod K. Nayar's *Posthumanism* (2013), and Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013).

the human with both technology and nature – that is, it explores how the human being interlinks with the surrounding world –, I previously defined posthumanism as "a bodily difference that threatens social conventions and forces the reader to rethink what it means to be human. This difference, which creates posthuman bodies, might be external, as in rotting flesh or gills, or internal, as two hearts or a mutated DNA structure" (Cerqueira, "Pandemics in Dystopian Young Adult Fiction" 192-3).

However, upon further reflection, I recognised that my definition can fall short when applied to YA speculative fiction and its main female characters, as it overlooks how the body's materiality affects one's subjectivity. After all, as I stated previously, YA speculative fiction builds worlds in which the teenage body enmeshes with nature and technology, raising questions about the stability of the self, which is defined via oppositional binaries. At the intersection of posthuman studies and the field of YA studies, Victoria Flanagan delves into the relationship between posthuman bodies and ontological issues. The author states that in YA fiction that explores posthuman subjects, "[t]he female body's engagement with technology is a topic that offers limitless ways of rethinking concepts of the self" (126). Flanagan asserts the potential of posthuman YA fiction to rethink traditional concepts of identity and embodiment. Fiona McCulloch also observes this relationship in her exploration of Revis's Across the Universe series. McCulloch states that the trilogy "responds to the posthuman turn by reconfiguring childhood identity beyond the liberal humanist paradigm in ways that interrogate its hegemonic systems, thereby enriching and liberating rather than threatening our understanding of humanity" (75).

YA literary dystopias end up foregrounding various aspects of what it means to inhabit a human body through the presence of bodies, on the one hand, born out of technological advances, such as cyborgs and clones, and, on the other hand, bodies that evolved to adapt to the worlds they inhabit. Set in the future, YA dystopian fiction portrays environments that enable the emergence of posthuman, liminal bodies that not only permit the construction of shifting multiple identities but also offer new models of girlhood.

A Girl Full of Wires

In The Lunar Chronicles, the teenage female body's liminality is intensified through advanced technology. When Cinder was three years old, her aunt, Levana, then queen regent of Luna, tried to kill her by setting her nursery on fire. Cinder did not perish, but her body suffered extensive burns, and she lost her left hand and leg. Hidden on Earth, she spends eight years in a suspended animation tank and undergoes cybernetic surgeries to survive, becoming a cyborg. Having no memory of the eleven years prior, Cinder finds herself in New Beijing, where she becomes its best mechanic, largely because of her cyborg nature. Although her body offers her tools to excel, Cinder hates being a cyborg. Her shame for who she is stems from how human beings treat cyborgs as inferior – the Cyborg Protection Act[113] decrees that cyborgs are not citizens, dehumanising them. Besides, the cyborg draft decreed by the royal research team in order to study letumosis, a plague-like disease that is taking over Earth, further reinforces this view of cyborgs as less than human. To Cinder, the draft

> was really just a reminder that cyborgs were not like everyone else. Many of them had been given a second chance at life by the generous hand of scientists and therefore owed their very existence to those who had created them. They were lucky to have lived this long, many thought. It's only right that they should be the first to give up their lives in search for the cure. (Meyer, *Cinder* 29)

Moreover, Cinder's humanity is constantly questioned not only by strangers who know she is a cyborg but also by her adoptive family. Her stepmother, Adri, constantly taunts Cinder about her inability to cry and accuses her of being unfeeling (Meyer, *Cinder* 63). Technological advances have enabled the creation of cyborgs, generating bodies that threaten social norms, resulting in a forced control that treats them as objects to be used and abused. Cinder feels so ashamed of her cyborg identity that she tries to hide

[113] The Cyborg Protection Act was written after a series of cyborg crimes that "caused widespread hatred and led to catastrophic riots in every major city in the Commonwealth" (Meyer, *Cress* 306). It was implemented to control the cyborg population, leaving them with no rights.

her multiplicity in an attempt to pass as human. She hides her metallic body, even if it causes her physical discomfort (Meyer, *Cinder* 5), keeping her true identity from Kai, the Commonwealth's Prince (and, later in the narrative, Emperor), afraid of his rejection and disgust. Cinder cannot accept her body.

Although Cinder is aware of her metallic limbs and retina scanner, she is not fully aware of the full extent of the cybernetic surgeries. Only when Adri volunteers her body for the plague research, which does not result in her death because she is Lunar, does Cinder discover the extent of her mechanical parts in a holographic diagram. Shocked, all she can see is the image of

> [a] girl full of wires.
>
> It was as if someone had chopped her down the middle, dividing her front half from her back half, and then put her cartoonish image into a medical textbook. Her heart, her brain, her intestines, her muscles, her blue veins. Her control panel, her synthetic hand and leg, wires that trailed from the base of her skull all the way down her spine and out to her prosthetic limbs. The scar tissue where flesh met metal. A small dark square in her wrist—her ID chip.
>
> But those things she had known. Those things she had expected.
>
> She had not known about the metal vertebrae along her spine, or the four metal ribs, or the synthetic tissue around her heart, or the metal splints along the bones in her right leg.
>
> The bottom of the screen was labeled:
>
> RATIO: 36.28%
>
> She was 36.28 percent not human. (Meyer, *Cinder* 82)

Cinder experiences the same visceral reaction when she sees the holograms of her ruined body at Michelle Benoit's farm, where she was taken after her attempted murder as a toddler and kept in a suspended animation tank. She sees herself more and more as a heartless machine. Observing the full extent of her cybernetic parts, Cinder questions her nature of being and existence. Her concerns about her ontological status are amplified by the knowledge that she is also Lunar – and she is not a common Lunar,

but the heir to Luna's throne, Princess Selene. Lunars are the moon's inhabitants. They evolved from an Earthen moon colony centuries ago, but are no longer considered human beings because they can manipulate bioelectricity. Through this manipulation, they can control the minds and bodies of Earthens, making them see things that do not exist and act against their will (43). How some Lunars take advantage of their ability to hurt and trick others has led Cinder to distrust and fear them.

Upon discovering that she is a Lunar, Cinder immediately reacts with disgust to both being a Lunar and a cyborg:

> To be cyborg and *Lunar*. One was enough to make her a mutant, an outcast, but to be *both*? She shuddered. Lunars were a cruel, savage people. They murdered their shell children. They lied and scammed and brainwashed each other because they could. They didn't care who they hurt, so long as it benefitted themselves. She was not one of them. (178)

After unlocking her ability to manipulate bioelectricity (a chip locked it to prevent her from going mad from Lunar sickness), Cinder uses it to escape imprisonment and protect herself from Levana and her minions. However, this newfound power intensifies the terror she feels of her own existence. Inhabiting a multiple, liminal body, Cinder cannot help but question her identity.

YA literature frequently addresses questions regarding ontology. Roberta Seelinger Trites argues,

> Ontological issues matter in literature for the young for several reasons. The first is one we all know because of Hamlet's adolescent musings: "To be or not to be." During adolescence, many teenagers gain for the first time the cognitive skills to question their being and their life's meaning. Second, for those cultures in which adolescence is an identified stage of life, adolescence itself is an ontological status; it is a unique period of existence in which being is typified by transition, change, and impermanence. Third, many of the pubertal issues of gender and sexuality that evolve during adolescence are also ontological: what does it mean to be (cis)female? or (trans)female? or (cis/trans)male? What does it mean to be asexual or bisexual

> or pansexual or demisexual or lesbian or gay or heterosexual? How does the relationship between one's gender identity and one's sexual orientation influence one's sense of being? (*Twenty-First Century Feminisms* 14)

Identity is a fundamental theme in YA fiction, where protagonists often embark on a physical or psychological journey of self-discovery. As John Stephens explains,

> [t]he characteristic concern of adolescent fictions with the production or possibility of subjectivity entails a narrative focus on personal growth or maturation in the context of relationships between the self and others, and the self and the world. Narrative structures tend to represent the emergence of subjectivity as a development of a central character's ability to express self-recognition or agency. (5)

This quest for who they are becomes particularly prominent when the narrative features characters whose bodies deviate from the humanist norm.

The process of identity formation is complex and combines both internal and external factors. The self, Cristina Santos affirms, "cannot exist in isolation of the Other. [It] exists as part of, in dialogue with and, in some cases, in divergence to the sociopolitical and cultural environment that externally inscribes its precepts onto the body" (*Unbecoming Female Monsters* Introduction). In YA fiction, "central characters are represented as internally fragmented and/or solipsistic, and their stories articulate a quest for a sense of identity which is stable, coherent, unique and whole" (McCallum 68). The development and construction of identity are crucial not only for the teenage protagonists but also for society itself. According to Susan Hekman, the nature of any society is closely tied to what it means to be a subject. An individual within a society necessitates an identity for functional integration and to facilitate the functioning of the societal structure. Hekman contends that

> [b]odies in social groups are not just bodies. They require an identity to make sense of their lives and to operate as human beings in a social setting. Human bodies in social groups require viable identities, but they can only obtain those identities from the social script extant in the society in which they live. The definitions of the subject in any particular society either give the individual body a viable identity or they do not. Either I become a subject or I do not. If I am excluded from subjecthood, I am deprived of an identity that can provide me with a possible life in my society. Having a viable identity, being accepted by my society as a subject, is necessary to social existence. Without it I am, quite literally, no one. (113)

The process of defining an individual within a society presents the possibility of developing an identity. However, what happens when an individual cannot be defined or build an identity within the societal framework? What happens when one's body embodies an amalgam of identities that blend one into another, enmeshing identities that were once stable? Just as the search for an identity is a central theme in YA fiction, so is the theme of identity crisis. Regardless of the body one inhabits, teenagers are bound to grapple with questions about who they are and who they want to be. Nevertheless, this crisis becomes more challenging when an individual does not fit established social scripts because of their liminal body – threatening, this body can only break or change societal norms. Teenage girls inhabiting posthuman bodies undergo a profound identity crisis when they discover that their bodies do not fit the definition of "human," and, consequently, they cannot forge a sense of self without accepting their bodies. In addition to the experience of an identity crisis, the struggle to define oneself can also lead to a lack of a sense of belonging, as the individual does not know where they fit in.

To successfully complete the process of questioning her being, Cinder must learn to conjugate her embodied identities: she is a girl; she is a cyborg; she is a Lunar. Most importantly, she must understand and accept her body's multiplicity. Material feminism delves into the theme of the body's multiplicity. This theory asks "to consider how the material world affects discourses about girls in terms of the body, the environment, technology, physical artifacts, and the natural world. In this formulation, identity is not a purely discursive function; it is formed in part via interactions with the material"

(Trites, *Twenty-First Century Feminisms* 29). The body exists as a material reality and interacts with external factors through discourse to construct a self-defined identity. In other words, the body cannot be separated from one's identity, expressing a multiplicity that challenges senses of being expressed by oppositional binaries.

Throughout the series, Cinder learns to embrace her embodied multiplicity, her body no longer a source of repulsion and anxiety but of empowerment. On the one hand, her cyborg body prevents her from falling for Levana's glamour since it can detect bioelectrical manipulation. On the other hand, her Lunar body saves her when she is injected with letumosis and gives her the ability to stand against Levana, her thaumaturges, and special operative packs. When Cinder loses access to her cyborg parts after jumping into the Artemisia Lake to save herself from being dismembered by a throng of people controlled by Levana, she realises she has always taken her body and what it can do for granted: "She'd become accustomed to having infinite data within her grasp, and it was disconcerting now to be without it. After five years of wishing she was like everyone else, now she missed all those conveniences that had come with being a cyborg" (Meyer, *Winter* 667). Her cyborg part (as well as her Lunar abilities) aids her in running from Earth as an outlaw and reaching Luna to save Lunars and Earthens alike from Levana's power-hungry intentions. Cinder's acceptance of her body is symbolised by the act of dropping her childhood, metallic foot into the waters of Artemisia Lake:

> She spun the cumbersome, hateful foot in her fingers. Ever since she could remember, it had been a burden. A constant reminder that she was worthless, she was unimportant, she was nothing but a cyborg.
>
> She held the foot over the water and let go." (Meyer, *Winter* 823)

By renouncing the metallic foot, a representation of her self-deprecation and hatred of her body, Cinder does not reject her cyborg-ness, but the shame attached to it. She accepts who she is, thereby letting go of the loathing and revulsion she harboured inside herself – a loathing embodied by this metallic body part.

In brief, upon being confronted with the full extent of her body's liminality, Cinder initially feels a sense of loathing and loss and a desire to distance herself from her physical form and the multiplicity it offers her. However, the discovery of her Lunar roots sends her on a journey away from familiar surroundings, where she learns not only to embrace her past but also her multiplicity. In this instance, liminality builds new understandings of the indistinctness between flesh and technology. Cinder overcomes the identity crisis caused by her liminal body. Nevertheless, she is not the only protagonist who must juggle the identities that emerge from her liminal body and conciliate them with who they believe themselves to be – that is, the self they constructed of themselves.

Although to a lesser extent, the liminality brought about by the usage of technology is also addressed in the world of Across the Universe. After finally landing on Century-Earth, Amy discovers the planet is inhabited by the descendants of the first colony. FRX enslaved them in order to increase production of solar glass – they combined Phydus with gen mode material to permanently turn them into complacent and obedient, "zombie-like" workers. Nevertheless, not everyone is affected. Chris, one of the descendants, explains that

> "[t]he compound they gave to my people genetically modified the adrenal and pituitary glands. Instead of a 'fight or flight' option, my people are programmed to 'accept and obey.' Lucky for me, my adrenal gland is broken. Makes more adrenaline than Phydus. After a few generations of being mindless Phydus-controlled freaks, my ancestors started to mutate." (Revis, *Shades of Earth* 375)

The first colonists' bodies were also genetically altered (they have better senses, strength, speed, and agility), resulting in enhancements that improved their capacity for labour. Because of all these changes, the first colonists are no longer regarded as human: "We're hybrids" (377).

In the final stand between *Godspeed*'s Earth crew and former inhabitants and the colony, Amy is injected with gen mode material, which turns her into a hybrid against her will:

> The other man has a syringe, and I can feel icy-hot liquid being injected into my bloodstream.
>
> …
>
> My eyes are burning, streaming with water. I squeeze them shut, unable to bear how bright the light is.
>
> "The pain will pass," Chris says to me softly. Sympathetically. His gun lowers as the other man steps back.
>
> I dry heave. It's the idea of my body being *changed* irrevocably. I can't bear it. And I can't bear the way Chris looks at me now, as if I'm already one of *them*.
>
> …
>
> It *hurts*. My body's DNA is rearranging itself to become some mutated hybrid, and I'm not even sure what's happening, I just know it's not human. It's painful, as if there is a fire inside, burning up my blood. I try to open my eyes. Dad's fighting against the hybrids while I'm becoming one. (391-2)

Amy experiences a painful transition from human to hybrid, undergoing visible bodily changes: "My eyes are blue now, not green, with oval irises. I can see so much clearer now, so much farther. I can sense from which direction the wind blows before it touches my face; I can shut my eyes and still tell where everyone is based on their scent alone" (421). The bodily alterations are a source of anxiety for Amy, particularly due to the fear of not being accepted by her people for becoming like those who were destroying their resources and murdering them (her difference from the *Godspeed*'s former inhabitants had already rendered her an outcast). However, Amy realises that everyone will remember who she is and what she has done to protect them. In fact, Amy becomes the acting commander, threatening to destroy FRX if they attempt to return to Centuri-Earth, and makes sure *Godspeed*'s colony is independent from the hybrid one. In contrast to Cinder, Amy does not experience an identity crisis due to her bodily

transformations. She possesses a clear understanding that, despite the changes she experiences, she is not monstrous. As Amy voices to Elder, "I'm still me" (441). However, similar to Cinder, both their bodies are transformed by male figures without their permission. This raises critical issues concerning representations of consent and the female body. Additionally, these forced transformations make use of language that evokes connotations of sexual assault and rape. Regrettably, a thorough exploration of this theme is beyond the scope of the current study.

~~*Because I'm a Monster*~~

Like Cinder's ability to manipulate bioelectricity, Juliette, Ruby, Aria, and Mare also possess superhuman abilities (some have their powers since birth, while others develop them when they reach a certain age or find themselves under stress/in a different environment) that highlight their liminal bodily condition.

In Shatter Me, after environmental and socio-political breakdown, gifted people emerge. These gifts "are different forms of Energy. Matter is never created or destroyed [and as the] world changed, so did the Energy within it. [The] abilities are taken from the universe, from other matter, from other Energies." Gifted people are not anomalies, but the inevitable result of the manipulation and chaos on Earth (Mafi, *Unravel Me* 2). Although some people possess "benign" gifts, as the power to heal, turn invisible or psychokinesis, Juliette possesses a lethal touch.[114] Her skin acts as a defence mechanism, "extracting" the life force out of an individual; in the process, Juliette receives a rush of energy. Individuals have instilled in Juliette fear for what she is and can do through mental and physical abuse and bullying. All of this led Juliette to fear and see herself as a monster. Juliette often describes herself as a Venus flytrap (Mafi, *Shatter Me* 23, 81). Her body "is a carnivorous flower, a poisonous houseplant" (121). Her revulsion for her body is so pervasive that she cannot stand being on her own skin: "You have no *idea* what it's like to be stuck in my skin—to be trapped in my body, afraid to breathe too

[114] Juliette later discovers that she also has super strength and invulnerability, a result of her lethal touch.

close to anything with a beating heart. If you did, you'd never ask me to be happy to live like this" (Mafi, *Unravel Me* 168). Juliette describes herself as a murderer, a monster, a "worthless soul stuffed into a poisonous body" (141), and sees her ability as a disease (110), not as a part of her whole self, but something that makes her monstrous. Juliette expresses her hatred for and fear of her body through the language of monstrosity.

It is not uncommon for female adolescent characters to see themselves as monsters; that is, as a monstrous Other. Contemporary science fiction and horror media, Rosi Braidotti contends, "portray[s] an exacerbated version of anxiety in the form of 'Otherness within': the monster dwells in your embodied self and it may burst out at any minute into unexpected and definitely unwanted mutations" ("Cyberteratologies" 156). This discourse finds place within literary representations of female adolescence in which unwanted bodily transformations result from growth spurts that bring the monster rooted in the body to the surface. "Teen girls," June Pulliam contends, "have firsthand [sic] experience with the Other: in a patriarchal culture, they *are* the Other, even when they successfully contort themselves into a restrictive normative femininity" (15). Although all these teenage girls can be positioned in what Pulliam describes as normative femininity, they still mirror an otherness – that is, monstrosity is embedded in their bodies. Cecilia Rogers argues that "[m]onstrosity is established as something innate in women and their biological heritage; that is, monstrosity is inherited through the female" (137). Indeed, as Anitra Goriss-Hunter offers, "[m]onstrous bodies [and, consequently, monstrosity] are connected with female bodies due to their inherent disorderly and unstable characteristics, which have the tendency to undermine hegemonic narratives" (27).[115] In addition to the focus on the female body as a framework for the conception of female monstrosity, this notion is also rooted in the patriarchal order, which discursively constructs any female who deviates from socially accepted gender roles as monstrous. Overall, "[t]he perception of women as monsters

[115] Interestingly, Braidotti explains, "[m]onsters are linked to the female body in scientific discourse through the question of biological reproduction. Theories of conception of monsters are at times extreme versions of the deep-seated anxiety that surrounds the issue of women's maternal power of procreation in a patriarchal society" ("Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt" 139).

seems to rest defiantly on the fear of that which is different from the norm but combined with the mutability of the female body in its power to procreate, becoming in its transmutations 'morphologically dubious'" (Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machine" 64) and "the site of phallocentric anxieties and fears" (Santos, *Unbecoming Female Monsters* Introduction). More generally, Cecilia Rogers expresses that

> Gothic monstrosity maintains a consistent presence in literature for young adults and its popularity may stem from the way that the Gothic engages with liminality. Adolescence, an in-between stage that is neither child nor adult, is congruous with monstrosities such as vampires, werewolves and zombies that exhibit intermediate states of being. (130)

There is a very thin line between becoming an adolescent and becoming a monster (138).

The monster (a category to which vampires, werewolves, and zombies belong), who usually embodies a liminal state of being, plays a crucial role in defining monstrosity (and not merely in the Gothic). Monster and monstrosity go hand in hand, the latter reinvented with each new incarnation of the monster. If the conception of "monster" and "monstrosity" once revolved around the possession of a hybrid body and deviant origins, such a conception is lacking these days. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock contends that the "theorization of monstrosity from antiquity to today has tended to divide along three tracks: *teratology*, the study of 'monstrous' births; *mythology*, the consideration of fantastical creatures; and *psychology*, the exploration of how human beings come to act in monstrous or inhuman ways" ("Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory" 4). The representation of monstrosity in the twenty-first century centres on monstrosity as a result of partaking in vicious, immoral behaviours.[116] The representation of the monster enmeshes with the human being's conceptions of what it means to be

[116] This is actually one of the key questions of one of the YA dystopian series under study, Schwab's Monsters of Verity. As I argue in my MA dissertation, which explores this duology, the real monster is never the so-called monster, but the human being who engages in immoral behaviours.

monstrous, problematising conventional norms and binary systems. Hence, the monster's always-presence in media permits to construct and deconstruct notions of "monstrosity" and "monstrous."

