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A Sociopsychological Study of Dystopia in Price's *Starters*

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Abstract: *Dystopia and utopia work in parallel in the same sphere. Every Dystopia has a Utopia, and every negativity has traces of positivity. Utopia is an attribute of modern thought and one of the most obvious results. With a contradiction at its core that does not need to be resolved, it was clear early on in its history that it could take on new meanings, serve new purposes, and crystallize into new structures. This study describes the issues raised by the psychological condition of the protagonist in Lissa Price's Starters, which relates her situation to a dystopian world and leads her to Utopia. In contrast, a descendant of satirical Utopia and anti-utopia, dystopia rejects the idea that humans can attain perfection. Taking mainly the shape of a process and refusing the label of an 'impossible dream', Utopia is a program for change and a gradual betterment of the present; in that sense, it operates at different levels, as a means of political, economic, social, moral and pedagogical reorientation. Finally, Utopia has become a strategy of creativity, clearing the path humans can only follow: the path of creation.*

Key Words: Dystopian Fiction, Utopia, Bildungsroman, Patriarchy, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

The practice of placing female protagonists in terrifying situations in dystopian fiction in the twenty-first century provides a rich field of research on how gender and resistance are combined in dystopian fiction. This article's main goal is to examine the connection between the subject of a female uprising against the patriarchal status quo and various incarnations of Callie in current YA stories. *Starters* is a novel by Lissa Price, and the characters in the dystopian novel *Starters* are called "Starters" if they are under the age of 20, and "Enders" if they are older than 60. Many Starters are underage and in serious need because they cannot pay for their needs. They are underage and cannot work. With a neuro-chip inserted by the Body Bank, some Starters have heard of an unusual way to make money by allowing Enders to temporarily control their bodies. The primary girl, Callie, age 16, lost her parents in combat. Her entire world has been altered. She is an orphan and lives with her Sick younger brother Tyler and friend Michael. She had to go through many problems to survive. This novel is based on the writer's fantasy. This study will discuss the psychological concerns that the protagonist's situation raises about the dystopian society and those that push her toward Utopia, whereas dystopia, which is a humorous utopia and anti-utopia, denies the notion that humans may achieve accomplishment. Utopia, which primarily takes the form of action and rejects the nickname of an "impossible dream," is a plan for change and the gradual improvement of the current. In this way, it acts on various levels as a tool for political, economic, social, moral, and educational readjustment.

The Callie–Young Adult (YA) fiction connection and the topic of rebellion have received significant research attention. Contemporary young adult dystopias appear to be particularly pertinent in this study. This study focuses on the female protagonists of Lissa Price's *Starters*. The main character also succeeds in

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overcoming an evil force or completing a task that is often associated with men. Finally, she learns to have confidence in herself despite what others may think. In my opinion, many contemporary YA books fall under the feminist category because they encourage an environment in which women can be praised for their feminine and masculine features. This corroborates Levy's claim that female Bildungsroman model young female heroes who challenge patriarchal expectations (Cameron, [2012](#)).

Price's *Starters* include female heroes who defy expectations while also emphasizing