In 1996, Cohen's pivotal thesis introduces the research field of Monster Studies.[117] In "Monster Culture (Seven Thesis)," Cohen presents "a sketch of a new *modus lengendi*: a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender" (3). By presenting the seven theses on understanding culture through its monsters, Cohen sketches a blueprint for reading and interpreting monsters within a culture. In short, the monster (1) inhabits a cultural body, (2) always escapes, (3) is the harbinger of category crisis, (4) dwells at the gates of difference, (5) polices the borders, (6) provokes a fear that is a kind of desire, and (7) stands at the threshold of becoming. The teenage female protagonists of the dystopian YA narratives analysed in this section share common ground with the monster, particularly in their ability to unsettle categories. Cohen explains that because of its ontological liminality, the monster "problematizes the clash of extremes—as that 'which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis'" (6). Their monstrous bodies, which are found within the bracket that separates binary pairs, are a threat to the binary logic that supports the patriarchal order. The monstrous body, Braidotti explains, "more than an object, is a shifter, a vehicle that constructs a web of interconnected and yet potentially contradictory discourses about his or her embodied self" ("Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt" 150). These girls, like the monster, fall outside traditional methods of organising knowledge and experience (Cohen 7), building stories about the self that deconstruct what were once thought to be inflexible structures.

Moreover, as a being dwelling at the gates of difference, "[i]n its function as a dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (*ibidem*). The monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political,

[117] Scholarship on the monster and its cultural significance already existed before Cohen's seminal work, but had yet to be systematised.

racial, economic, and sexual, and, consequently, "[m]onsters are never created *ex nihilo*, but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted 'from various forms' (including—indeed, especially—marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster" (11). All these teenage girl protagonists embody fragments of identities that are the Other, the marginalised. Besides their gender, they embody fragments of marginalised communities – as underlined earlier, they inhabit the margins of society. The construction of their difference and Otherness deeply mirrors that of the monster, so it should not come as a surprise when they end up feeling monstrous themselves. It is significant to note that in these YA dystopian narratives, "growing up manifests as a process in which understanding one's relation to monstrosity defines the future for the character—and sometimes for the whole future" (Limpár Introduction).

After being freed from her cage and discovering that others have gifts and have been fighting The Reestablishment, Juliette begins to comprehend that her ability – her monstrosity – can be her strength. Of course, her ability to control her powers depends on her acceptance of her body. Additionally, Juliette's body is constantly in defence mode – her ability turns on when she is distressed (Mafi, *Unravel Me* 166-7). As a consequence of her experiences and trauma, Juliette is constantly anxious and worried, resulting in her gift being always "on." As Juliette begins to develop a deeper understanding of herself and unravels from the hate, grief and guilt that have consumed her since she can remember, she realises that what makes her so dangerous to others stems from her inability to accept her body, which, consequently, hinders her from comprehending how her gift works and controlling it. When Juliette finally comes to terms with her not-so-monstrous difference, she is finally able to control and contain her gift – she can no longer hurt anyone accidentally. No longer afraid of her body's power, she is able to turn the energy that activates her lethal touch on and off at her will. Through embracing every part that constitutes her self, firstly, Juliette recognises she let herself fall into a state of almost-hopelessness where she could see neither her humanity nor that she mattered:

> "Don't you think it *kills* me to know that it was my own unwillingness to recognize myself as a human being that kept me trapped for so long? For two hundred and sixty-four days […] I was in there [the asylum] and the whole time, I had the power to break myself out and I didn't, because I had no idea I could. Because I never even tried. Because I let the world teach me to hate myself." (Mafi, *Ignite Me* 245)

Secondly, Juliette can finally admit where she stands in this world:

> I've always known, deep down, who should be leading this resistance. I've felt it quietly for some time now, always too scared to bring the words to my lips. Someone who's got nothing left to lose and everything to gain. Someone no longer afraid of anyone.
>
> …
>
> It should be me. (35)

Juliette becomes the leader of the rebellion – the leader of a changing nation, where The Reestablishment and its policies have no place.

In The Darkest Minds, because of Idiopathic Adolescent Acute Neurodegeneration (IAAN), by the age of ten, children either die or develop abilities – they seemingly develop different abilities because of their genetics: "individual brain chemistry, and which neural pathways are affected at the moment you transition" (Bracken, *In the Afterlight* 425). Children classified as Red or Orange are considered dangerous and are subjected to euthanasia, while the rest are confined to camps. Ruby survives her tenth anniversary and is taken to Thurmond after erasing her parents' memories of her. During her evaluation, Ruby realises which colour she fits as she persuades the doctor to categorise her as Green: she is an Orange. Ruby can read and erase someone's memories through touching or being touched. Later, she learns she can also twist someone's mind, making them hallucinate, as well as influence individuals to do something against their will by speaking and forcing images into their head.

Juliette's and Ruby's journeys follow similar patterns due to both of them possessing powerful abilities. On the one hand, like Juliette, Ruby experiences fear and repulsion towards touch and being touched – in several instances, Juliette thinks about how much she misses human touch, as touch means "to feel human" (26). On the other hand, Ruby's incarceration at Thurmond also increases her self-hatred for who she is and what she can do. This violent confinement leads her to always be aware of her abilities and to suppress them, paralleling Juliette's feelings and actions after being confined in an asylum. Consequently, akin to Juliette, Ruby thinks of herself as a monster (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 159; *Never Fade* 365). Indeed, Ruby discovers at the Children's League headquarters that she is called Medusa, a mythical figure best known for her hair of snakes and the ability to turn people to stone with a single look. Ruby's ability to control someone's mind is compared to that of Medusa: "One wrong look and your brains turn to stone" (Bracken, *Never Fade* 216). Those in power have moulded Ruby's vision of herself as a monstrous other: "[a]bilities. Powers that defied explanation, mental talents so freakish, doctors and scientists reclassified our entire generation as Psi. We were no longer human. Our brains broke that mold" (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 43). As a matter of fact, the perception that Psi children are something other than human is responsible for the mistreatment and incarceration of any pre-teen and teenager who develop abilities. The treatment Ruby endures at the incarceration camp makes her so terrified of her abilities – as she explains, "we were made to understand from the beginning that what we were, and what we could do, was dangerous and unnatural" (215) – that she never attempted to learn how to use them before escaping Thurmond. All she does is contain her powers – well, abilities, because, as Ruby explains, "I didn't like to think of them as *powers*—that seemed to imply they were something to celebrate. And they were most definitely not" (89) – since she sees what she can do as something dangerous to be afraid of. Unfortunately, more often than not, it backfires on her as she finds herself visualising memories she does not want to or erasing herself from someone's mind: "I can't always control it like you can […]. And sometimes I do things—*bad things*. I see things I shouldn't. I turn people into things they aren't. It's horrible" (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 323).

Ruby goes back and forth about how she feels about her ability. After joining the Children's League and the destruction of its Los Angeles headquarters, from where she saves files with the location of a cure for Psi kids' abilities, Ruby's actions are all aimed at curing herself from *this* disease. Her reluctance could be related to finding herself agreeing with the antagonist, Clancy, who has no qualms about who and what he tramples on to reach his ends. As Clancy tells Ruby over and over again,

> "You are your abilities and they are you. I can't put it to you more plainly. Do you know why I hate this cure? It's a statement that *what we are* is inherently wrong. It's a punishment for something that isn't our fault—all because they can't control their fear about what we can do, any more than they can control their resentment that there are people out there stronger and more powerful than they are. They want to strip you of yourself—your ability to protect and enforce your right to make decisions about your life. Your own body. Mark my words: in the end, it won't be a choice. They'll decide this for you." (Bracken, *In the Afterlight* 254-5)

Only after discovering that the cure is an operation on the brain "during which something called a deep brain stimulator […] is implanted [and it] releases an electrical charge of its own. It regulates the abnormal flow, shifting it into what a typical human would have" (427), and that the cure does not eradicate the mutation but manages it, Ruby comes to terms with her ability. As she confesses to Liam, her love interest,

> "I thought I could fix myself with the cure. That's all I've ever wanted, to be done with this. But now, I just want to be kinder to myself. I don't want anyone to implant anything in my head, or mess with who I am. When all of this *is* over, however long it takes, I won't ever have to use my abilities again. But for now I have to, and I have to trust myself to do right by everyone." (441)

Ruby eventually accepts that her abilities – her gift, her power – are a part of herself.[118]

[118] Following the revelation of the truth about the rehabilitation camps and the government's subsequent downfall, a new administration is established. This administration attempts to revoke the right of individuals under eighteen to choose being cured (as well as imposes on those who choose not to be cured

Through tribulations and utilising their abilities to partake in rebellions, dismantle totalitarian governments, and let the world be shrouded in hope, Juliette and Ruby ultimately come to embrace their powers as an essential part of themselves. Subsequently, they accept their liminal bodies, understanding that they are not a source of fear, marginalisation, or diminishment, but of empowerment. With their abilities, they enact meaningful change in their worlds: Juliette uses her abilities to take down The Reestablishment, while Ruby uses hers to close down Thurmond, rescue Psi children from mass murder, and expose the government's unethical practices against Psi children. In acknowledging their power as inseparable from their identities, Juliette and Ruby, like Cinder, establish new conceptions of what it means to be human: being human is not constructed in opposition to the monster, to the monstrous other, but, instead, it stands in a blending of both binaries.

While Juliette and Ruby fear their abilities, a fear that arises from being trapped and mistreated for having them, Aria and Mare are neither afraid nor repulsed by them. Nevertheless, the process of discovering their abilities and their effect on their sense of self become a source of anxiety.

Silver and Red, and Stranger than Both

After trespassing on an inactive service dome and everything going terribly wrong (her best friend dies in a fire started in a deactivated Pod by the son of a Consul), Aria is thrown out of her home, Reverie, and exiled into the outside world. Although Aria has lived her whole life entrapped in a liminal world, the Realms, she never confronted her own liminality until being exiled, as well as she never saw her experience in the Realms as something liminal. Outside the Pod, where she spent her whole life cooped up, Aria's body starts changing. She can dream, her nails start growing (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 135), and she menstruates for the first time: "She was bleeding. Like an animal. Dwellers

to reside in a Psi-only community for the remainder of their lives). Nevertheless, the decision is not welcomed by Psi-kids, who advocate for the right of everyone with abilities to decide whether to receive the cure or not, without any interference from the authorities. They assert their autonomy in deciding whether to keep this part of themselves.

didn't menstruate. Procreation happened through genetic design, then a special course of hormones and implantation" (155). In a sense, all Dwellers inhabit posthuman bodies since they are genetically engineered. For instance, through genetic manipulation, engineers have altered Dweller's teeth, which are all even (110, 183), and removed facial hair (135). They have also used genetics to cure diseases and ailments such as arthritis (Rossi, *Through the Ever Night* 89-90). Aria becomes terrified of these bodily changes, feeling her body and mind as foreign (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 158). As she tells herself, "[s]he didn't want to change. She wanted to go home perfectly preserved" (161). Nonetheless, that is not possible.

Adolescence is a time of physical changes beyond anyone's control, often leading teenagers to experience an identity crisis. The physical changes experienced during adolescence are tumultuous – so tumultuous that Bracken represents it as a time in which children entering puberty either die or gain abilities that result in their monsterisation. Adolescence, Cristina Santos writes, "is a time that the body seems to betray the self–undergoing quick biological changes faster than the psyche can keep up with" (*Unbecoming Female Monsters* ch. 2). Karen Coats suggests that

> [t]he advent of puberty brings with it a host of bodily changes over which we have little control, which sends us right back to mirror stage thinking: that is, preferring our body image to our actual bodies [and] caring for and obsessing over our image rather than necessarily having a positive feeling toward it. (*The Bloomsbury Introduction* 71)

How teenagers behave towards their bodies indicates the influence of the body on the construction of the self. The body functions as a vehicle for expressing an individual's identity. When the body does not match an individual's sense of self, it causes a crisis. Besides, the female, teenage body, Joan Gould argues in her assessment of the veiled meanings in fairy tales and myths and their connection to the transformations females experience throughout their lifetime, "is what forces [the heroine] to leave childhood behind, as her body will dictate so many of the passages of her story" (3). Puberty, Gould writes, "eventually produces an independent sexual woman from a dependent child"

(5). Consequently, "[a]dolescence involves a break with the past, as well as a thrust toward the future. Without any choice, either too soon or too late to suit her, a girl loses the flat, lean body that she took for granted and finds that she has become a sexual creature, obscurely desired or threatened from all sides" (5-6).

In her study of the construction of adolescent identity in fantastic realism, Alison Waller proposes that metamorphosis echoes "the actual physical, mental and social changes that occur during [adolescence]." According to the author, "[t]here is a clear correspondence between metamorphosis and the physical changes at puberty" and "[t]he dilemmas of swift transition or relentless development at adolescence can partly be solved by fictional and fantastic transformation into a body that is materially, and particularly physically, 'other'" (44). Sanna Lehtonen, in exploring how invisibility and age-shifting as body transformation types expose, question, and rewrite conventional constructions of girlhood and young womanhood, states that female bodily transformations offer diverse perspectives on the changing body and agency of girls. Lehtonen theorises that "[t]he girl character's bodily transformations are crucial in relation to subjectivity because in their different forms the girls also have different experiences of embodiment, they are able to enter different gendered positions and their personal identity narrative is affected by the transformation" (Introduction). Although the bodies explored here emerge from technological interventions or are shaped by evolution, they can, in a sense, intertwine with fantastical notions. After being cast out, Aria undergoes a similar metamorphosis process, though not as fantastical as those explored by Waller. Observing how these girls experience their bodies, as Elaine Ostry argues, "[t]he posthuman body is a metaphor for how foreign one's body feels during adolescence, as adolescents must discover themselves and reintegrate into their society" (238). (Reintegration should be taken with a pinch of salt, as for these liminal, posthuman, teenage girls, a reintegration within society does not signify giving continuity to societal order, but disturbing and transforming it.)

Away from Reverie and its Realms, besides experiencing physical changes, Aria also discovers that she is an Audile (someone with an extraordinarily augmented sense of hearing). On the Outside, some people have developed enhanced senses, which allow

them to survive in a hostile world ravaged by Aether storms. There are Audiles, Scires, who can identify scents and emotions, and Seers, who have heightened vision. These mutations were accelerated by the Aether storms, creating, as Aria states, a subspecies (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 183). Lumina, Aria's mother, met her father, an Outsider, when he was taken into a Pod in order for genetic engineers to study adaptations to stress (Rossi, *Into the Still Blue* 365). Contrary to her belief, Aria is not the product of genetic engineering. As half-Dweller, half-Outsider, her genetic makeup is unique (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 358). Here, Aria's body can be interpreted as a living embodiment of Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality," defined as a movement across bodies and nature that alters the sense of self ("Trans-Corporeality" 435). "Imagining human corporeality," Alaimo explains, "as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (*Bodily Natures* 2). In Under the Never Sky, the Aether storms (the environment) "enter" the human body, causing mutations essential for the survival of those living outside the Pods, which are passed on to their descendants.

While experiencing her body changing is an upsetting process, Aria embraces her Outsider half with diminished apprehension, even if she is initially caught off guard by the discovery. After all, as she tells Perry, "How could I hate what's kept me alive?" (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 281). Being half-outsider protects her from the degenerative limbic syndrome (DLS) that affects most of the Dwellers. DLS is a brain disease that weakens basic survival instincts. As Lumina explains, the limbic system

> "… controls many of our most basic processes. Our drive to mate. Our comprehension of stress and fear and reaction to it. Our quick decision-making capability. We say a gut reaction, but actually these reflexes come from here. Simply put, this is our animal mind. Over generations in the Realms, the usefulness of this part of our brain has vastly diminished. What do you think, Daughter, happens to something that goes unused for time too long? […] It degenerates. This has catastrophic consequences when we do need to rely on instinct. Pleasure and pain become confused. Fear can become thrilling. Rather than avoid stress, we seek it and even revel in it. The

will to give life becomes the need to take it. The result is a collapse of reason and cognition. Put simply, it results in a psychotic break." (256-7)

Although Aria accepts her difference, she still loses her sense of belonging: "She had no idea where she belonged. Out here? In Reverie? Hess had banished her in the fall, and now he was using her. The Tides had tried to kill her yesterday. She didn't fit anywhere" (Rossi, *Through the Ever Night* 129). Aria finds herself within the space between Dweller and Outsider. She belongs in-between the groups, bridging them. This in-between space provides her with knowledge of both categories. Embedded in both Dweller and Outsider characteristics, Aria can bring both groups together. As she is told after reaching the mythical land Still Blue,[119] "[t]he Dwellers look to you as a leader, and you have the respect of the Tides" (Rossi, *Into the Still Blue* 362). Aria becomes a leader among the Dwellers who are able to escape Reverie and come into the Still Blue. In this new land, both Dwellers and Outsiders start constructing a new life, and Aria joins the leadership council of her own volition (384). Similar to Cinder and Juliette, Aria's in-between condition is essential to her leadership role. These girls use their posthuman liminality to ignite social-political change and become leaders. Likewise, Mare too discovers within herself the capacity to change her oppressive world through her posthuman body.

As a Red, Mare's inferiority has always been marked by her body: those born with red blood are seen by Silvers as an inferior species because they are without superhuman abilities. The colour of their blood divides Silvers and Reds, "[t]his simple

[119] Throughout the series, the Still Blue is a mythical land free of Aether. It is described as "a dream of a clear sky" (Rossi, *Under the Never Sky* 233) and "[t]he land of sunshine and butterflies" (Rossi, *Through the Ever Night* 225). However, it is revealed to be a real place. When ravaging Aether storms threaten to initiate another event like the Unity, ravaging the Pods and the Tribes' compounds, consequently killing everyone who inhabits them, a group of Dwellers and Outsiders fly into the sea, discovering this utopian land. As they approach the Still Blue, "Aria saw a break in the perfect line of the horizon. From a distance it looked like a black bump, but it broadened as they neared, gained color and depth. Becoming verdant slopes, covered in lush foliage. These hills were folded and rolling, and they couldn't have been more different from the rocky bluffs they'd left behind. The colors she saw were crisp, unlike the dullness caused by the smoke that had clung to the Tides' territory. Here the land was vibrant green, the water turquoise, both almost garishly so" (Rossi, *Into the Still Blue* 325-6).

difference somehow makes [Silvers] stronger, smarter, *better* than [Reds]" (Aveyard, *Red Queen* 9). As Mare explains, "[we] did not evolve like them, with powers and strengths beyond our limited imaginations. We stayed the same, stagnant in our own bodies" (48).[120] However, Mare learns she is wrong about Reds when she discovers that she is, in fact, a newblood. Two life-threatening events punctuate this discovery. First, a nymph (a Silver capable of manipulating water) attempts to drown Mare. Unknowingly, she uses her latent powers to escape. Second, during the Queenstrial, a competition between the eligible daughters of the High Houses devised to show their power, with the victor marrying the prince or the king, Mare falls onto the electric shield encasing the arena. Instead of dying, Mare is unscathed by the electricity. Through these harrowing experiences, Mare's ability is revealed: similar to Silvers, she can control electricity; yet, she can also create electrical energy, a unique ability to newbloods, classifying her as an electricon (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 427).

Akin to the other female protagonists discussed in this section, Mare also struggles to accept who she is in light of her newfound abilities. She finds herself in the gap between the oppositional binary Silver/Red, since she is a Red possessing Silver-like abilities. Her sense of self is destabilised not only because she despises the Silvers, but also because she discovers she is something in-between – she is neither Red nor Silver. This lack of understanding of who – of what – she is causes Mare to experience a panic attack when she is told of her difference:

> "You are something else entirely. Not Red, not Silver. Something else. Something *more*."

[120] During her imprisonment under Maven, Mare has access to Julian's books, her mentor when she first found herself captive within the palace walls. Within his collection, not only does she learn that Silvers were once persecuted by Reds due to their difference; she also discovers information about the Silvers' origins: the Silvers are the result of mutations, "[t]he result of ancient weaponry we no longer possess and can no longer create." Julian's notes also reflect this belief: "*Strange that so many thought themselves gods, or a god's chosen* […]. *Blessed by something greater. Elevated to what we are. When all evidence points to the opposite. Our abilities came from corruption, from a scourge that killed most. We were not a god's chosen, but a god's cursed*" (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 267-8).

> "Something different." I expected Julian's tests to bring me closer to some kind of answer, but instead they only raise more questions. "What am I, Julian? What's wrong with me?"
>
> Suddenly it's very difficult to breathe, and my eyes swim. I have to blink back hot tears, trying to hide them from Julian. It's all catching up to me, I think. Lessons, Protocol, this place where I can't trust anyone, where I'm not even myself. It's suffocating. I want to scream, but I know I can't.
>
> "There's nothing *wrong* with being different," I hear Julian say, but the words are just an echo. My own thoughts, memories of home, of Gisa and Kilorn, drown him out. (*Red Queen*, Aveyard 139-40)

Moreover, Mare's sense of self becomes further disrupted when she is forced to take on a new identity, which erases her past as a Red and rewrites her story as a Silver. She ceases to be Mare Barrow, a Red girl from the Stilts, and becomes Lady Mareena Titanos, Silver nobility, daughter to a deceased Silver general. Nevertheless, even though Mare expresses concerns about "what she is" and "who she is," she does not harbour fears about her abilities, nor does she allow them to incite self-loathing. Rather, she perceives her abilities as her "most prized possession, even though it separates me from everyone else. But for power, for my *own* power, it is a price I am willing to pay" (Aveyard, *Glass Sword* 66). Unlike Juliette and Ruby, her abilities do not inherently render her monstrous; rather, it is what she may choose to do or not with her abilities that does. Mare is acutely aware of her potential to become a monster; she could be one too, "[i]f given the wrong chance. If someone broke me" (Aveyard, *King's Cage* 169). Mare is almost broken during her confinement in Maven's court. Afterwards, she does feel something raging inside her, a "monster I carry with me, born of all my wrongs and all the wrongs done to me" (Aveyard, *War Storm* 448). Nonetheless, she keeps this monster, her inner darkness, under control, choosing not to become destructive.

When the truth about her new identity is revealed, she finds herself deep in the rebellion taking place against the Silvers, Mare no longer knows who she is. To her, who she was has died: "Mare of the Stilts died the day she fell onto a lightning shield. Mareena, the lost Silver princess, died in the Bowl of Bones. And I don't know what new person opened her eyes on the Undertrain. I only know what she has been and what she

has lost, and the weight of it is almost crushing" (Aveyard, *Glass Sword* 31). In order to do what she must do to save newbloods, who are being ruthlessly slaughtered, and to be part of a rebellion aimed at overthrowing Silvers from power, Mare adopts various masks. However, this behaviour magnifies her loss of self, leading Mare to not only question her sense of self but also her own humanity and the ability to be who she is: "The girl I see is both familiar and foreign, Mare, Mareena, the lightning girl, the Red Queen, and no one at all. She does not look afraid. […] She is not seventeen, but ageless, Silver but not, Red but not, human—but not. A banner of the Scarlet Guard, a face on a wanted poster, a prince's downfall, a thief … a killer. A doll who can take any form but her own" (354). After the political games and the violent war that culminates in a hopeful, equitable future, Mare understands that she needs time to figure out who she is. She asks Cal, the rightful king of Norta, who abdicates the throne in favour of a society of elected leaders, to "[l]et me figure out who I am now." Mare knows that she is "[n]ot Mareena, not the lightning girl. Not even Mare Barrow. But whoever came out on the other side of all this" (Aveyard, *War Storm* 652). Indeed, all these fragments are part of her – even her posthuman body, the "lightning is only one part of [her]. It doesn't rule [her]" (460) – and she must build her identity in-between these fragments, whose characteristics leak one into another.

The identity crisis these girls experience also emerges from the challenge of conciliating their identities, especially who they think they are and how the world sees them. Society's perception of an individual's self carries a great weight on how the individual perceives herself/himself, as "self-identity is defined by how an individual is valued by others" (Stephens 5). The conflict that arises from different views of the same person often leads to an identity crisis. The individual ends up questioning and analysing the image others have of them and the one they have of themselves. However, it is essential to outline that girls inhabiting posthuman bodies are not the only ones who have trouble coping with their multiplicity. Although Kate from Monsters of Verity is considered a human being, she also finds it problematic to reconcile her multiple identities (Cerqueira, "'Are you afraid of your own shadow?'" 85). Throughout the duology, Kate takes on various roles. On her return to North Verity, Kate takes on the

role of Callum Harker's daughter, an identity that carries certain expectations and prejudices. As Harker's daughter, she must act viciously (the inhabitants of Verity expect Kate to be cruel and wicked, just like her father). Due to the expectations about how a Harker must act, Kate is forced to assume a role that is not who she truly is. Despite having developed a series of characteristics that are neither affable nor friendly due to the trauma she experienced in the car crash that killed her mother and due to being abandoned by her father, there are ethical boundaries that Kate cannot cross, contrary to what might be expected of Harker's offspring. Nevertheless, Kate "births" a Malchai, whose existence is interpreted as proof that she is her father's daughter. Being a Harker and being who she truly is creates a conflict within Kate. Although Kate feels guilty and remorseful, the existence of the monster makes her question whether she is not a murderer and whether, deep down, she does not share the characteristics that make her potentially like her father. It makes her question everything she knows about herself.

In The Selection, America also experiences a similar sense of fractured identity. Within the palace walls, on the threshold between staying and leaving, America lives in a state of suspension that causes her to interrogate her sense of self. Due to the caste system, during the competition, America realises that she is in a liminal social state of being: she is no longer a Five, yet while the competition is not over, she is neither a Three (at entering the Selection, all competitors become a Three) nor a One (whoever marries the prince becomes a One). Thinking about her future, America interrogates how vague her position is: "Was I a Five or a Three? When this was over, would I be a Two or a One? Would I live out my days as an officer's wife or a king's? Would I slide quietly into the background in which I'd always been so comfortable or force myself into the spotlight I'd always feared? Could I happily do either?" (Cass, *The Elite* 214). Besides, she might not even become a Three or a One. After being selected, America becomes property of Illéa, having to follow suffocating rules or face punishment (Cass, *The Selection* 61). The girls who do not act according to what is expected of them are punished by being kicked out of the Selection or might even become an Eight – America might become part of the lowest caste, whose members have no way to provide for themselves and end up living on the streets. As part of the Selection, besides finding

herself in a position to question the rightness of the caste system due to being exposed to the different realities and experiences of each caste, America also finds herself in a position to question who she is. She is no longer a performer but does not feel like a Three. America explains, "[i]t was strange to think of myself as a Three, to consider embracing teaching or writing as a profession" (Cass, *The Elite* 12).

Furthermore, America doubts whether she has what it takes to become a One. As the number of contestants dwindles, her uncertainty about her own identity grows, especially since the possibility of becoming queen is not an illusion (Maxon, the prince, does have feelings for her). America sees herself as lacking what is needed to become the queen: "I was unrefined. I didn't have it in me to be bossy or overly organized. I was selfish and had a horrible temper, and I didn't like being in front of people. And I wasn't brave. You had to be brave to take this job. And that's what this was. Not just a marriage, but a position" (Cass, *The Selection* 201). America's worries about who she is and who she might become are increased by the King, who does not see her fit to become royalty and keeps thwarting her agency. Although America does exert her agency – for instance, when a deadly group of rebels starts attacking and murdering innocent people, America tells people to fight against them since they "aren't going to suddenly stop being violent" and if one gives "them power, they're going to be a thousand times worse" (Cass, *The One* 70). America also refuses to punish a man for being arrested for speaking against the King – as a result, she faces severe consequences enforced by the King himself. He takes from her family the monetary compensation they receive due to America's participation in the Selection as well as forces America to record propaganda used to "quell the unrest" among the castes, stopping any uprising that would take power away from him (206). Kate and America, too, move between identities, thriving in fragmentation instead of unity, even though their bodies are not posthuman. In a sense, identity construction moves towards posthumanism. As Coats suggests, it is "not that we think of ourselves as cyborgs necessarily, but that we reject the idea of the unified, autonomous self that traditional philosophical 'humanism' posited as the end goal of a mature adult person" (*The Bloomsbury Introduction* 72).

In Arc of a Scythe, Citra is caught in a liminal social state of being.[121] When she becomes a scythe apprentice, Citra is removed from her community, as observed at her aunt's wedding. Scythe Faraday, her mentor, forbids Citra from dressing up, cautioning her "[l]est you feel yourself a part of that world." Citra acutely feels this separation from her family, and the community she belonged to: "Wearing simple street clothes amid the pageantry made her feel even more the outsider—and the apprentice armband made it worse. Perhaps this was the reason Faraday allowed her to attend—to make crystal clear the distinction between who she had been and who she was now" (Shusterman, *Scythe* 91-2). However, she is not yet a scythe. Indeed, Citra's apprenticeship does not guarantee her ascension to the position of scythe. It not only depends on her performance in a series of trials but she is also competing for the spot with Rowan, the teenage male protagonist. Should she fail to become a scythe, Citra would return to her previous life. Thus, for a whole year, Citra stands on the threshold between becoming or not-becoming, living in a state of suspension, similar to America. The in-between, fragmented identities the YA dystopian heroines find so troubling are a source of empowerment. Citra understands it when she adopts a new identity. After becoming a scythe, Citra is told to "announce to the MidMerican Scythedom, and to the world who … you … now … are" (Shusterman, *Scythe* 435). When a new scythe is appointed, it is tradition to shed their names and adopt the name of a Patron Historic.[122] Citra chooses to be known as Scythe Anastasia Romanov. Although belittled for her choice by the High Blade Xenocrates, the leader of the scythes in that region, due to the historic Anastasia dying too young to have had any impact on the world, Citra explains that is

[121] Although Citra's body is posthuman (she has nanites in her body that keep pain away and the ability to be revived), this body is the norm in a world where death has been conquered. Thus, I do not consider her body in my analysis of her liminal position.

[122] A Patron Historic is a real-life or mythical figure who inhabited the world before death was conquered and did something of worth in their life. Scythes change their names in favour of, for example, physicists and chemists (such as Michael Faraday and Marie Curie), writers (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Mark Twain), philosophers (such as Socrates and Xenocrates), and political activists (such as Nelson Mandela).

> "Exactly why I chose her, Your Excellency," Citra said, holding eye contact with him. "She was the product of a corrupt system, and because of that, was denied her very life—as I almost was. […] Had she lived, who knows what she might have done. Perhaps she could have changed the world and redeemed her family name. I choose to be Scythe Anastasia. I vow to become the change that might have been." (436)

Citra uses her new identity to challenge the Scythedom, to call out the corruption among the scythes – because they are above the law of the Thunderhead and only have to abide by the Scythe Commandments, scythes started finding loopholes to engage in immoral actions.

As observed, YA dystopian heroines exist in-between oppositional pairs, rejecting social binaries of hierarchy, prejudice, and oppression. Of course, as Dominick LaCapra indicates, "deconstructing a binary opposition does not automatically cause it to go away or to lose its often constraining role in social and political reality" (150). Nevertheless, these teenage heroines reveal that the boundaries that separate binary pairs are not natural but socially constructed. This awareness creates the possibility of resisting and rebelling against these binaries and building new, fluid forms of being. It is also through standing in-betwixt that the body of YA dystopian heroines is Gothicised in these narratives. The Gothic body, built in opposition to what is conceptualised as the normal body, is usually depicted as grotesque, excessive, and deformed. It is often described as monstrous, causing its inhabitants to become monsters themselves in the eyes of others. These bodies, Xavier Aldana Reyes suggests, "in their grotesque guises, explore our fears of difference and marginalisation, but they also work to undermine normative conceptions of what a body is forced to be and mean" (7). Moreover, Aldana Reyes argues that "Gothic bodies produce fear through their interstitially: they are scary because they either refuse absolute human taxonomies or destabilise received notions of what constitutes a 'normal' or socially intelligible body" (5). Whether that body is posthuman or not, the YA dystopian teenage female body is a site of fear not only because it threatens the normal, static body through its instability, but also because this same changeability becomes the menacing force that enables it to take down authority.

Most importantly, the Gothic body cannot be controlled, just like the female, teenage body. Their liminal bodies enable these teenage girls to move between states of being, making multiplicity possible. The multiplicity found in liminality makes them most dangerous to societal hierarchies and norms. By accepting their bodies and recognising that they are part of their subjectivity, these girls establish new conceptions of the self – the self is not static or stable; boundaries do not limit it. Their internal and external being does not stand on one side or the other of the oppositional binary, but in-between them, where boundaries creep into one another, enabling the changeability and mutability of identity. In these YA dystopian texts, liminal bodies build new understandings of the blurriness between self and body, as well as dismantle the Cartesian mind/body dualism, making the body as essential to construct one's subjectivity as the mind. Therefore, liminality is represented as embracing embodiment. The body's physicality matters in the teenage quest to find who they are. In other words, the body's materiality intertwines with its subjectivity, rebuking the notion disseminated by the mind/body split that identity is "situated in the brain (or the soul, according to religious discourse) and is separate from the material body. Within this ideological framework, the human body is situated as an object, something to be controlled and dominated but which is not intrinsic to the formation or development of subjectivity" (Flanagan 100).[123] By accepting their bodies, these (posthuman) teenage girls understand their space in the world and overcome the identity crisis motivated by being adolescents, but also because their bodies are seen as inhuman.

Through their in-betweenness, YA dystopian heroines can effortlessly move between spaces, their liminality preventing them from being confined to one single space. For instance, Katniss moves between the civilised and uncivilised spheres. She slips between District 12 and the forest outside its fenced, electrified walls, moving between the spaces and learning what both have to teach her. Similarly, in Delirium, Lena also moves between the civilised (the regulated, cured cities) and the uncivilised

[123] Because of this, "[t]he material body has often provided the basis for the exclusionary practices used to construct the unitary humanist subject – and for this reason embodiment is crucial to models of posthumanism that seek to redress such concepts of selfhood" (Flanagan 100).

(the Wilds) spheres. Cinder bridges between the planetary and the interstellar spheres, slipping between Earth and outer space. She also traverses both the high, such as the New Beijing Palace and the Artemisia Palace, and low social, such as the New Beijing market and the Warehouse District, spheres. In Legend, June likewise traverses the high and low social spheres, moving between the rich sectors, as a military officer and Princeps-Elect, and the poor sector, as a spy and, later, as a fugitive. Aria moves between the technological (Pods and Realms) and natural spheres (the Death Shop and the Tribes). In these instances, their in-betweenness enables these teenage girls to contest power structures. In fact, here, liminality enables transgression.

The Gothic mode is about the transgression of boundaries: social boundaries, gender boundaries, sexual boundaries, ethical boundaries, and religious boundaries,[124] to name a few. These transgressions resonate with adolescents.[125] Indeed, transgression and liminality are two characteristics that primarily define the social construction of adolescence. In the online lecture "Gothic, Pandemic, Technology," David Punter avers that from the very beginning, the Gothic has something to do with transgression. The norm being transgressed is not only about social acceptance but also about the limits of nature itself. The Gothic novel is "all about subversion and transgression of traditional norms vis-à-vis the conflicts of those who were empowered versus those who were disempowered" (Chess 394) in order to readjust power structures. Thus, boundaries are transgressed in Gothic texts to question, define, and redefine those exact boundaries. Transgression often provokes fear, which usually enables "the reconstitution of limits and boundaries [in which] [g]ood [is] affirmed in the contrast with evil." Transgression assumes an important role "not only as an interrogation of received rules and values, but in the identification, reconstitution or transformation of limits" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 5). YA dystopian fiction also privileges transgression in order to readjust power

[124] Indeed, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik highlight this understanding, writing that "Gothic writing always concerns itself with boundaries and their instabilities, whether between the quick/the dead, eros/thanatos, pain/pleasure, 'real'/'unreal,' 'natural'/'supernatural,' material/transcendent, man/machine, human vampire, or 'masculine´/'feminine'" (*Gothic and the Comic Turn* 321).

[125] The relationship between transgression and desire also becomes important during adolescence. This relationship leads to the development of transgressive romances in YA fiction, that is, to the depiction of relationships between human and non-human, inter-species crossing romance.

structures. The teenage female protagonists of these novels transgress societal norms imposed by the oppressive regimes: in Matched, Cassia learns how to write by hand; Lena breaks curfew to meet an uncured boy; Tris refuses to act according to just one Faction's beliefs; America calls for the end of the castes on national television. These acts of transgression become a means of reclaiming agency and individuality in a world designed to suppress them. Additionally, as they transgress norms, they inspire others to rebel against the totalitarian authorities, creating a ripple effect that leads to collective resistance.

Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz stress that "contemporary dystopian literature with adolescent women protagonists place young women in unfamiliar, often liminal spaces—caught between destructive pasts and unclear futures—in order to explore the possibilities of resistance and rebellion" (7). YA dystopian heroines learn (and teach to readers) that it is possible to stand in-between, building challenging models of girlhood; that is, models of being a girl that thrive in the in-between binary oppositions that, hopefully, will build adulthoods that do not fall prey to binary hierarchical, oppositions. Consequently, liminality constructs utopian spaces in these narratives where various discourses convene and blend. It allows characters to negotiate binary perspectives and discourses – a negotiation that alters how they see themselves and others, as well as their understanding of the world they inhabit. As a result, they build new worlds where humans and non-humans collaborate and establish long-lasting relationships. This altering process, rooted in the characters, guides them to build new, fluid visions for the future.

It is key to note that the YA dystopian heroine's body's internal multiplicity and fluidity raise suspicions that something "other," invisible to the eye, inhabits it, creating a sense of uncanniness. That is, through challenging expected forms of being and appearing, their liminal bodies become a site of fear where the familiar and unfamiliar entangle to produce a diffuse sensation of terror known as the *unheimlich*.

2.3.3. We're the Same, You and I

Etymologically, the word "unheimlich" derives from "heimlich," which, besides being synonymous with "secret," "conceal," and "occult," has numerous other meanings: *häuslich* (something that belongs in the house) or, Marie M. Tatar highlights, something "which is concealed or kept from sight, and hence sinister" (169). In this sense, the *unheimlich* refers to something that threatens "one's sense of 'at-homeness', not from the outside but from within the house" (Beal 4-5). The *unheimlich* is the realisation that something in a familiar place (the home, the self, the society) does not belong there; it is "an experience of otherness within sameness" (Beal 5). It "represents a feeling which relates to a dialectic between that which is *known* and that which is *unknown*" (Punter, "The Uncanny" 130).

Sigmund Freud describes the *unheimlich* as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well-known and had long been familiar" (*The Uncanny* 124). That is, it is a feeling of dread that arises from events that are, simultaneously, strange and familiar. The *unheimlich* is the understanding that something frightening is rooted in the familiar. Freud goes on to explain that the *unheimlich* arises when someone is confronted with "something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (148). His word echoes F. W. J. Schelling's conceptualisation of the *unheimlich*, where "something that should have remained hidden and has come in the open" (qtd. in Freud, *The Uncanny* 148). The *unheimlich* is the secret that should have remained hidden, but somehow unburied itself and came to the surface. At the peak of its manifestation, Freud posits that "the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" (*The Uncanny* 148). Entities such as ghosts and spirits lie on a threshold between life and death, beyond the boundaries of conventional meaning systems. These supernatural beings embody chaos within order and possess the ability to dismantle societal values and notions regarding the self, laying bare an individual's insecurities about themselves and the world. Standing on the threshold of the supernatural world – on the cusp of mortality – provokes a diffuse sensation of terror and unease in the human being. These

liminal entities disrupt the human being's state of mind by immersing them in uncertainty.

Uncertainty is one of the conditions of the *Unheimlich*. Departing from this assumption, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle suggest ten forms the uncanny can take:[126] repetition, such as "the experience of déjà vu (the sense that something has happened before), and the idea of the double (or doppelgänger)"; odd coincidences; animism; anthropomorphism; automatism, including that "when what is human is perceived as merely mechanical: examples of this would be sleepwalking, epileptic fits, trance-states and madness" and robots and other automata; "[a] sense of radical uncertainty about sexual identity – about whether a person is male or female, or apparently one but actually the other"; the fear of being buried alive, that is, "related more broadly to images or experiences of claustrophobia, of being unexpectedly and unpleasantly stuck"; silence; telepathy, since "your thoughts are perhaps not your own, however private or concealed you might have assumed them to be"; last but not least, death, which I have already observed (35-9). Other conceptualisations of the *unheimlich* also explore the uncertainty that permeates it. Fred Botting states that the uncanny is "a disruptive return of archaic desires and fears [which] disturbs the familiar, homely and secure sense of reality and normality," and it "renders all boundaries uncertain [leaving] readers unsure whether narratives describe psychological disturbance or wider upheavals within formations of reality and normality" (Botting, *Gothic 1st Edition* 7). In *The Uncanny* (2003), Royle defends that "[t]he uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (1). The confrontation with the *unheimlich* may be a traumatic experience. After all, "the uncanny, at root, suggests the uncontrollable nature of memory, of trauma, of haunting;

[126] Freud also lists several elements that can metamorphose something ordinary into *unheimlich*: animism, magic, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, unintended repetition, the castration complex, a living person with the intent to harm with evil powers, epilepsy or madness, severed limbs, "when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on full function and significance of what it symbolizes," and the female genitalia (Freud, *The Uncanny* 149-51).

it serves to remind us that we cannot, at the end of the day – or during the watches of the night – exorcise the ghost" (Punter, "The Uncanny" 130).

YA dystopian heroines are a reminder of this "ghost," their bodies threatening the sense of self of those who hold power. Their bodies are a locus of fear that evokes the uncanny in the antagonists. When Cinder mistakenly uses her glamour, Levana experiences this horror: "Levana's rage seemed to hiccup when their gazes met. The queen gasped and drew back a step. For a moment, she looked almost afraid" (Meyer, *Cinder* 364). As Levana later confirms in the narrative, Cinder, through using her glamour, became the spitting image of her mother, Queen Channary (Meyer, *Winter* 336). Levana finds herself staring at not one but two ghosts: her dead sister and niece.[127] Amy's non-monoethnic body is recognisable yet foreign. The only awakened person who was not born in *Godspeed*, Amy is regarded by the Shipborn as a freak. As she explains, "while the residents of *Godspeed* had the individuality bred out of them so they're all monoethnic, I've got super-pale skin, bright green eyes, and red hair to mark how different I am." Additionally, "[t]he former ship's leader, Eldest, did me no favors, either, telling the residents that I was a genetic experiment gone wrong" (Revis, *A Million Suns* 20-1). Unsurprisingly, the Shipborn (especially the Feeders) see Amy as a threat. Amy is a ghost of a different time; of the difference expunged by *Godspeed*'s Eldest system. Both Tris, a Divergent, and Mare, a Red-Silver mutation, are familiar and yet unfamiliar, threatening the belief system. Their existence challenges the regime enforcers, disturbing not only what is familiar to them but also their reality. Here, these girls can also raise this sense because these onlookers recognised their bodies as abject. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980/1982), Julia Kristeva describes that what

[127] As previously noted, I do not intend to explore either prequels or companion novels in relation to the main corpus. Nonetheless, I would like to highlight that Katniss is also a haunting memento of someone from President Snow's past: Lucy Gray Baird, the female protagonist of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020), a singer from the nomadic Covey and the first female winner from District Twelve (and only one until Katniss wins the 74th Hunger Games). Despite the stark contrast between the two teenage girls (for instance, Katniss is quiet, keeping to herself, while Lucy is extroverted, a natural performer), Katniss inadvertently evokes Lucy's memory through her singing. When Katniss sings, she reminds President Snow of the girl he once knew (and loved). In fact, President Snow does not know the fate of Lucy Gray, who "vanished" in the wilderness around District Twelve, after he tried to kill her. Lucy Gray became a ghost and, as a consequence, Katniss is an uncanny reminder of this ghost.

causes abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). If abjection is liminal, then those who are abject are also liminal. Since YA dystopian heroines have the power to disturb the system and order, not only through their status as liminal figures, I argue that they are abject and, consequently, provoke such a repulsion in the antagonists.

As emphasised, the *unheimlich* can arise from the idea of the double. It results from confronting one's double, particularly one's dark double. In *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1925), Otto Rank makes a distinction between different kinds of doubles: the physical double, the double that shares the same body as the doubled, and "a likeness which has been detached from the ego and become an individual being" (20). The latter, Rank explains, emerges from humanity's desire to become immortal, serving as a form of preservation against the extinction that death causes. Freud also shares this view, yet the double no longer prevents the annihilation of the self, declaring that "the meaning of the 'double' changes: having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (*The Uncanny* 142). Rank asserts that the "uncanny double is clearly an independent and visible cleavage of the ego" (12). This version of the self transforms into an "independent entity and which always and everywhere balks the self" (11). The double becomes a physical shadow of its creator, and its presence is a threat to the existence of the individual.[128]

YA dystopian fiction portrays different types of doubles. These can be represented as someone they physically resemble, as the antagonist who helps maintain the totalitarian regime, or even as a physical monster. Indeed, this double is often what one would describe as monstrous. While the first type of double is somewhat less insidious, the latter representations are often the *doppelgänger*[129] of the protagonist –

[128] The double as a being separated from the self is represented in the Gothic (indeed, the double is a common motif of the Gothic mode). It is often represented as a corporeal shadow that haunts its creator.
[129] The *doppelgänger* has roots in Germanic folk legends, where it is described as a supernatural being that can duplicate any person. It is "[a] mirroring or duality of a character's persona, [referring] to the twin, shadow double, demon double, and split personality" (Snodgrass 83).

due to this doubleness, the protagonist's sense of monstrosity is reinforced. Whenever the antagonists are powerful females, they are represented as the protagonists' darker side, their shadow self, their *doppelgänger*. As Carl Jung describes, the shadow self is "the thing a person has no wish to be" (qtd. in Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 138), representing the unconscious part of the psyche that has been repressed. The creator projects their anxieties about themselves onto this oppositional being in order to confront their darker self and embrace it. Ursula K. Le Guin, through her exploration of fantasy literature and its interplay with Jung's concept, argues:

> The shadow is the other side of our psyche, the darker brother of the conscious mind. It is Cain, Caliban, Frankenstein's monster, Mr. Hyde. […] It is all we don't want to, can't, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used. […] The person who denies his own profound relationship with evil denies his own reality. He cannot do, or make; he can only undo, unmake. (143)

The Gothic mode features double, shadow selves, some of them already mentioned in this thesis: Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, Jane Eyre and Bertha, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. By recognising their doubles, YA dystopian heroines acknowledge the darkness within them, revealing that the relationship between good and evil is complex. Indeed, the oppositional binary pair good and evil is destabilised. YA dystopian heroines stand on the bracket between this binary pair. Their actions are not supposed to be read as a triumph of good over evil. After all, they partake in violence with unethical results: for in The Chemical Garden, Rhine emotionally manipulates her husband, Linden, who is clueless about his father's experimentations and that his brides were kidnapped; Tris erases the memory of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare workers; in the escape from the Aether storms, Aria condemns both Dwellers and Outsiders to death. Rather, their actions involve a recognition of their own capacity for darkness. This darkness is often mirrored in the figure of the double.

In The Lunar Chronicles, Cinder and Levana are doubles. Cinder's distress over being Lunar is further complicated by her revulsion at the thought of becoming like

Levana. While Cinder is initially thrilled when she realises that she can glamour her metallic hand, since "[no] one would ever know she was a cyborg again," when her retina scanner quickly alerts her to the truth hidden by glamour, Cinder finds herself annoyed with herself, "disgusted at how easily the desire [to hide her cyborg nature] had come to her." After all,

> [t]his was how Levana did it. She kept a hold on her people by tricking both their eyes and their hearts. She ruled with fear, yes, but also with adoration. It would be easy to abuse a person when they never recognized it as abuse.
>
> …
>
> If this was her chance to decide who she was, who she wanted to be, then the first decision was an easy one.
>
> She would never be like Queen Levana. (Meyer, *Scarlet* 196-7)

Although Cinder decides she does not want to be like Levana, she often compares her actions to those of Luna's Queen. When Cinder uses her ability on Adri, her stepmother, to infiltrate the New Beijing palace and stop the Emperor of the Eastern Commonwealth from marrying her aunt, she is overcome with a sense of distress:

> She stared back at her own reflection as the doors slipped shut behind her. Her heart started to pound. Thankfully no one else was in the elevator to witness her, because she lost her hold on the glamour immediately, gaping into her own brown eyes and, for the first time, felt horrified of who she saw in that reflection.
>
> Because what she'd done to Adri, twisting her emotions against her, forcing her to feel guilty and shame, for no other reason that Cinder's own terrible curiosity, her own burning desire for retaliation…
>
> It was something Levana would have done. (Meyer, *Cress* 404)

Cinder is terrified of becoming like Levana, abusing her power to control and hurt others.

Despite their mutual loathing, Cinder and Levana share similar feelings about their bodies. As I discussed earlier, Cinder feels embarrassed by her cyborg body parts, while Levana is ashamed of her scarred body. Levana uses glamour to conceal the scars left on her whole body after being forced to put her hand in fire by her sister, Cinder's mother (Meyer, *Winter* 741). Staring at Levana, Cinder perceives her as deformed but immediately regrets her own thoughts:

> Cinder hated her own mind for labeling the queen as grotesque. She had once been a victim, as Cinder had once been a victim. And how many had labeled Cinder's own metal limbs as grotesque, unnatural, disgusting?
>
> No. Levana was a monster, but it wasn't because of the face she'd kept hidden all these years. Her monstrosities were buried much deeper than that. (753).

Nevertheless, while Levana never accepts her bodily scars and becomes a monster, Cinder's acceptance of her cyborg body keeps her from using it to control and force everyone to conform to her will.

In Legend, June and Captain Jameson are also represented as doubles. In what June expects to be her last confrontation with Jameson, who was sentenced to execution due to being part of a plot to murder the new Primo Elector, Jameson tells June, "[y]ou were one of my favorites. Do you know why I was so interested in having you on my patrol? It's because I saw myself reflected in you. We're the same, you and I," ending with ominous words: "'Better be careful, Iparis […]. You might turn out just like me'" (Lu, *Champion* 69). Captain Jameson's words haunt June because of her fear of becoming like her. In their last confrontation, June wonders: "Why can I face everything in the world except Commander Jameson?" (315). She is terrified of confronting her *doppelgänger*, her darker side.

In Red Queen, the juxtaposition between Mare and Elara, the queen of Norta, is only hinted at. After the events in *Glass Sword*, Mare cannot stop herself from wondering if she will become like Elara, "something wretched […] with nothing and no

one to love her" (Aveyard, *Glass Sword* 412). Mare recognises Elara as her darkness; as who she can become if she allows her hatred to run wild and dominate all her emotions, as she mostly did in her attempt to save all newsbloods from Maven.

Similarly, in Divergent, Tris recognises in Jeanine her shadow self:

> I look at the mirror. It's not so difficult to pretend that I'm speaking to Jeanine when I speak to my own reflection. My hair is blond like hers; we are both pale and stern-looking. The thought is so disturbing to me that I lose my train of thought for a few seconds, and instead stand with my finger in the air in silence.
>
> I am pale-skinned, pale-haired, and cold. I am curious about the pictures of my brain. I am like Jeanine. And I can either despise it, attack it, eradicate it . . . or I can use it. (Roth, *Insurgent* 331-2)

Tris finds physical and psychological similarities between herself and Jeanine, understanding the necessity of using these similarities rather than rejecting or attempting to eliminate them. She uses the sameness they share to manipulate her antagonists. Additionally, under a serum-induced simulation, Tris confronts a physical double:

> I start toward the door, and someone appears in my path. She is short, thin, and blond, with dark circles under her eyes. She is me.
>
> A reflection? I wave at her to see if she will mirror me. She doesn't.
>
> "Hello," I say. She doesn't answer. I didn't really think she would. (489)

In the confrontation between Tris and her double, both are equally matched – as Tris observes, "[t]he second I want something, she also wants it. She and I can only be, at best, at a standstill" (491). Tris is only able to gain the upper hand when a gun appears in the room. Her double, Tris observes, is "holding the gun but visibly shuddering, the weapon as far out from her body as she can possibly hold it. She is as weak as I am. No,

not as weak, because she is not going blind and losing air, but almost as weak, almost" (493). Here, girl and shadow are one and the same, sharing not only the same physical form but also the same fears. As a result, Tris is unable to continue repressing her trauma. By confronting her double, whom she ultimately kills, Tris is forced to acknowledge her past decisions and traumatic experiences, and can initiate a healing process.

While the doubles discussed so far are human beings (except Tris' simulation double), Mary (Forest of Hands and Teeth) and Kate (Monsters of Verity) have monster doubles: Gabrielle, an Unconsecrated, and Alice, the Malchai born out of Kate's deadly crime. Gabrielle is an Outsider who finds her way into Mary's village. In order to keep the truth from the community, the Sisterhood confines Gabrielle in the Cathedral and later forces her to transform into an Unconsecrated. Following a fleeting exchange of words through the walls of a room, Mary finally glimpses Gabrielle when wandering outside the Cathedral: "I stop and look up at her and our eyes meet. My breath hitches– it is like looking at a reflection in the water. The same age, same dark hair, same questions in our eyes" (Ryan 71). Mary is struck by the physical resemblance between Gabrielle and herself to the point that she muses about the possibility of them being mistaken for sisters (168). After returning to Verity in the chase of a new monster, the Chaos Eater, Kate is confronted with the consequence of her actions: a Malchai. This Malchai is a distorted reflection of Kate as well as a manifestation of her inner demons. An evil version of Kate, the Malchai adopts her mother's name, Alice, and transforms into a monstrous physical form of Kate. Not only does Alice wear her creator's clothes, but "her hair was [also] more white than blond, chopped at a violent angle along her jaw" (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 73), similar to Kate's. When Kate is confronted with Alice's existence for the first time, she is struck by a sense of familiarity, yet also by strangeness and confusion. Gazing at her Malchai, Kate states that Alice "was like a reflection, distorted by smoke and shadow [...] a ghost, a shade, a monster made in her own image" (Schwab, *Our Dark Duet* 418). Both Gabrielle and Alice, as monsters, amplify the sense of uncanniness felt by their other half. This results from the peculiarity of the monster, which embodies traits of both the familiar and the unfamiliar. The monster is "both

Same and Other. [It] is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar; s/he exists in an in-between zone" (Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt" 141).

In the motif of the double, it is common for creator and creation to destroy one another. As Rank states, "the impulse to rid oneself of the uncanny opponent in a violent manner belongs [to] the essential features of the motif" (16-7). Indeed, the creator and the monster-creation cannot stand separated for too long. "Because it is a body across which difference has been repeatedly written," Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests, "the monster seeks out its author to demand its raison d'être—and to bear witness to the fact that it could have been constructed Otherwise" (Cohen 12). To put it another way, the self and the *doppelgänger* cannot coexist due to their desire to cancel each other out. Only the creator (in this instance, the YA dystopian heroine) can destroy their *doppelgängers*, and this destruction can be direct or indirect.

For instance, in their final confrontation, Cinder shoots Levana after the queen drives a blade through her heart (Meyer, *Winter* 756). Cinder only survives because her heart is mechanical. June is not able to kill Jameson on her own, yet she orders the killing. Holding a dangling Jameson on a high-building roof, before Jameson can take her down with her, June yells to Republic soldiers to shoot her. However, this destruction awakens feelings of guilt. June finds herself overwhelmed by remorse: "I hurriedly wipe the tears from my face. What did I just do? Her blood stains my hands—I rub my good hand against my clothes, but I can't get it off. I don't know if I'll ever be able to" (Lu, *Champion* 319). Mare identifies Elara as her dark counterpart only after murdering her. Following the loss of her brother, Shade, who dies rescuing her from Elara and hosts of Silver soldiers, Mare loses the feeble control she still has on her lightning. In a moment of unrestrained fury, she electrocutes Elara, turning her body into a grotesque spectacle: "Lightning twisted her muscles, pulling her mouth into a sneer even she couldn't muster while alive. Her simple uniform is cooked to her skin, and her ash-blond hair is almost gone, burned away until only stringy patches remain" (Aveyard, *Glass Sword* 389-90). Consumed by grief, Mare does not remember her deadly actions. However, upon her capture and return to the Silver court, Mare is forced to remember Elara's death during her torture by a Silver whisper – an individual endowed with the ability to read and

manipulate the mind. This process unearths her forgotten memories, causing Mare to relentlessly relive not only the queen's death but also the tragic loss of her brother. Although Tris perceives herself and Jeanine as the same, that is, as her double, she refrains from killing her, despite possessing the skill derived from her Dauntless training and the will to do so after being tortured and almost killed at the hands of Jeanine. However, Tris is a witness to Jeanine's violent demise. In contrast, as explored, Tris does kill her simulation-double. She does what her double cannot do, firing the gun: "I close my eyes at the moment the trigger presses back, and when I open them, it is the other Tris who lies on the ground between the dark patches in my vision; it is me" (Roth, *Insurgent* 495). While in these instances one of the doubles usually survives the final confrontation, Kate and Alice present a different resolution: they both meet their demise in mutual destruction. During their final confrontation, Kate and Alice lose their lives at each other's hands. Kate succumbs to the injuries caused by her monstrous creation, but not before inflicting the same fate on her by piercing her heart.

The destruction of the double does not signify the annihilation of an individual's latent insidiousness; rather, it represents the individual's conscious embrace of that aspect of themselves. These teenage girls learn to thread on their darkness, to live in tandem with it. It is important to highlight that the desire to destroy their *doppelgänger* emerges from the need to complete their identity. As shadowy selves, these *doppelgänger*s are independent and visible fragments of one's ego, meaning one's identity is split. The only way to have a stable identity once again is through the destruction of the double. Truly, it is through facing and destroying the double that the teenage female protagonists face and accept their traumatic experiences and realise who they want to be. Interestingly, neither Mary nor Rhine kill their doubles or take any action that leads to their demise, as Gabrielle and Rose, are mirrors of themselves, not their shadowy selves**.** The dystopian conditions of their worlds lead to the premature death of their doubles. After being infected, Gabrielle becomes faster and more active than the other Unconsecrated, quickly depleting her energy and deteriorating – that is, rotting – in the process. Rose succumbs to the virus that plagues the younger generations.

Nevertheless, even the more benign doubles[130] play a crucial role in shaping the identity of these adolescent girls, since in YA fiction, the double is "frequently used in narrative to explore the idea that personal identity is shaped by a dialogic relation with an other and that subjectivity is multiple and fragmented" (McCallum 75). In this context, confronting the double is fundamental to shaping an individual's beliefs and values, as well as the construction of their sense of individuality. The double plays a fundamental role in the development of subjectivity. Generally "perceived by a character as a threat to their sense of selfhood" (McCallum 77), the double not only poses a challenge to the physical existence of their counterpart but also to their identity by calling into question their individuality and destabilising the notion of the self. Hence, the double has the potential to erase an individual's identity, which can be observed in The Chemical Garden, in which Rhine and Rose are dead ringers.

When those who know Rose look at Rhine, they see Rose: "[Deirdre] doesn't say it, but I know that as she stands beside me in the mirror, she's thinking I look like Rose. And when Linden sees me, I suspect he will not be seeing me at all, but some reincarnation of the girl he lost" (DeStefano, *Wither* 113). Of course, the similarity to Rose is a boon for Rhine – not only is she selected as First Wife because they look similar, but also, when she is taken to the Carnival[131] run by Madame (she later discovers she is Rose's mother), because she looks like the woman's dead daughter, she is not forced to engage in forced sexual activity (DeStefano, *Fever* 69). Rhine confesses: "I know how

[130] The presence of benign doubles can also work as a source of rebellion – here, the ambiguity of the Gothic is present. In The Hunger Games, Rue reminds Katniss of Prim. While lying on Katniss's arms dying, Rue asks her to sing her a song. Katniss is reluctant but thinks to herself: "But if this is Prim's, I mean, Rue's last request, I have to at least try" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 273). Watching Rue's dying feels as heart-wrenching as if she were witnessing Prim's death. This doubleness makes Katniss act against the Capitol – she finally understands Peeta's words the night before the game: "Only I keep wishing I could think of a way [to] show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games" (276). Katniss decides: "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. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I" (276). Katniss beautifies Rue's corpse with flowers. This becomes one of her first acts of rebellion against the Capitol.

[131] The Carnival, as the name indicates, is a decaying carnival/circus setting, where Madame has a menagerie of girls – in other words, it is a brothel. Captured young girls are treated as property and sexually abused. Rhine describes the Carnival as an in-between space: "If Manhattan is reality, and the mansion a luxurious illusion, this place is a dilapidated, blurry line that divides the two places" (DeStefano, *Fever* 43).

Linden looks at me—like I'm Rose. It's my only defense to play along, but it's so exhausting at night to have him lying beside me, muttering her name in his sleep. It's like he's erasing me, a little more every day" (DeStefano, *Wither* 128). Rhine is aware she is losing herself; losing her identity, becoming Rose.

Notably, Rhine inhabits the threshold between life and death not only because of the virus that runs in her body, dictating her death at the age of twenty, but also because of her likeness to Rose. When Linden's uncle, Reed, first sees Rhine, he identifies her as her ghost:

> "I thought you were dead," he says to me.
>
> I must be worse off than I thought, because surely I just imagined that. But then Linden says, "That isn't Rose, Uncle. Her name is Rhine. Remember I told you the other day?"
>
> "Oh, right, right," Reed says. "I'm bad with names. I'm usually much better with faces."
>
> "I've been told I look like her," I offer.
>
> "Doll, you could be her ghost," Reed says. (DeStefano, *Sever* 18)

Rhine becomes Rose's ghost, existing as a liminal being. As Rose's ghostly counterpart, Rhine embodies neither her own identity nor that of Rose. Her presence brings Rose back from the dead, hence, positioning both Rose and, by extension, Rhine, in the betwixt and between of life and death. Rhine functions as a haunting presence, bringing Rose back to life. In other words, Rhine is Rose's living echo, haunting the mansion and the men who loved and/or destroyed her.

Rhine does not have the possibility to confront her double, which results in her struggle to reclaim her individuality. She constructs her subjectivity, separating herself from Rose's ghost, by successfully escaping the spaces and forces designated to contain her. These flights function as acts of self-definition for Rhine. By rejecting being contained within the domestic sphere where Rose's absence dominates, Rhine actively resists and counters the potential erasure of her subjectivity. Through resistance, Rhine

regains her sense of self. This approach, namely resisting the totalitarian system, is often employed by YA dystopian heroines who do not have a double.

3. Gothic Girlhoods in Dystopian Times

> The authors of books for young audiences are uncannily inventive when it comes to constructing new forms of female heroism.
>
> Maria Tatar, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*

In the foreword of *Heroic Girls as Figures of Resistance and Futurity in Popular Culture* (2024), Alexandra Heller-Nicholas writes:

> For a girl to make it through adolescence to womanhood is of itself a major victory. In a world where so much attention is placed on policing women's bodies — how they should look, what they should do and, most of all, what they should not do — the teenage years for so many young women is a period where enormous pressure is placed on transformation. On one hand, teenage girls especially have great social and cultural power, the figure of the nubile young woman broadly deemed the ideal state of feminine sexuality. Yet so much of the world we live in seeks to repress that power, deny girls and teens any sense of agency, and portray any attempts to utilise their power as potentially dangerous, devious, or monstrous. (xvi)

When teenage girls are thrust into a dystopian world, their transition into womanhood is threatened not only by the policing of female bodies but also by the panoply of perils they encounter and face on their journey. Despite the authoritarian society's attempts to suppress their agency and power through strict rules and severe punishment for breaking them, YA dystopian teenage girl protagonists manage to transcend these challenges. When they wield their power, drawing on Heller-Nicholas's words, it does become dangerous, devious, or monstrous, but only to those accustomed to maintaining dominance and exerting authority over others with no desire to relinquish it.

Roberta Seelinger Trites suggests that teenagers "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" (20). However, Trites's conclusions are informed mostly by realistic fiction for adolescents, such as Beatrice Sparks's *Go Ask Alice* (1971), Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) and *I Am the Cheese* (1977), Marijane Meaker's *Is That You, Miss Blue?* (1975), and Nancy Garden's *Good Moon Rising* (1996), which, in my view, might have created a biased inference that does not apply to today's fiction for teens. Relations of power are still a central theme, yet recent YA literature depicts teenagers who achieve maturation without reconciling or conforming to social institutions. Adolescents transgress social norms to build new social-political structures (or, at least, to free themselves from the shackles of authoritarian figures and the structures that support them). They do not reconcile with the existing social structures. Such is the case of YA dystopian fiction.

In YA dystopian fiction, accepting their power, that is, their agency, in a world structured to render them passive, is a transformative process for the teenage girl protagonists (as considered, when this power comes from having disruptive posthuman bodies, the protagonists must go through a process of acceptance of who they are and of understanding that neither themselves nor their power is monstrous). This acceptance allows them to move from passivity to agency as well as recognise that their seemingly static society is not fixed. Most importantly, it enables them to become heroines who, rather than reconciling with the totalitarian social structures, transgress and transform the power systems. Nevertheless, until these teenage girls undergo the transformative journey that culminates in their herohood, they are subjected to risky and treacherous environments and experiences. In fact, without confronting and experiencing such trials, they would be incapable of treading this path. The perilous experiences they undergo intertwine with intrinsic Gothic themes, whose depictions I have analysed in chapter 2: power (violence, surveillance, entrapment, and isolation), the erasure of the past, and liminality (spatial and bodily). These themes converge to shape the Gothic girlhood experienced by teenage girls in YA dystopian fiction. This form of girlhood is integral to their journey to herohood and to how they reframe the concept.

Earlier discussion noted that Gothic girlhood aligns with Chris Baldick's definition of the Gothic: in this form of girlhood, girls are overwhelmed by feelings of terror and dread, accompanied by a perception of inescapability from their surroundings, resulting in being overcome by a sense of claustrophobia. In YA dystopian fiction, teenage girls find themselves facing daily feelings of anxiety and terror, as well as claustrophobia, caused by the totalitarian authorities controlling the societies they are part of. Additionally, while reviewing the theoretical frameworks on girlhood and its relationship to both YA dystopian fiction and the Gothic, I identified four essential characteristics of Gothic girlhoods: trauma, isolation, marginalisation (being or feeling an outsider), and, of course, liminality (experiencing an in-between existence). These four characteristics and how YA dystopian heroines experience them are addressed in chapter 2. However, I would like to take a closer look at the topics of isolation, since my observations focused on the isolation of the community as a controlling mechanism, and not on the isolation these girls experience individually, and marginalisation.

In the works comprehended in my selected main corpus, the teenage girl protagonists often find themselves isolated. They can experience social isolation, which reinforces their status as outsiders, and/or institutional isolation, as well as psychological isolation, which is often imposed on them by themselves as a result of the traumatic experiences they undergo. Frequently, due to the latter form of isolation, these girls have trouble forming meaningful friendships. When friendships are formed, they are with a teenage boy, who becomes part of the love triangle the teenage protagonist finds herself in, a device often featured in YA fiction after the global success of Meyer's Twilight,[132] rather than with a teenage girl. For instance, in The Hunger Games, with the exception of her sister (and Rue, who, in reality, is a double for her sister), Katniss is closer to Gale, a boy who also lost his father in a mine accident and with whom she hunts outside the confines of District Twelve. After Katniss's first games, Gale confesses his feelings for her, and Katniss finds herself torn between Peeta and

[132] The love triangle "has been a prevalent dynamic in YA literature and culture for quite some time, [yet] it was immensely popularized by Stephenie Meyers' *Twilight* series—to the point where many deem that including this device will contribute to a work's success" (Matos 153-4).

Gale. The only girl Katniss interacts with and tentatively thinks of as a friend is Madge, who gives her the Mockingjay pin. About to leave for the Capitol for the first time, Katniss realises "that maybe Madge really has been my friend all along" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 44). However, Madge dies when the Capitol bombs their district after the Quarter Quell. In Matched, Cassia's best friend is Xander, the boy with whom she is Matched. Although Xander has feelings for Cassia (who initially reciprocates them), she finds herself drifting towards Ky. In Across the Universe, besides Elder, Amy befriends Harley, a painter and a resident of the mental ward, who commits suicide. In Starters, Callie's only friend is Michael, with whom she finds herself in a love square. In Monsters of Verity, Kate is friendless not only because of who her father is, but also because she has erected psychological walls to keep herself distanced from other people. Kate's only interaction with a girl around her age happens after she listens to her talking about her mother and results in Kate physically threatening her: "In an instant, Kate had her up against the wall, five metal-tipped fingers wrapped around her throat. With her free hand, Kate drew the lighter from her pocket. She pressed a notch on the side, and a silver switchblade slid out with a muted *snick*" (Schwab, *This Savage Song* 48). Similarly, in Arc of a Scythe, Citra is also friendless because of her social position as a scythe. Her only friend is Rowan Damisch, first her rival apprentice, and later her love interest. However, after Citra's selection as a scythe, Rowan becomes a vigilant, killing scythes who do not respect the Scythedom's commandments or take advantage of their position. As a result, they spend lengthy periods of time without communicating.

When there is a close relationship between the YA dystopian heroine and another teenage girl, both being confidants of one another, the friendship is often thwarted because of the boy they are romantically linked to, such as Mary and Cassandra in The Forest of Hands and Teeth, both initially harbouring romantic feelings for the same boy, and Cassia and Indie, the latter falling first in love with Xander and later with Ky, the two boys who dispute Cassia's affections, competition, such as America and the other female contestants in The Selection, betrayal, such as Lena and Hana in Delirium, in which the later denounces Lena's plans to leave for the Wilds with Alex, resulting in her detention by regulators, or death. The death of the girl friend is the

most common device in these narratives. In Across the Universe, when Amy gets close to Victria due to both having been victims of sexual assault by Luther (in fact, Victria is raped), their slow-building friendship comes to an abrupt end after Victria is shot at and dies. In Under the Never Sky, Aria loses her best friend in the Pod incident that leads to her exile and she is unable to develop a friendship with another girl throughout the story. Near the end of the competition, America and Celeste, her nemesis throughout the Selection, are able to put their divergences aside and initiate a friendship. However, they never become close friends, since when Maxon is to announce the winner of the Selection, the Southerner rebels attack the ceremony, and Celeste is shot in the back of the head. Analysing the incompatibility of female friendships in YA dystopian fiction, Amy M.M. Childs suggests that if the YA dystopian female protagonist "has a close female friend, the dystopia applies the costs and penalties for the social transgressions of rebellion to the friend." For the close female friend, the penalty is often death. These representations of female friendship, Childs contends, strengthen cultural stereotypes that dictate that "young women will always abandon friendship for a young man, as they seemingly value romance over platonic friendship [painting] girls as shallow, competitive creatures incapable of camaraderie" (188). Indeed, among the corpus of YA dystopian series studied, The Lunar Chronicles is an exception in that it foregrounds positive friendships among its teenage girl protagonists, Cinder, Scarlet, Cress, and Winter. Although each heroine is introduced in a separate novel, the narrative arc progressively brings them together. These four girls weave friendships grounded in collaboration and emotional support while repudiating the notion of female rivalry. Nonetheless, it is important to note that at the beginning of her journey, Cinder loses her closest friend, her step-sister Peony, who falls victim to the deadly disease letumosis.

The isolation experienced by the teenage girl protagonist in YA dystopian fiction is exacerbated due to her being on the margins. Usually "at-risk" girls (see chapter 1.4), most of these girls come from unsavoury environments (they live in poverty, having to take on caregiving roles at a young age and limited access to education and healthcare), which makes them more vulnerable to physical and psychological violence (see table 2). Thus, as "at-risk" girls, they have higher chances of enduring trauma from an early age.

Many YA dystopian heroines grow up and reside on the margins of society. Katniss comes from the poorest district of Panem. America is a Five. Although she is not at the end of the caste system, she and her family must count every penny they earn. During the Selection, America is often discriminated against because she belongs to a lower caste. Lena is an orphan whose mother was never cured of *amor deliria nervosa*, and whose older sister was forced into the cure. Due to her family history, Lena is often ostracised and treated poorly. As a cyborg, Cinder has no civil rights. Rhine, who also lost both her parents, lives in a dying society where girls are kidnapped, forced into marriage, and/or used for reproductive purposes. Because of this, she is abducted by Gatherers and sold as a bride. Few protagonists come from non-vulnerable environments. Cassia is born to two Officers. June (Legend) is part of the military. Her success is commemorated by the regime (she got 1500 points in the Trials) and she interacts with the society's leader, denominated Elector Primo. Aria is a Dweller, living inside a Pod, protected from the Aether tempests. Kate is the daughter of the man who controls North Verity. Citra becomes part of the Scythedom. However, no matter how impervious these environments seem to be, they have cracks and these "privileged" teenage girls can find themselves on the margins: June still comes from a broken home, having lost both her parents and later her brother; Aria has a tense relationship with her mother, who passes away without Aria being able to apologise for their last fight; Kate witnesses her mother's death at the hands of a monster and is abandoned by her father.

Nevertheless, margins are active, transformative sites that can destabilise understandings, and, as such, bodies that stand on the margins are potentially dangerous to totalitarian societies. Even though these girls are insiders to their society, born and raised under their totalitarian power, at the same time, they are outsiders, having grown up on the margins. Their awareness as insiders and outsiders – that is, their standing in the in-between insider/outsider – endangers totalitarian social-political structures. Living on the margins allows for a better understanding of how the dystopian world operates, since these teenage girls lack the privileges that would blind them to the authorities' actions. Although they are not knowledgeable about everything the authorities do, YA dystopian heroines are not easily fooled by the propaganda and

develop critical thinking that leads them to change the world. As Sarah Hentges contends, "[p]ersonal experiences with oppression and privilege shape the lives and experiences of girls and shape the ways in which they develop critical and oppositional consciousness" (136). Because of their social context and the (mostly traumatic) personal experiences that arise from it, these heroines find themselves in a position to challenge the *status quo*. As they inhabit the margins of their society, when they get involved in the initiation rituals that aim to introduce them into the societal machine, many of these girls already have insight into the insidious ways authorities act to perpetuate control and/or have experienced significant trauma that left both psychological and physical scars. Nonetheless, for YA dystopian heroines, trauma does not mean mental disintegration, even when they are on the brink of it.

William Hughes argues that "the Gothic heroine is renewed and redefined through her traumatic experiences" (100). These experiences are used to restore the social-political order jeopardised by the villainous antagonists – an order centred on a patriarchal culture, confining the Gothic heroine to the domestic sphere and constraining her to powerless social roles. The Gothic heroine, as earlier discussed and pinpointed by Diane Long Hoeveler, uses the suffering she experiences to find herself sustenance and financial stability, even if it means losing her freedom. The YA dystopian heroine, who endures a Gothic girlhood, is also renewed and redefined by her traumatic experiences. However, contrary to the Gothic heroine, she uses her suffering and liminality to reconstruct the social-political order. Traumatic experiences become central to these girls' uprising against the dominant authorities (their suffering encourages them to overthrow the regime) and their catharsis, shaping how they wish to revolutionise their society so that other individuals do not have to endure the same anguish they did. Despite the fact that the involvement in a rebellion may lead to further traumatic experiences, the rebellion serves as a catalyst for initiating their healing process. Such healing would be unfeasible within the very society that has inflicted physical and psychological harm upon them. Therefore, trauma is central to the construction of the YA dystopian heroine.

3.1. The Making of a Dystopian Heroine

Analysing the discourses of Otto Rank (the importance of the child cutting ties with the family home) and Joseph Campbell (the monomyth) on the hero, Leah Philips concludes that "the hero-journey is essentially about the perpetuation of patriarchy (status quo) through the slaying of monsters and through marriage" ("Impossible Journey" 6). The marriage represents the union of the hero with the hero's prize, a role fulfilled by young, beautiful women, who are only part of the monomyth to become the hero's bride. However, if the YA dystopian heroine may not be fit to be the hero, she clearly cannot be the hero's bride. Phillips contends that Cinder cannot be the hero's prize because of the actions of her aunt, Levana, against her. With her body severely burnt and disfigured, Cinder is turned into a cyborg in order to survive. However, Phillips remarks, "the attempt on her life places Cinder within the heroic romance as the hero: an early attempt on the hero's life resulting in his being 'reared by foster parents in a far-off country' is a common feature of hero stories" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction* 82). Due to the attempt on her life, Cinder is placed on the hero's path from an early age.

Cinder is not the only YA dystopian heroine who cannot be the hero's prize because of their body. In the YA dystopian narratives considered, the teenage girls' bodies are marred by the violence they experience. For example, Aria is poisoned via tattoo ink, which leaves her arm disfigured. Later, she is shot in the same arm, suffering nerve damage: "Aches stabbed deep in her bicep as she tried to make a fist. Her fingers gave only the slightest twitch. It was like her mind had lost the ability to speak with her hand, the message vanishing somewhere along her arm" (Rossi, *Into the Still Blue* 1). Rhine (The Chemical Garden) cuts open her body to remove a tracking device and almost dies. Sloane (The Program) burns her hand to prevent her parents from seeing her crying. Mare (Red Queen) has burn scars on her neck and back and a branded "M" on her collarbone (Maven marked the letter as a sign of possession). Besides having been left with unilateral hearing loss, Kate has deep scars on her face from the car crash that

killed her mother. Still, it is not only physical scars that render these girls unfit to be the hero's prize. The development of "superpowers" also makes their bodies unworthy. Juliette (Shatter Me), Aria, Ruby (The Darkest Minds), and Mare have all developed abilities. Comparable to Cinder's cyborg body, these abilities transform their human, female body into a posthuman body – a body that moves them beyond the oppositional binary system and places them in the bracket separating binaries. As Phillips writes about Cinder, "[t]he centre of opposition underpinning the hero/prize relationship and accounting for the appearance and actions of both pairs radically excludes Cinder because she is a cyborg, part human, part machine" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction* 82). Because they are neither fully human nor entirely Other, these girls are excluded from the traditional hero/prize framework.

Their posthuman body (Amy's body is also categorised as posthuman following her transformation into a hybrid) further makes them unworthy hero prizes – especially because what may materialise from the union with these girls will destabilise established oppositional binaries. Even Citra, whose body cannot be harmed or scarred (always a blank slate because of the nanobots in her body that heal any scarring injury she may suffer), cannot be anyone's prize due to being a scythe. In the Scythedom, romantic relationships are discouraged – in fact, its ninth commandment orders "Thou shalt have neither spouse nor spawn" (Shusterman, *Scythe* 75) – as love can interfere with their duty, raising ethical questions about whom they choose to kill. Additionally, girls whose physical bodies are not disfigured (some bodies are marred, yet because of the technological advancements achieved in these future societies, it is possible to remove any imperfection), but bear psychological scars are still inadequate to suit this role. Who is the hero who wants to marry the madwoman instead of hiding her in the attic? Who is the hero who wants to marry a girl whose life experiences are tempered with trauma? Their scarred, mutilated, imperfect bodies and fractured minds make YA dystopian girl protagonists unworthy of being hero prizes.

Having been removed from assuming the role of the hero's prize, the following question emerges: can the teenage girl protagonists in YA dystopian fiction be the hero? The short answer is "yes" (no surprise here, as I have been using the term "YA dystopian

heroines" to refer to these teenage girls). However, their transformative process into heroines is not simple, since the female body is not the body of the hero. As discussed earlier, the body of the hero is often that of a young (often adolescent), white male (Margery Hourihan), whose body is stable (Phillips). On the contrary, as Phillips reasons, the female body is unstable. However, their unstable bodies permit these teenage girls to move in-between oppositional binaries – a space differentiated by its liminality, where frontiers blur, enmeshing one into another. It is in this space that the reconfigurations of what a hero is made of takes place, opening doors for girls to transform into, using Phillips's term, she-heroes. They overcome all the exclusions imposed on them to become heroines in their own right through the inclusion of the body in the characteristics of a hero – it becomes understandable why these teenage girl protagonists must accept their body in all its difference.

The relationship between the YA dystopian teenage girl protagonist and the concept of heroism has been extensively examined in academic discourse. As previously explored, the female protagonists of YA dystopian fiction are defined as Girl on Fire (Sarah Hentges), girl revolutionary heroine (Jeffrey A. Brown), YA girl warrior (Cristina Santos), Trickster Girl (Maria Tatar), and speculative fiction heroine (Catherine Driscoll and Alexandra Heatwole). As demonstrated throughout this thesis, I frequently refer to them as "YA dystopian heroines." YA dystopian heroines engage in Campbell's monomyth. However, their journey diverges from that of the male heroes. First, it cannot be forgotten that they are females and their experiences diverge from those of males, especially in societies in which the female body is regulated – for instance, from being forced into patriarchal and dictatorial forms of femininity (see chapter 2.1.3) to being used for reproductive exploitation. Second, as an activist, a dimension the YA dystopian female protagonist embodies, it is her responsibility to call for a better community, severing ties with the dystopian system. (Severing ties with the dictatorial authorities does not mean erasing their existence from historical records – after all, the vicious society they lived in resulted, in a sense, from forgetting the past.) Hence, Cristina Santos contends, "[t]he female hero's journey in YA dystopian fiction can be a process of self-conscientisation marking the passage from girlhood to adulthood while

emphasising that, though a personal narrative of becoming, it is a politicised process of socialisation" (Santos, *Untaming Girlhood* 144).

Third, according to Childs, the depiction of romantic relationships in the hero's and heroine's journey differs: "for the male protagonist, saving the day is the ultimate goal, and he is rewarded his love interest for successfully doing so, while the female protagonist saves the day as a part of how she meets her goal of winning her relationship" (199). For the hero, a romantic partner is a prize rewarded for successfully saving the day. Here, the role of female characters in the monomyth is highlighted again as a prize – the female love interest is positioned as a prize that confirms the heroic achievement of the male character. By contrast, her heroism is subordinated to the fulfilment of the romantic relationship. Although this view seemingly attempts to lessen female heroism (heroines are doing it for themselves and not for the good of the community), it is important to stress that romantic love "serves as a transformative force for the protagonists of YA dystopian fiction [empowering] them to challenge and resist the controlling, dehumanizing practices." Most importantly, "it is not merely a personal experience but a foundational element of collective resistance and societal transformation, playing a critical role in the pursuit of social dreaming" (Cerqueira, "*Amor Deliria Nervosa*" 56-7).

Moreover, in a manner akin to Santos's girl warriors, the YA dystopian heroines exhibit significant inner growth throughout their journey, ultimately perceiving themselves in ways that diverge from societal expectations, and strive to act in accordance with their vision of themselves. Nevertheless, "there are societal and political pressures to tame and contain the girl warrior hero so that she, and her subversiveness, does not spill out beyond the accepted domain—be it a district, faction, arena, or the externally defined girl warrior hero narrative" (Santos, *Untaming Girlhood* 143). In contrast, the hero typically operates within the boundaries established by the power structures. He does not confront these societal and political pressures, since his journey is not inherently subversive. Instead, it reinforces prevailing oppositional binary hierarchies. The hero acts inside the accepted domain, keeping the *status quo*. However, the heroine and her subversiveness "spill out" and, as a consequence, binary

relationships are destabilised. Third wave feminism, Svenja Hohenstein writes, "wants to raise awareness for and deconstruct the pattern of binary opposites that have informed Western thinking and supported male superiority for centuries." In this wave, there is a "call for a perception of all people as having ambivalent and changing identities and thus also advocate for a contradictory notion of womanhood that is influenced by both feminine and masculine features" (6). Tatar's Trickster Girl, earlier discussed, incorporates feminine and masculine characteristics, being described as androgynous. In addition, third-wave feminism

> endeavors to subvert patriarchal power structures and gender hierarchies through the revaluation and equalization of traditional femininity as well as a reconceptualization of gender as non-binary. It also works with an intersectional approach that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and insists on the inclusion of previously marginalized groups. (10)

Most YA dystopian fiction protagonists do not follow socially constructed notions of femininity, even though some are forced into them, as well as are coerced to engage in performances that the ruling society declares to be feminine. In these representations, the grasp that feminine and femininity are socially constructed is emphasised. YA dystopian heroines, then, often stand in the in-between of what is attributed to feminine and masculine, disrupting once binary oppositional models of gender.[133]

[133] There are contrary views to this perspective. From a broad perspective, observing the archetype of warrior women, Tatar wonders if "we risk installing a disturbing new archetype of female heroism, one that emulates the muscle and agility of classic male heroes" (*The Heroine with 1001 Faces* ch. 6). Phillips states that Katniss is an intensification of a straight gender swap, bearing "many of the (toxic) traits of heroic masculinity" (*Female Heroes in Young Adult Fiction* 16). Katniss is the archetypal hero inverted (that is, she inverts binaries rather than questioning them or placing herself in the in-between liminal space), leaving the monomyth hero structure intact. My perception of Katniss's relationship with binaries diverges, as I see her as challenging binaries (if not all, some) rather than inverting them. For example, Katniss destabilises and reconfigures the binary provider/nurturer (and, as a consequence, she also disrupts the binary masculine/feminine, since provider is associated with male and nurturer with female). Standing in the bracket separating these binaries, Katniss is imbued with characteristics from both sides. Since she provides food for her family and nurtures her sister, Prim, acting as her caregiver, Katniss blurs the distinction between caring and providing. Besides, as Tatar contends by analysing Suzanne Collins's interview with *School Library Journal*, Katniss and the mockingjay, a liminal creature, are "zoological doubles" (*The Heroine with 1001 Faces* ch. 6). To give context, in the interview, Collins tells that "Katniss

Indeed, as I have been addressing and discussing throughout this thesis, YA dystopian heroines find themselves in liminal positions, be it where they stand, where they move, or their bodies (their always-changing body serves as a fundamental force for deconstructing oppositional binaries). As Hentges and Sean P. Connors note about the Girl on Fire, she "elides boundaries and resists simple categorization" ("Introduction" 7).

For YA dystopian heroines, heroism becomes a process of resistance rather than conquest, contrary to that of the hero. Further, if trauma is taken into account, other perspectives can be uncovered and, perhaps, the monomyth does not remain that intact. In the framework of the monomyth, trauma, even though not explicitly identified as such, can be featured at the beginning of the hero's journey. This trauma is represented as a disruption in the hero's daily life, compelling him to depart on a quest to mend injustices; however, the emotional ramifications of this disruption are rarely lingered over. Throughout his adventure, the hero confronts ethical dilemmas and monstrous adversaries and is physically injured. Rather than being framed as traumatic events, these challenges are portrayed as trials that prove his heroism and worthiness. Enduring several traumatic experiences during his journey, the hero returns home whole since these experiences were perceived merely as obstacles to be overcome. The monomyth framework tends to minimise the lasting nature of trauma. YA dystopian fiction revises the monomyth through its representation of heroines, each of whom grapples with varying degrees of mental instability. These narratives do not depict a full recovery for the traumatised heroines, acknowledging the persistence of psychological wounds while exploring the resultant psychological scars. These narratives also connect trauma to the social and political power structures that shape the characters' experiences. Notably, contemporary YA fiction on the whole reworks the hero's journey, Olivia Sandoval suggests. Besides other transformations that Sandoval examines, to

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is the mockingjay. She is the thing that should never have been created, that the Capitol never intended to happen. In the same way they just let the jabberjays go and thought, 'We don't have to worry about them,' they thought, 'We don't have to worry about District 12.' And this new creature evolved, which is the mockingjay, which is Katniss" (Margolis "The Last Battle"). Hence, Katniss's identity is in-between human and non-human; her status is ambiguous not only to Panem's categorisation system but also blurs the monomyth's binary human/non-human, suggesting that identity intertwines with the other-than-human.

reflect “the psychological realities of adolescent protagonists, whose experiences are often shaped by memory, trauma, and shifting perspectives,” YA fiction moves from the classic monomyth’s linearity [disrupting] this flow through nonlinear timelines, flashbacks, and fragmented narrative arcs” (34). While in the monomyth, trauma is a means to heroism, in YA dystopian fiction, it becomes a defining state that reshapes the concept of heroism. In other words, whereas the monomyth portrays trauma as an experience that generates heroism and is ultimately transcended, YA dystopian narratives depict trauma as a persistent state that alters the very nature of heroism itself.

Through this reconceptualisation, YA dystopian fiction illustrates that recovery from trauma is not an obligatory trajectory. In *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants* (2013), Lydia Kokkola argues that abused teenage characters are “further disempowered by the demand that [they] recover” (205). The demand to recover is often associated with the expectation of narrative closure, in which characters must be recovered by the story’s conclusion. However, in the selected main corpus, this demand is not obligatory since, as the journey ends, the YA dystopian heroine is still struggling with the consequences of her trauma – though some YA dystopian heroines do find themselves being pushed to recover by other characters, such as Katniss who must become the Mockingjay the District Thirteen rebels want her to be (of course, their demand cannot be satisfied because Katniss suffers from PTSD and she does not undergo a “magical” recovery to meet their desires).

In early Gothic fiction, madwomen are those who do not fit the expected image of female behaviour in both the domestic and social spheres. Frequently, women who succumb to madness are subjected to severe punishment, facing a deadly fate. However, while in early Gothic there is no space to understand madness and integrate it into a tale of female empowerment, in recent Gothic fiction, female authors have begun using madness to discover their true selves, transforming stigmatisation into a journey of personal power. Karen F. Stein, in her discussion of monsters and madwomen in Female Gothic, argues that in these more recent Gothic texts, heroines “experience madness as a stage on the journey toward self-knowledge.” Throughout “these inner

journeys – the female equivalent of the male adventure[134] – the heroines learn to identify with their hidden selves and to reaffirm the values which had previously been denied [reintegrating] split selves, restore their fragmented identities and return to sanity and social acceptance with open-ended possibilities before them" (124).

In this context, understanding trauma as Gothic madness, the YA dystopian heroine can be interpreted as a contemporary incarnation of the madwoman in the attic, as conceptualised by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. However, unlike the traditional madwoman in the attic archetype, this modern iteration is no longer regarded as a monstrous double figure of the heroine, but rather the heroine herself. Nonetheless, in my interpretation, she continues challenging and revising the self-definitions of patriarchal culture on female characters. As a figure written primarily by women (the only series in the main corpus authored by a male author is Neal Shusterman's Arc of a Scythe), she also articulates rage, repression, and resistance to patriarchal culture, striving for change through large-scale rebellions aimed at building a new societal order. Trauma – madness – empowers the YA dystopian heroine, rather than disempowering her. Moving between reality and hallucination, madness and sanity (lucid moments and moments when they are taken over by nightmares, hallucinations, and panic attacks), characteristics of the oppositional binaries are enmeshed in their bodies and psyches. In the binary sane/insane, they travel the tenuous line that separates these – a liminal line where they continually find themselves.

Overall, in her quest into herohood, the YA dystopian heroine leaves her home, her initiation is embedded in painful and violent experiences that leave physical and mental scarring, and she returns to a community she has changed and where she must learn to cope with her trauma. In chapter 2.1.1, I explore the forms of violence witnessed, experienced, and inflicted by the YA dystopian heroine and their consequences for her psyche. Left mentally scarred, the YA dystopian heroine faces

[134] Stein compares the differences between male and female rebellion in Gothic literature: "For a man to rebel, to leave a comfortable home and to search for truth are noble acts. Thus, this pattern of behavior is expressed in the heroic epic. For women, however, such assertations of questioning self-hood have been deemed bizarre and crazy" (123).

PTSD, depression, panic attacks, insomnia, split selves, among other mental conditions that render her what would once be described as "hysterical." Nevertheless, trauma becomes central to her journey into new forms of heroism. Instead of being "barred" from being a hero(ine), she redefines the concept: a hero(ine) can break down and question herself and her actions.

Furthermore, because of experiencing a Gothic girlhood, the Gothic heroine "of early Gothic fiction, is continually faced with the prospect of the dissolution of all expectation and hope" (Punter and Byron 276). Similarly, the YA dystopian heroine, who also experiences this form of girlhood, is incessantly faced with situations that compel her to reassess her sense of hope – the hope for a better future is always in danger of being extinguished. However, in the end, the YA dystopian heroine rises from the ashes, truly becoming the heroine she was always meant to be: a heroine who defies notions of meekness and passivity, brings down totalitarian regimes, and becomes a beacon of hope for both her community and readership.

3.2. Bright Futures: Envisioning Eutopian Communities

"Dystopian society," Erika Gottlieb asserts, "evokes the horror of a nightmare" (274). A dystopian society is a society that

> puts its whole population continuously on trial, [disenfranchises and enslaves] entire classes of its own citizens, [and] by glorifying and justifying violence by law, preys upon itself. Like a dysfunctional family that maintains its framework but is unable to fulfil its function to advance the good of each member of the family, who would, in unison, form a community, dystopian society is what we would today call dysfunctional; it reveals the lack of the very qualities that traditionally justify or set the *raison d'être* for a community. As a result, dystopian society is ultimately a moribund, death-bound society that is incapable of renewal, where the ruling elite cling to their existence as parasites on their own people, whom they devour in the process. (40-1)

In YA dystopian fiction, societies share these characteristics. The ruling authorities employ control mechanisms to preserve power and subjugate citizens, as well as, understanding the importance of community, formulate policies aimed at preventing the emergence of a sense of community. "If you destroy the ability, or simply the desire, to give or to share amongst a group of people," Bree Despain emphasises, "you will destroy the heart of the community. And if you destroy the heart of community and replace it with fear, then you will control the people" (238). The devices employed (such as the enforcement of social policing) do not permit the development of bonds between individuals or the ability to create roots or a common history. In Matched, the erasure of cultural and historical hallmarks is a deliberate strategy to inhibit critical thought and communal solidarity. Further, by seizing the artefacts, the Society is effectively severing the connection between individuals and their ancestors, as all these objects are family heirlooms. The Society undermines familiar bonds as well as ties to place. For example, after marriage, the wife relocates to her husband's Province, resulting in a severance of her ties with her parents and siblings. After moving out of their original Province, many individuals do not maintain regular contact with their families. This estrangement extends to grandchildren, who often experience a brittle relationship with their maternal grandparents. When Cassia reflects on her relationship with her paternal grandfather in contrast to her maternal grandparents, she observes that "[w]e communicate via port every few months and visit every few years. Many grandchildren watch the Final Banquet on the portscreens, too, one step removed from what's happening" (70). Moreover, when Cassia and her family are Relocated to another Province, leaving the street where she grew up, she perceives that

> a new sign has been hammered into place: Garden Borough. Without the trees and without the name, Mapletree Borough is gone. It's as though it never existed. […] Everyone else will live on here in Garden Borough. They've already added extra newroses to all the flower beds.
>
> …
>
> The quickness with which Ky disappeared, with which the Markhams disappeared, with which we will disappear, makes me cold. It is as if we never happened. And I suddenly remember a time

> back when I was small, when I used to look for the air train home to Stony Borough and we had paths made of low flat stones that led to our doors.
>
> *This happened before*. This Borough keeps changing names. (Condie, *Matched* 363)

How can individuals know where they come from or grew up if their Borough name keeps changing? Such strategies illustrate the Society's broader aim to fragment community ties and diminish the significance of personal and communal history.

Similar to the Society, in The Selection, Gregory Illéa implements a system that cuts ties between families and ancestors. Here, it is done by erasing their last name. The surnames of many people, especially those of the lower castes, become simply suggestive of their profession: America Singer (as a Five she is a performer, singing and playing musical instruments), Aspen Ledger (Sixes can be secretaries), and Anna Farmer (Fours can be farmers). Cutting relational ties between families is a common strategy implemented by totalitarian societies in YA dystopian literature in order to keep everyone under their power.[135] In Divergent, teenagers who choose to transfer to a faction different from the one they grew up in are encouraged to cut all ties with their previous faction, including their parents. The Factions' motto is "faction before blood." As Tris ponders, "[m]ore than family, our factions are where we belong" (Roth, *Divergent* 43). In Delirium, even though families are not torn apart physically, the surgical procedure that individuals are obliged to undergo not only erases romantic love but also

[135] In history, there have been instances of totalitarian governments implementing family policies that dismantled familial unity. Maoism, a *doctrine composed of the ideology and methodology for revolution* developed by Mao Zedong, a Chinese politician, revolutionary and political theorist who founded the People's Republic of China, saw the family and the clan "as institutions that kept the peasants oppressed so he issued several policies to break down the family structure. Families were made to eat in cafeterias; which meant no home needed a kitchen, children were raised in daycare centers instead of being looked after by relatives, parents were cremated instead of buried, and the ancestor tablets (family records) and ancestral halls were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution" ("The Chinese Family Under Mao"). In Cambodia, Pol Pot, the leader of the political movement Khmer Rouge, forced apart countless Cambodian families. The political regime responsible for the Cambodian genocide, "made it official policy to dismantle the nuclear family, which it considered a capitalist relic, and divided much of the population into slave labor camps" (Roasa "Cambodian families separated"). Children were forced to leave their parents and "taught that the Khmer Rouge were their real family. They lost all their rights and were forced to work as soldiers, prison guards, farmers and spies – spying on adults" ("The country that closed all schools").

the ability for familial and affectionate love. Parents fulfil the societal obligation of raising their children, yet are incapable of nurturing emotional attachment. Due to the absence of attachment, some parents reject their offspring. As Lena explains,

> in the absence of *deliria nervosa*, some people find parenting distasteful. Thankfully, cases of full-blown detachment—where a mother or father is unable to bond normally, dutifully, and responsibly with his or her children, and winds up drowning them or sitting on their windpipes or beating them to death when they cry—are few. (Oliver, *Delirium* 7)

Following the medical procedure, engagement with blood relatives becomes infrequent. Lena rarely meets up with her sister, only seeing her because of mandatory visits, which are often scheduled weeks in advance.

The societies in which these teenage girls grow up often are presented as fragmented: as has been shown, YA dystopian heroines come from broken families (these girls have lost their parents and/or siblings) and ritualised violence is accepted as a form of social cohesion (the rites of passage these girls experience are rooted in forms of violence and segregation; indeed, even communities based on castes and ageism are rooted in ritualised violence). Only through a grand-scale rebellion can society achieve the transformation needed for citizens to (re)gain their freedom. A central feature of YA dystopian fiction, as previously explored, is the open ending, which concedes eutopian possibilities for the narrative's heroines and societies undergoing reconstruction in the aftermath of the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. In other words, because these narratives feature endings in which the pathways to the future present countless possibilities, society can move from a dystopian nightmare to social dreaming. The YA dystopian heroine has "the optimism or the opportunity to re-construct a world, most often within the confines of a new or evolving community structure" (Hentges 195). Hence, the YA dystopian heroine is frequently placed in positions of leadership within these emerging and/or evolving communities. It is "[g]irls who survive [who] become our leaders and have the responsibility to build a future community together" (198).

Examining four YA dystopian novels that depict "intriguing explorations of young women's utopian capacity for leadership and for re-visioning traditional power relations and social structures" ("'Belonging' in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction" 40), Patricia Kennon pinpoints the role teenage female girls play in the construction of child-centric communities.[136] However, child-centric communities are often under threat because the governing systems have yet to be challenged, and, consequently, Kennon asserts,

> despite these novels' empowering message of young female characters' potential for creating new configurations of spatial politics and new visions of future societies, it is the case that inherited regulatory systems such as the home and patriarchal authority seem to exert an overwhelming ideological pressure on restabilising these child-centric alternative communities as conservative social and spatial arrangements, embedded in traditional conventions of control and authoritarian power relations. (48)

In more recent YA dystopian fiction (the texts Kennon analyses were published between 1994 and 2004), the emerging communities do not have their social structures organised around young people. This is not to say that such a society cannot be found in the narratives under study. For instance, in The Darkest Minds, East River represents one such community. East River is described as "a place where any kids on the outside can go and live together. The Slip Kid, who runs the show, can get you in touch with your folks without the PSFs finding out about it. There's food, a place to sleep—well, you get the picture" (Bracken, *The Darkest Minds* 147-8). It is a utopian community for Psi children. However, the Slip Kid is Clancy, and he is not a benevolent leader. Not only does he not allow Ruby and her friends to leave the camp, but he also leaks its location to the government for his own insidious objectives: to control the Reds. Additionally, Knox, a blue teenage boy, having heard of East River, pretends to be Slip Kid and creates his own tribe. He controls this community through humiliation and abuse. Teenage girls are sexually harassed and abused by Knox and his most trusted blue male followers.

[136] The novels examined by Kennon are Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* (2004), O.T. Nelson's *The Girl Who Owned a City* (1995), Marcus Sedgwick's *Floodland* (2000) and Gary Kilworth's *The Electric Kid* (1994).

Even though these communities offer counter-models to the dystopian world, they are both embedded in traditional conventions of control and authoritarian power relations. Because of this, child-centric communities cannot thrive, and their eventual dissolution is expected – they are represented as transitional. Hence, the YA dystopian heroine aims to build communities that exist between old and new socio-political models, rather than entirely replacing one with the other. Community blueprints are built betwixt and between, in the bracket that separates both these models. Through building new community models in this liminal space, YA dystopian narratives, besides positioning teenage girls as agents of transition, imagine alternative, eutopian futures. I note, however, that the emerging communities in YA dystopian fiction do not fulfil their eutopian potential, even though they offer a utopian impulse (see chapters 1.3 and 1.3.2).

Sean Daniel Donnelly flags the dystopian girl for failing to achieve utopian ideals (see chapter 1.5), since she survives the social systems that produce oppression rather than transforming them. For Donnely, the dystopian girl indicates a rejection or failure of utopian ideals and calls into question the possibility of different futures. First and foremost, as I have been discussing throughout this thesis, the YA dystopian heroine denounces the wrongdoings of social-political systems that are embedded in contemporary society. Second, truthfully, the YA dystopian heroine does not offer a blueprint for moving beyond these social-political structures when the narrative comes to a close. As Hentges upholds, "[m]any of our YA dystopia stories end with ashes to build from or with structures to re-make [and the] building of new communities is the work for the girls to inspire and will fall to the next generation" (197). The YA dystopian heroine does not construct a utopia, yet she offers hope for a better society to emerge from the ashes of a corrupted one. Recalling Basu Balaka, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz's observation that YA dystopian narratives place hope for a better future in the young teenage protagonists (7), as a teenager, the YA dystopian heroine becomes central to imagining the future. Although these words might echo Anita Harris's Future Girl (see chapter 1.4), because the teenage girls represent hope for the future, the narrative around the YA dystopian heroine reveals that social change is not rooted in

individualism. Consequently, it is not the Future Girl's individual success that will transform society. Social change entails confronting and overthrowing oppressive systems through collective resistance. Besides, while the Future Girl seems to be ignorant of socioeconomic barriers constituted by gender, race, social class, sexuality, and disability, the YA dystopian heroine exposes structural injustices (after all, she frequently lives in the margins) – in fact, dystopian fiction on the whole denounces contemporary socio-political structures that took a turn for the worse.

Furthermore, in YA dystopian fiction, Raffaella Baccolini contends, "[u]topia is neither reached nor accomplished at the end of the novels, but a utopian dimension is maintained for the readers and is fostered through hope and the education of desire" ("Literature, Gender, and Education for Children and Young Adults" 132). Additionally,

> the ambiguity of (un)happy endings serves to disturb, challenge, and motivate young adults. By resisting the convention of reassuring readers, the futures foreshadowed in these dystopian novels do not foreclose hope; they actually interpellate YA readers to intervene critically in the imagination and construction of a future they desire and to possibly do something in their present that can begin to build that future. (133)

YA dystopian fiction aims for eutopia, that is, the weaving of a better future, and the YA dystopian heroine is integral to constructing societies that aspire to improve themselves every single day. "The work of community," Hentges explains, "happens beyond the pages of the fictional futures of the Girls on Fire" (195).

To an important extent, if the YA dystopian heroine were to realise utopia, it would mean she would give readers the blueprint for utopia, each step to take and goal to achieve to live in it. Following this scheme, the human being would reach an immutable utopia. Remembering Fátima Vieira's assertion (see chapter 1.3), utopias' imagined goals are knowingly unattainable, yet it is precisely these goals that drive humanity to reshape and redefine itself continually. In other words, Vieira asserts, utopia is primarily an impulse, a critical mode of thinking. Utopia is not something that can ever be fully accomplished. It is, in fact, a journey where human beings continually

strive to improve themselves and their communities. Ruth Levitas proposes that "utopia is no longer constrained by the need to appear immediately possible [allowing] a much deeper exploration of the implications of alternative values than when it must be seen as realistically attainable from the here and now." Hence, because of such, "most utopias now present the transition as (i) merely possible, rather than inevitable; (ii) involving some kind of radical break from the present, necessary because it is not possible to identify trends in the present which seem likely to lead to utopia; (iii) a very vaguely defined event" (228). Hope plays a central role in this context. "If utopia is not to remain 'draped in black'," Levitas suggests,

> hope must be recovered – the hope that we may collectively build a world of peace, justice, cooperation and equality in which human creativity can find its full expression. The dream becomes vision only when hope is invested in an agency capable of transformation. The political problem remains the search for that agency and the possibility of hope; and only if we find it will we see our dreams come true. (231)

Hence, through this sphere of thought, as a being of hope, the YA dystopian heroine does fulfil utopian ideals. She embodies the value of utopia, having the ability to question her present (our future), exposing the injustices of society, and allowing for imagining an alternative future rooted in hope.

Quite interestingly, as the release year of the YA dystopian novels under analysis progresses, the representation of teenage girls in leadership roles becomes increasingly prominent. Once the totalitarian regimes and figures are overthrown, the task of re-establishing a new society begins, and the YA dystopian heroine occupies a central space in the construction of alternative futures. After having a pivotal role in the rebellion and/or in deconstructing the despotic social-political structure, they are not dismissed and/or isolate themselves from the new world arising (such as Katniss and Rhine). For instance, Amy, Juliette, and Aria, having accepted their body, become leaders in their community, assuming central roles in its (re)construction. June becomes "commander of all squadrons in California, the youngest lead commander in Republic history" (Lu,

Champion 344). Following her ascension to the throne of Luna and becoming queen, Cinder initiates the process of healing the socio-political relationships between Earthens and Lunars. Cinder works to extinguish class divisions, "compiling councils made up of both members from the Artemisian court and nominated citizens from the outer sectors to begin bridging the gap between the classes" (Meyer, *Winter* 816). Cinder also plans on dissolving the Luna's monarchy since she believes that what Levana did to hold to power is bound to happen again: "Some king or queen is going to brainwash the people, use their power to enslave them … There has to be some division of power, some checks and balances … so I've decided to change Luna into a republic, elected officials and all" (820). Although America becomes the queen of Illéa through marrying Maxon, she uses her new social role to call for the end of the caste system, as she defended during her participation in the Selection. Due to the open ending of YA dystopian fiction, the roles these teenage girls assume in their community are not always well-defined (such is the case of Mary, Cassia, Lena, Callie, Ruby, Sloane, Mare, and Citra). Nevertheless, no matter where they stand in the society that rises from the ashes of the totalitarian one, it is evident they will not allow the order that kept them under a tight leash to return. As Lena calls for the destruction of all walls, none of these YA dystopian heroines will allow physical and/or ideological walls to entrap them and/or their communities ever again. In Matched, for example, amidst all the worries about the new political system based on voting, Cassia reminds herself that "*Society can't take it all again unless we let them. We can get our memories back, but we will have to talk with each other and trust one another*" (Condie, *Reached* 507).

It is important to stress that when the YA dystopian heroine assumes a leadership role, it is situated within a horizontal leadership structure. Horizontal leadership "[u]nlike traditional hierarchical models, where decision-making and authority rest primarily with a single individual or small group [it] distributes leadership roles across [individuals] based on their skills, experience, and situational relevance" (Kay "Leading without a crown"). In this form of leadership, decisions are made collaboratively, and leaders act as coordinators and facilitators rather than as commanding figures. Although the YA dystopian heroine is a central figure in the (re)configuration of society, she does

not engage in hierarchical power structures. She participates in leadership and political horizontal structures, where everyone has a voice. For instance, Aria joins the council of the town being built in the Still Blue. The council is composed of both former Dwellers and Outsiders, and decisions are taken together. Although June becomes a commander, she refuses to exercise personal political authority, allowing the system itself to transform (here, power shifts from hierarchy to the citizens) rather than replacing one ruler with another. Even though she becomes a queen and can influence decisions, America cannot end the caste system on her own. She and the Northern Rebels, whom many citizens, including her father, secretly support, join in this task. Cinder creates a council that includes representatives from both Artemisia and the outer sectors to restore Luna collaboratively.

In these instances, the YA dystopian heroine parallels the monomyth, in which the hero, upon returning home, does not invariably assume the role of community leader, yet always emerges as a symbolic figure with authority and moral guidance (a status derived from the knowledge acquired during his adventures). The returned hero "brings newfound wisdom and abilities back to the ordinary world, contributing to the community's well-being" (Allison, Beggan and Goethals 1095). Similarly, the YA dystopian heroine uses her experiences to promote her community's welfare. Nevertheless, rather than deriving her authority from heroic deeds that perpetuate hierarchical structures, the YA dystopian heroine's authority stems from relational dynamics, underscoring the importance of collective action and horizontal leadership. In this context, the YA dystopian heroine stands on the bracket separating the oppositional binaries of individual leadership and collective empowerment. She embodies the role of a symbolic leader (representing individual authority) while simultaneously enabling the community to act collectively. Although individual leadership and collective empowerment are frequently framed as oppositional, the YA dystopian heroine illustrates how these roles can coexist, merging a symbolic influence with horizontal, relational power.

Due to the pivotal influence of the YA dystopian heroine in her new community, society's potential for social dreaming intertwines with the YA dystopian heroine's

trauma, which shapes the foundations of the new community (communities themselves are affected by collective and intergenerational trauma and constructed upon it). The traumatic experiences this teenage girl undergoes and their effects on her body and mind enable her to imagine and practise new forms of community far removed from the dystopian socio-political structures. After all, their trauma makes them more acute to the suffering of the other and their community, while sowing the seed of rebellion in their heart – they will not willingly perpetuate the systems that scarred them both internally and externally. It is important to stress that trauma also strips these girls of their identities – even of the identities that the authoritarian forces enforce upon them since they were born. "What it means to be a subject" Susan Hekman contends, "is central to the character of any society; defining the individual is a fundamental element of social organization. The definition of a subject in any given society provides individuals with the possibility of an identity" (113). Hence, YA dystopian heroines find themselves building a new subjectivity (and discovering an individuality they were not permitted to have under authoritarian regimes – for instance, Katniss is a girl from a mining town, Tris is first an Abnegation and later Dauntless, America is a Five, Aria is a Dweller, Ruby is an Orange, Mare is a Red) outside the governing structures. They do it in communities that do not share the same value system as the one in which they were raised (even though these communities might initially exist within the hostile systems). These teenage girls need these new communities to (re)shape their identity. Therefore, trauma becomes a resistance (and transformative) force.

How can, then, the YA dystopian heroine build communities that do not continue causing trauma and propagating structural violence? The uncovering of the buried past is not only significant to the heroine's own emancipation and revolt against the despotic authorities. The revelation of the past also impacts the community, which learns that the structures of their community are fraught – if not a flat-out lie. As approached in chapter 2, YA dystopian fiction represents the past as repressed. It becomes clear that if this past is not known and acknowledged, the community cannot move forward from its dystopian connections. It cannot build something different from what those who chained them and removed their individuality did.

In stories about heroines, according to Tatar, there is a greater emphasis on the power of connection. Heroines and their stories feature care, compassion, empathy, and connection. Through crafting a heroine's journey centred on the development of relational bonds and empathy among community, the authors of these stories, Tatar suggests, "have made it possible to reimagine the future, and [understand] how care, empathy, compassion, and new forms of justice […] are leading us to turn our backs on the heroic ideals we once embraced" (*The Heroine with 1001 Faces* Epilogue). Hohenstein's consideration of the model of the feminist quest heroine also emphasises the importance of community. Through the inclusion and depiction of elements that were once omitted from the hero's journey, from emotions and collaboration to care and resistance to patriarchal social-political structures, there is a shift in the narrative elements that pertain to the monomyth. The YA dystopian heroine also embraces these values. As Hentges explains, the Girl on Fire is characterised by her ingenuity and persistence, and is described as someone who loves, nurtures, and values collaboration. Undeniably, these are essential for fostering Victor Turner's communitas. In YA dystopian fiction, these values and characteristics are essential for her to build communities that move from structural violence and broken families to a community formed through mutual care and protection. For this reason, Katniss and Juliette killed President Alma Coin and the North America's Supreme Commander, respectively; Amy (Across the Universe) guarantees the freedom of *Godspeed*'s colony from the Financial Resource Exchange (FRE); Tris choses to erase the memories of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare; America refuses to allow the caste system to continue; Mare rejects the reestablishment of the Silver monarchy. These figures and authoritarian structures would keep perpetuating the same old models – societies that operate as sites of violence and surveillance, constructing spaces of normalising disciplinary power – that turned the world into a dystopia.

The construction of care-based communities is essential to the healing of the YA dystopian heroine – in fact, "the concept of community [becomes] the answer to overthrowing an oppressive regime" (Despain 251). Her trauma is not depicted as healed at the narrative's end – these girls must learn how to exist side-by-side with their

traumatic memories (something that is rarely portrayed). Because of this, communities build ways of living that do not erase collective or personal trauma. Instead of burying and/or perpetuating trauma, these flourishing communities use it to inspire kinship and care. Indeed, the trauma rooted in these new forms of community works to prevent individuals from going back to violent, authoritarian systems. Thus, only through the experience of Gothic girlhoods, the trauma, isolation, marginalisation, and liminality entrenched in it, can the YA dystopian heroine (re)construct her community. These communities stand within the bracket that separates oppositional binaries: in-between old and new socio-political models, agency and passivity (community members possess agency, which was once stripped from them by the totalitarian authorities; still, they belong to a supportive, communal network). Trauma opens doors to eutopian futures, building communities of resistance and care.

Notably, micro communities, may these be rebellious groups actively engaging in taking down the despotic authorities or groups of individuals that refuse to follow the rules, are the first contact the YA dystopian heroine has with communities formed under care-based policies, countering the social order of the dystopian system. In Delirium, Lena finds a community of care in a small group of Invalids, which is not only led by a female but also accepts same-sex relationships.[137] The members of the group take care of one another, providing water, provisions, protection, and shelter, rotating tasks, ensuring everyone survives. In The Darkest Minds, Ruby builds a community of care with Liam, Chubs, and Zu, while they travel in search of the utopian haven East River. These micro-communities, which are also embedded in individual and collective trauma due to the conditions imposed by the authoritarian figures and regimes, incorporate the values intended to be transplanted into a macro-community.

[137] According to the government, there are "hormonal imbalances that occasionally lead to Unnaturalism, to boys being attracted to boys and girls to girls. These impulses, too, will be resolved by the cure" (Oliver, *Delirium* 52). Same-sex relationships are not accepted in the cured society.

Conclusion

Rebellion is an arrow
Wired to the sun
Igniting everyone
Igniting everyone

Patti Smith, *Capitol Letter*

At the beginning of this project, I proposed to answer the following research question: what kind of Gothic visions are constituted, and how are they represented in English-language YA dystopian fiction? During the process of close reading, I identified three key themes intrinsic to the Gothic that YA dystopian fiction assimilates: power (encompassing violence, surveillance, entrapment and isolation), the presence of the past, and liminality. The selection of these themes, as previously articulated, was not random; rather, it stemmed from a thorough analysis of critical and theoretical frameworks associated with the Gothic (see chapter 1.1) and a deliberate focus on themes that are frequently associated with the literary category of YA fiction, particularly those that resonate with questions of power and agency.

In this analytic process, it became evident that through applying a Gothic lens to YA dystopian fiction, the usage of Gothic mode is essential for the construction of a dystopian reality (specifically, the atmosphere of fear and anxiety that permeates YA dystopian narratives can only be effectively crafted through incorporating these Gothic themes). Furthermore, the emergence of the YA dystopian heroine as a figure who opens doors into eutopian futures in their imagined worlds, which transcend beyond the confines of fiction into the real-world, is rendered possible by her engagement with experiences characteristic of a Gothic girlhood. Remarkably, the intersection of the fields of Gothic Studies, Utopian Studies, YA Studies and girlhood studies permits to unbury new perspectives on these novels. Indeed, the exploration through the Gothic lens brings another utopian dimension to YA dystopian fiction.

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In the YA dystopian fiction studied, the female protagonists experience childhoods marked by traumatic events and their trauma is further exacerbated in their adolescence since they inhabit a society where violence is pervasive, used as a tool to keep citizens under control (and, to some extent, it is specifically targeted at young females). Here, as in trauma fiction, the traumatised protagonist "brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values or ideologies" (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" 155). In these dystopian narratives, individual trauma is deeply interconnected with the larger socio-political structures, where violence, as in the Gothic mode, runs rampant, especially against teenage girls, whose bodies are objectified, beaten, imprisoned, and marginalised. The language used by Katniss (The Hunger Games), Juliette (Shatter Me), Tris (Divergent), Mare (Red Queen), Kate (Monster of Verity), and Ruby (The Darkest Minds) to describe the aftermath effects of the traumatic experiences and memories of the violent moments that traumatise them engages with the Gothic imaginary: from nightmares of being buried alive and doubles to phantom feelings and a sense of claustrophobia.

Violence serves not only as a catalyst for societal change but also as a driver of character growth. For instance, Sean P. Connors and Matt Dingle, in their analysis of Katniss's refusal to kill Peeta and instead consume the poisonous berries, assert that the narrative of The Hunger Games "suggests that the cycle of violence can be disrupted when good people become aware of it and choose not to participate in it" ("'The Poor Get the Worst of It'"). By refusing to become the sole Victor, Katniss actively resists the violence that the Capitol wields to control its citizens, thereby igniting a rebellion by showing everyone that they are more than just a piece in the Capitol's Games and can fight back against the violence they continually experience. The same narrative plot can be observed in the other series, where teenage girls such as Juliette, Mare, Kate, and

Ruby leverage their experiences of violence from an early age to recognise that their repressive world needs to change, thereby disrupting the cycle of violence that has kept the socially marginalised powerless and passive.

Furthermore, teenage girls inhabit a "surveillance society"[138] (Lyon, *The Electronic Eye* 3), wherein their lives are scrutinised to the tiniest detail, and their personal data is systematically gathered and stored. This process serves not only to exert control but, more insidiously, to ensure they do not emerge as potential threats that must be contained. YA dystopian heroines are subjected to the pervasive gaze of totalitarian, patriarchal surveillance, a condition that echoes the plights faced by the Gothic heroine. However, whereas the Gothic heroine often discovers fleeting moments of agency within the hidden spaces designed to observe her, the YA dystopian heroine must negotiate her agency under the constant gaze of surveillance.

These YA dystopian teenage girl protagonists learn to manipulate the surveillance mechanisms and turn them to their own advantage. Under the dictatorial structure's watchful eye, rather than succumbing to the system and becoming docile bodies that fail to realise their full potential, these protagonists fight for their agency and freedom. In such instances, surveillance fails its objective of producing the desired docile bodies. It is important to emphasise that the production of docile bodies in the enclosed and tightly regulated societies of YA dystopian fiction is made possible precisely through the relentless surveillance implemented by the panoptic regime. These dystopian societies operate not only as sites of surveillance but also as spaces of normalising disciplinary power.

Initially, these girls attempt to remain compliant with the surveillance systems (even if such compliance is all a futile effort either to fit into the system or to avoid attracting the wrong attention), because, as Lena (Delirium) explains, "[y]ou may not like the patrols and the identity checks, but since you know it's all done for your

[138] David Lyon characterises the surveillance society as one in which "[p]recise details of our personal lives are collected, stored, retrieved and processed every day within huge computer databases belonging to big corporations and government departments" (*The Electronic Eye* 3).

protection, it's impossible not to cooperate" (Oliver, *Delirium* 58). Nonetheless, manipulating surveillance by behaving as expected or hiding their innermost thoughts can only take them so far. Katniss cannot convince everyone that she is merely a love-struck teenage girl. Lena is apprehended by the regulators and restrained after being diagnosed with *amor deliria nervosa*. Rhine (The Chemical Garden) returns to the site of her confinement after becoming severely ill; her body is subjected to scientific experiments without her knowledge, and without medical care, she is close to death. Sloane (The Program), despite all her efforts, is nevertheless taken into The Program. Unlike the Gothic heroine, who can retreat into hidden spaces to evade the gaze, these YA dystopian heroines have nowhere to hide. However, in contrast to the Gothic heroine, who often loses her agency once she returns to the "light," finding herself ensconced in a marriage, YA dystopian heroines are able to hold onto their agency by physically escaping the system that seeks to contain them. Of course, this physical escape can be thwarted because of enclosing walls.

Through the presence of visible and invisible walls, YA dystopian fiction draws on the Gothic mode's characteristics of imprisonment and consequent escape. The attempts of YA dystopian heroines to run during moments of claustrophobic distress are met with walls that entrap them in dystopian spaces inhabited by monstrous societies and beings, both literal and figurative. In a manner akin to the Gothic heroine, who discovers her agency through her flight from incarcerating spaces, the act of escaping these all-encompassing walls similarly activates the agency of these teenage girls. However, while classic Gothic narratives frequently emphasise the terror and paralysis experienced by the Gothic heroine, YA dystopian fiction transforms these motifs into narratives centred on agency and rebellion. The moment of escape from totalitarian authorities transcends mere liberation from physical entrapment; it emerges as a symbolic act of self-determination. In fact, it represents a pivotal moment of transformation, enabling these teenage girls not only to challenge various forms of entrapment but also to halt and destroy them. In alignment with the Gothic narrative of transgression and escape, YA dystopian heroines oppose and resist these forms of entrapment by trespassing into forbidden spaces, uncovering concealed knowledge, and

challenging the systems established to confine them. The uncovering of this concealed knowledge often arises from unearthing the past – a past that has been obscured and/or distorted to uphold the regime's narrative and force citizens into positions of submission.

When Lena escapes to the Wilds, she is rescued by Raven, the leader of a small group of migratory Invalids. Believing she has lost Alex, who was unable to cross the fence with her, a heartbroken Lena finds herself dwelling on the past, to Raven's dismay. As Raven often says, "the past is dead" (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 85). Nonetheless, in these dystopian worlds, time and space intertwine to ensure that whatever lies in the past bursts into the present, contradicting Raven's mantra. The past exerts a suffocating influence over the present: it is not dead until it is unburied, confronted, and restored. In order for YA dystopian heroines to engage with a past that has been deliberately manipulated and nearly destroyed by authoritarian forces, the selected YA dystopian narratives employ the Gothic motif of the found manuscript (the term "manuscript" describes not only manuscripts as such, but also records, old journals, diaries, letters, recordings, books, and even video records). The incorporation of discovered documents from a lost past not only reintroduces forgotten histories into the narrative but also complicates these girls' comprehension of their surroundings. They ultimately empower them with the knowledge necessary to reject their current reality. Cassia (Matched) no longer aspires to be an Official and advocates for individuals' freedom of choice. America (The Selection) resolves to dismantle a hierarchical system rooted in a petty man's vengeance. Likewise, Amy (Across the Universe) becomes determined to tear down the walls of *Godspeed* after discovering that Centauri-Earth lies just beyond the spaceship.

Another recurring motif in YA dystopian fiction that connects with the return of the past is the monster. Even though, as explored, in YA dystopian fiction the monster often symbolises fears and transgressions, it also serves as a memento of the past – after all, "[t]he meaning of the monster is in the eye of the beholder and therefore they can be therapeutic, familiar, reassuring as well as evil" (Erle and Hendry 4). As a representation of the characters' traumatic past, the monster assumes a cathartic function. That is, as the adolescent protagonists navigate realities where past and

present intertwine through the figure of the monster, they are compelled to confront these haunting spectres of memory. Their encounters with monsters enable them to engage with the painful memories of their past, thereby initiating a process of personal transformation, acceptance, and/or healing. Hence, the confrontation with the monster encourages YA dystopian heroines to reflect on their traumatic experiences, leading to a transformation in their behaviour towards themselves, their relationships with others, and their broader social context – a relationship that will ultimately bring about social revolution and the (re)construction of a community.

Because of constant surveillance and isolation, as well as the dangerous creatures that inhabit these sites, liminal places are entrapping and dangerous to the YA dystopian heroines' survival. They echo a threat as they are dangerous and menacing to the characters, inducing in them a state of claustrophobia that may lead to mental and/or physical breakdown. Even though these spaces are full of possibilities, they frequently inspire feelings of terror and fear (on a small or large scale). As observed, Amy, Rhine, Juliette, and America feel claustrophobic in liminal spaces, and Katniss has a panic attack when she learns she has to go back to the arena after the announcement that, in the third Quarter Quell, the Tributes will be selected from the pool of Victors. However, liminal spaces are empowering for these female characters as they learn about themselves, can redefine themselves, question the authority of oppressive systems, and find agency within them. Because of this, despite all the dangers they contain, liminal spaces can be perceived as sites of safety; that is, they temporarily harbour the characters from the social-political world they inhabit and, through conflict, allow them to negotiate their identity. In this instance, liminal spaces are also sites of conflict and negotiation. Nevertheless, they can be traumatising, since teenagers develop a sense of self and girlhood through forced encounters with trauma within these sites. This same sense of threat is felt in the isolated, haunted settings of Gothic fiction.

However, liminality also empowers female characters. Standing on liminal thresholds empowers these protagonists, who social structures and norms have not yet engulfed. In the end, experiencing, being, and moving in and out of liminal spaces are

essential for YA dystopian heroines to understand their existence and develop a sense of being. Hence, YA dystopian heroines thrive in liminality, disrupting oppositional binaries, becoming politically active. They become beacons of hope. They resist and challenge oppressive systems, emerge with a new sense of agency and autonomy (that they can keep), and (re)gain power and control. They critique the patriarchal system that oppresses the Other. They critique contemporary discourses that are becoming (if they have not yet become) deeply embedded in society. They must fight for what they have, along, to a more or less extent, with the community.

These three Gothic themes are imperative to constructing the dystopian world's narrative, where the shadow of Chris Baldick's assertion that, in the Gothic, the tension between time and space results in mental and physical breakdown haunts them. The confrontation with power, the past, and liminality is the driving force behind YA dystopian heroines' efforts to destroy the world of shadows they live in – it is essential for their transformation into heroines. No longer the hero's prize, not because their scarred bodies and minds make them unfit, but rather because, as Cristina Santos suggests, they should be considered "as Cinderellas who are not waiting to be chosen by a Prince Charming, but rather have the power to choose for themselves" (*Untaming Girlhoods* 132), YA teenage girls become heroines, re-envisioning the monomyth. This is possible because the teenage girl protagonists in these narratives are embedded in liminality. For various reasons, their bodies are liminal: they are teenage girls, between childhood and adulthood, whose female bodies are unstable. Their liminality, that is, their instability, in a totalitarian world that aims to be stable and unchangeable, creates space for them to disrupt socially constructed concepts. Thus, firstly, YA dystopian heroines and their stories, similar to those of contemporary girl/female heroines, show the importance of care, love, collaboration, resilience, and persistence, shifting away from the forms of individualism, mastery, and conquest that permeate Joseph Campbell's monomyth. Secondly, trauma is no longer conceptualised merely as a series of challenges that serve to prove the hero's worth, with no emotional consequences for the psyche. YA dystopian heroines rework the representation of trauma found in the monomyth, acknowledging both its lasting scars and its persistence, and introducing the

idea that a hero(ine) can visibly experience moments of vulnerability and uncertainty (heroes also show vulnerability, but it is typically represented in a more restrained way).

Hence, the trauma that surfaces due to the analysed themes is crucial for the journey of the YA dystopian heroine towards growth, becoming an essential part of her rebellion against the dominant political structures, her journey in herohood, and the creation of communities that are rooted in values of care and empathy and are no longer defined by oppositional binary structures. Trauma enables YA dystopian heroines to imagine an equitable and ethically moral community, one in which the previous structures grounded in structural violence and a rigid (patriarchal) hierarchy have no place to exist. Paramount, this form of representation of trauma allows the construction of a more inclusive discourse on girlhood within and beyond the selected texts, where the negative outcomes of mental health are not erased. I draw attention to the fact that the rebellion is part of the healing process. Although rebellions are as traumatic as the harrowing experiences YA dystopian heroines undergo (some rebellions can even be more traumatic than the tormenting experiences they have faced until that moment), they are necessary for a future in which healing is possible for both the YA teenage girl protagonists and their communities. While the totalitarian regime is in place, there is no possibility for any of them to heal. Additionally, the rebellious acts these teenage girls perform in their transformation into heroines incite in real-life adolescents the development of socio-political agency, making them realise that they are "capable of speaking out against oppression in its myriad forms and willing to work in support of equity and justice for all people" (Connors, "Becoming Mockingjays" 28).

These themes combine to create Gothic girlhoods. By exploring the selected YA dystopian series, the present study demonstrates that YA dystopian heroines are intrinsically connected to Gothic girlhood; that is, the experience of Gothic girlhood is essential to the construction of the YA dystopian heroine. The violence, isolation, marginalisation, and liminality and the consequent trauma experienced by the teenage female protagonists of these dystopian narratives build new utopian forms of girlhood, outside the oppositional, hierarchical binary system and where mental health is acknowledged rather than silenced, not only for themselves but also for teenage girl

readers in the real world; that is, they construct girlhoods outside the social-political patriarchal system where teenage girls can wield power without being villainise or demonise, and their bodies do not have to follow social constructed patterns of femininity. These forms of girlhood permit teenage girls (hopefully, not only teenage girls but teenagers on a general level) to question the limitations placed upon them and (re)think the world, building deep, meaningful connections with individuals and communities as well as utopian spaces within themselves (who they want to be) and the communities they belong to.

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Appendices

Title	Author	Nationality	Year	Publisher	Series	Series Title
The Giver	Lois Lowry	American	1993	Houghton Mifflin	Yes	The Giver
Noughts & Crosses	Malorie Blackman	British	2001	Penguin	Yes	Noughts & Crosses
Mortal Engines	Philip Reeve	British	2001	Harper Collin US UK	Yes	The Hungry City Chronicles
Feed	M.T. Anderson	American	2002	Candlewick Press	Standalone	n/a
The House of the Scorpion	Nancy Farmer	American	2002	Atheneum Books for Young Readers	Yes	Matteo Alacran
The City of Ember	Jeanne DuPrau	American	2003	Random House Children's Books	Yes	Book of Ember
Epic	Conor Kostick	Irish	2004	O'Brien	Yes	Epic
Uglies	Scott Westerfeld	American	2005	Simon Pulse	Yes	Uglies
Genesis	Bernard Beckett	New Zealander	2006	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	Standalone	n/a
Life As We Knew It	Susan Beth Pfeffer	American	2006	HMH Books for Young Readers	Yes	Last Survivors
Incarceron	Catherine Fisher	British / Welsh	2007	Hodder Children's Books	Yes	Incarceron
The Declaration	Gemma Malley	British	2007	Bloomsbury USA Childrens	Yes	The Declaration
Unwind	Neal Shusterman	American	2007	Simon & Schuster	Yes	Unwind
The Roar	Emma Clayton	British	2008	Chicken House	Yes	The Roar
Little Brother	Cory Doctorow	Canadian	2008	Tor Books	Yes	Little Brother
The Adoration of Jenna Fox	Mary E. Pearson	American	2008	Henry Holt and Co.	Yes	Jenna Fox Chronicles
The Knife of Never Letting Go	Patrick Ness	British-American	2008	Walker Books	Yes	Chaos Walking
Gone	Michael Grant	American	2008	Katherine Tegen Books	Yes	Gone
The Other Side of the Island	Allegra Goodman	American	2008	Razorbill	Standalone	n/a

Appendix 2

Title	Author	Nationality	Year	Publisher	Series	Series Title
The Hunger Games	Suzanne Collins	American	2008	Scholastic Press	Yes	The Hunger Games
Shift	Charlotte Agell	American	2008	Henry Holt and Co.	Standalone	n/a
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Carrie Ryan	American	2009	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Yes	The Forest of Hands and Teeth
The Maze Runner	James Dashner	American	2009	Delacorte Press	Yes	The Maze Runner
Inside Out	Maria V. Snyder	American	2010	Mira Ink	Yes	Insider
The Line	Teri Hall	American	2010	Dial Books	Yes	The Line
Birthmarked	Caragh M. O'Brien	American	2010	Roaring Brook Press	Yes	Birthmarked
Dark Life	Kat Falls	Amercan	2010	Scholastic Press	Yes	Dark Life
Ship Breaker	Paolo Bacigalupi	American	2010	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Companion	Ship Breaker
The Reapers are the Angels	Alden Bell	American	2010	Hold McDougal	Cancelled	Reapers
Rot & Ruin	Jonathan Maberry	American	2010	Simon & Schuster	Yes	Rot & Ruin
The Unidentified	Rae Mariz	American	2010	Balzer + Bray	Standalone	n/a
Matched	Ally Condie	American	2010	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Yes	Matched
The Iron Thorn	Caitlin Kittredge	American	2011	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Yes	Iron Codex
The Water Wars	Cameron Stratcher	American	2011	Sourcebooks Fire	Standalone	n/a
Across the Universe	Beth Ravis	American	2011	Razorbill	Yes	Across the Universe
Drought	Pam Bachorz	American	2011	EgmontUSA	Standalone	n/a
Delirium	Lauren Oliver	American	2011	HarperCollins	Yes	Delirium
Wither	Lauren DeStefano	American	2011	Simon & Schuster	Yes	The Chemical Garden
Memento Nora	Angie Smibert	American	2011	Marshall Cavendish Children's Books	Yes	Memento Nora
Divergent	Veronica Roth	American	2011	Katherine Tegen Books	Yes	Divergent
Enclave	Ann Aguirre	American	2011	Feiwel & Friends	Yes	Razorland
Bumped	Megan McCafferty	American	2011	Balzer + Bray	Yes	Bumped
Possession	Elana Johnson	American	2011	Simon & Schuster	Yes	Possession
Blood Red Road	Moira Young	American	2011	Margaret K. McElderry Books	Yes	Dust Lands
Beauty Queens	Libba Bray	American	2011	Scholastic Press	Standalone	n/a
Awaken	Katie Kacvinsky	American	2011	HMH Books for Young Readers	Yes	Awaken
Ready Player One	Ernest Cline	American	2011	Crown Publishers	Yes	Ready Player One
Angelfall	Susan Ee	American	2011	Hodder & Stoughton	Yes	Penryn & The End of Days
Glow	Amy Kathleen Ryan	American	2011	St. Martin's Press	Yes	Sky Chasers
Eve	Anna Carey	Irish	2011	HarperCollins	Yes	Eve
The Pledge	Kimberly Derting	American	2011	Margaret K. McElderry	Yes	The Pledge
Shatter Me	Tahereh Mafi	American / Iranian	2011	HarperCollins	Yes	Shatter Me
Legend	Marie Lu	Chinese-American	2011	Putnam Juvenile	Yes	Legend
Cinder	Marissa Meyer	American	2012	Feiwel & Friends	Yes	The Lunar Chronicles
Article 5	Kristen Simmons	American	2012	Tor Teen	Yes	Article 5
Incarnate	Jodi Meadows	American	2012	Katherine Tegen Books	Yes	Newsoul
Under the Never Sky	Veronica Rossi	Brazilian-American	2012	HarperCollins	Yes	Under the Never Sky
Pure	Julianna Baggott	American	2012	Grand Central Publishing	Yes	Pure
Partials	Dan Wells	American	2012	Balzer + Bray	Yes	Partials Sequence
Starters	Lissa Price	American	2012	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Yes	Starters
Masque of the Red Death	Bethany Griffin	American	2012	Greenwillow Books	Yes	Masque of the Red Death
The Immortal Rules	Julie Kagawa	American	2012	Harlequin	Yes	Blood of Eden
The Selection	Kiera Cass	American	2012	HarperTeen	Yes	The Selection
Slated	Teri Terry	Canadian	2012	Orchad Books	Yes	Slated
Darkness Before Dawn	J.A. London	American	2012	HarperTeen	Yes	Darkness Before Dawn
Shadows Cast by Stars	Catherine Knuttson	Canadian	2012	Atheneum	Standalone	n/a
Chosen Ones	Tifanny Truitt	American	2012	Entangled Publishing	Yes	The Lost Souls
The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf	Ambelin Kwaymullina	Australia / Palyku	2012	Walker Books Australia	Yes	The Tribe
For Darkness Shows the Stars	Diana Peterfreund	American	2012	Balzer + Bray	Companion	For Darkness Shows the Stars
The Forsaken	Lisa M. Stasse	American	2012	Simon & Schuster	Yes	The Forsaken
Glitch	Heather Anastasiu	American	2012	St. Martin's Press	Yes	Glitch
The Lost Girl	Sangu Mandanna	Bengaluru-born	2012	Balzer + Bray	Standalone	n/a
What's Left of Me	Kat Zhang	American	2012	HarperCollins	Yes	The Hybrid Chronicles
Breathe	Sarah Crossan	Irish	2012	Greenwillow	Yes	Breathe
BETA	Rachel Cohn	American	2012	Hyperion	Yes	Annex
Mystic City	Theo Lawrence	American	2012	Delacorte Press	Cancelled	Mystic City
Ashes of Twilight	Kassy Tayler	American	2012	St. Martin's Press	Yes	Ashes Trilogy
Black City	Elizabeth Richards	British	2012	G.P. Puntnam's Sons BYR	Yes	Black City
Renegade	J.A. Souders	American	2012	Tor Teen	Yes	The Elysium Chronicles
The Darkest Minds	Alexandra Bracken	American	2012	Disney Hyperion	Yes	The Darkest Minds
Dualed	Elsie Chapman	Canadian	2013	Random House Books for Young Readers	Yes	Dualed
The Summer Prince	Alaya Dawn Johnson	American	2013	Scholastic	Standalone	n/a
When We Wake	Karen Healey	New Zealand	2013	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Yes	When We Wake
Orleans	Sherri L. Smith	American	2013	Putnam Juvenile	Standalone	n/a

Taken	Erin Bowman	American	2013	HarperTeen	Yes	Taken
Arclight	Josin L. McQuein	American	2013	Greenwillow Books	Yes	Arclight
Acid	Emma Pass	British	2013	Corgi Children's Books	Standalone	n/a
The Program	Suzanne Young	American	2013	Simon Pulse	Companion	The Program
Coda	Emma Trevayne	British (expatriate Am	2013	Running Press Kids	Yes	Coda
The 5th Wave	Rick Yancey	American	2013	G.P. Puntnam's Sons BYR	Yes	The 5th Wave
Anomaly	Krista McGee	American	2013	Thomas Nelson Publishers	Yes	Anomaly
Linked	Imogen Howson	British	2013	Simon & Schuster	Yes	Linked
Of Beast and Beauty	Stacey Jay	American	2013	Delacorte Press	Standalone	n/a
The Woodlands	Lauren Nicole Taylor	Australian	2013	Clean Teen Publishing	Yes	The Woodlands
The Coldest Girl in Coldtown	Holly Black	American	2013	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Standalone	n/a
Perfect Ruin	Lauren DeStefano	American	2013	Simon & Schuster	Yes	The Internment Chronicles
Pawn	Aimée Carter	American	2013	Harlequin	Yes	The Blackcoat Rebellion
Disruption	Jessica Shirvington	Australian	2014	HarperCollins	Yes	Disruption
Hungry	H.A. Swain	American	2014	Feiwel & Friends	Standalone	n/a
Plus One	Elizabeth Fama	American	2014	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	Standalone	n/a
After the End	Amy Plum	American	2014	HarperCollins	Yes	After the End
Reckoning	Kerry Wilkinson	British	2014	St. Martin's Press	Yes	Silver Blackthorn
The Murder Complex	Lindsay Cumming	American	2014	Greenwillow Books	Yes	The Murder Complex
Perfected	Kate Jarvik Birch	American	2014	Entangled Publishing	Yes	Perfected
Only Ever Yours	Louise O'Neill	Irish	2014	Quercus	Standalone	n/a
Extraction	Stephanie Diaz	American	2014	St. Martin's Press	Yes	Extraction
The Jewel	Amy Ewing	American	2014	HarperTeen	Yes	The Lone City
Atlantia	Ally Condie	American	2014	Dutton Children's	Standalone	
The Book of Ivy	Amy Engel	American	2014	Entangled Publishing	Yes	The Book of Ivy
Red Queen	Victoria Aveyard	American	2015	HarperTeen	Yes	Red Queen
The Glass Arrow	Kristen Simmons	American	2015	Tor Teen	Standalone	
The Fire Sermon	Francesca Haig	Australia	2015	Harper Voyager	Yes	The Fire Sermon
Rook	Sharon Cameron	American	2015	Scholastic Press	Standalone	n/a
5 to 1	Holly Bodger	Canadian	2015	Knopf Books for Young Readers	Standalone	n/a
The Choosing	Rachelle Dekker	American	2015	Tyndale House Publishers	Yes	Seer
The Stars Never Rise	Rachel Vincent	American	2015	Delacorte Press	Yes	The Stars Never Rise
The Scorpion Rules	Erin Bow	American-born Canad	2015	Margaret K. McElderry	Yes	Prisoners of Peace
Forget Tomorrow	Pintip Dunn		2015	Entangled Publishing	Yes	Forget Tomorrow
Flawed	Cecelia Ahern	Irish	2016	HarperCollins Children's Books	Yes	Flawed
This Savage Song	Victoria Schwab	American	2016	Greenwillow Books	Yes	Monsters of Verity
The Thousandth Floor	Katharine McGee	American	2016	HarperCollins	Yes	The Thousandth Floor
The Forgetting	Sharon Cameron	American	2016	Scholastic Press	Yes	The Forgetting
Metaltown	Kristen Simmons	American	2016	Tor Teen	Standalone	
The Surrendered	Case Maynard	American	2016	Blaze Publishing	Cancelled	The Surrendered
Children of Eden	Joey Graceffa & Laura	American	2016	Simon & Schuster Children's UK	Yes	Children of Eden
Flashfall	Jenny Moyer	American	2016	Henry Holt and Co.	Yes	Flashfall
Scythe	Neal Shusterman	American	2016	Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers	Yes	Arc of a Cythe
Shadow Fall	Audrey Grey	American	2016	Blaze Publishing	Cancelled	Shadow Fall
Ink	Alice Broadway	British	2017	Scholastic	Yes	Skin Books
Brave New Girl	Rachel Vincent	American	2017	Delacorte Press	Yes	Brave New Girl
The Marrow Thieves	Cherie Dimaline	Canadian / Indigenous	2017	Dancing Cat Books	Standalone	n/a
The Sandcastle Empire	Kayla Olson	American	2017	HarperTeen	Standalone	n/a
Want	Cindy Pon	Taiwanese	2017	Simon Pulse	Yes	Want
This Mortal Coil	Emily Suvada	Australian	2017	Simon Pulse	Yes	This Mortal Coil
LIFEL1K3	Jay Kristoff	Australian	2018	Knopf Books for Young Readers	Yes	Lifelike
Sunscorched	Jen Crane	American	2018	Carpe Noctem Publishing	Yes	Subterranean Series
We Set the Dark on Fire	Tehlor Kay Mejia	American	2019	Katherine Tegen Books	Yes	We Set the Dark on Fire
Dealing in Dreams	Lilliam Rivera	American / Latinx	2019	Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers	Standalone	n/a
Girls with Sharp Sticks	Suzanne Young	American	2019	Simon Pulse	Yes	n/a
Internment	Samira Ahmed	American-Indian	2019	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Standalone	Girls with Sharp Sticks
The Red Labyrinth	Meredith Tate	American	2019	Flux	Standalone	n/a
City of Beasts	Corrie Wang	American	2019	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Standalone	n/a
Verify	Joelle Charbonneau	American	2019	HarperTeen	Yes	Verify
War Girls	Tochi Onyebuchi	Nigerian American	2019	Razorbill	Yes	War Girls
The Sound of Stars	Alechia Dow	American	2020	Inkyard Press	Standalone	n/a
Agnes at the end of the World	Kelly McWilliams	American	2020	Little, Brown Book For Young Readers	Standalone	n/a
Silence is Also a Lie	Tracey Mathias	Wales	2020	Scholastic UK	Standalone	n/a
The Key to Fear	Kristin Cast	American	2020	Head of Zeus	Yes	The Key
Escaping Eleven	Jerri Chisholm	Unknown	2020	Entangled Publishing	Standalone	n/a
Dustborn	Erin Bowman	American	2021	HMH Books for Young Readers	Standalone	n/a

Appendix 3

Title	Author	Nationality	Year	Publisher	Series	Series Title	Translated	Awards/Nominees	Popular (Goodreads Book & Author Stats)	Ratings	Reviews
The Hunger Games	Suzanne Collins	American	2008	Scholastic Press	Yes	The Hunger Games	Yes	Yes	Yes	7430612	185,413
The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Carrie Ryan	American	2009	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Yes	The Forest of Hands and Teeth	Yes	Yes	Yes	84704	8,897
Matched	Ally Condie	American	2010	Dutton Books for Young Readers	Yes	Matched	Yes	Yes	Yes	725009	34,511
Across the Universe	Beth Revis	American	2011	Razorbill	Yes	Across the Universe	Yes	Yes	Yes	117637	10,471
Delirium	Lauren Oliver	American	2011	HarperCollins	Yes	Delirium	Yes	Yes	Yes	449031	27,524
Wither	Lauren DeStefano	American	2011	Simon & Schuster	Yes	The Chemical Garden	Yes	Yes	Yes	100104	8,188
Divergent	Veronica Roth	American	2011	Katherine Tegen Books	Yes	Divergent	Yes	Yes	Yes	3461468	113,878
Shatter Me	Tahereh Mafi	American / Iranian	2011	HarperCollins	Yes	Shatter Me	Yes	Yes	Yes	464094	44290
Legend	Marie Lu	Chinese-American	2011	Putnam Juvenile	Yes	Legend	Yes	Yes	Yes	480627	33,338
Cinder	Marissa Meyer	American	2012	Feiwel & Friends	Yes	The Lunar Chronicles	Yes	Yes	Yes	816638	62,302
Under the Never Sky	Veronica Rossi	Brazilian-American	2012	HarperCollins	Yes	Under the Never Sky	Yes	Yes	Yes	113676	8,984
Starters	Lissa Price	American	2012	Delacorte Books for Young Readers	Yes	Starters	Yes	Yes	Yes	42347	4,434
The Selection	Kiera Cass	American	2012	HarperTeen	Yes	The Selection	Yes	Yes	Yes	1256707	64,978
The Darkest Minds	Alexandra Bracken	American	2012	Disney Hyperion	Yes	The Darkest Minds	Yes	Yes	Yes	174145	17,834
The Program	Suzanne Young	American	2013	Simon Pulse	Companion	The Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	50866	6,171
Red Queen	Victoria Aveyard	American	2015	HarperTeen	Yes	Red Queen	Yes	Yes	Yes	802465	56,992
This Savage Song	Victoria Schwab	American	2016	Greenwillow Books	Yes	Monsters of Verity	Yes	Yes	Yes	89268	13,727
Scythe	Neal Shusterman	American	2016	Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers	Yes	Arc of a Scythe	Yes	Yes	Yes	216571	31,816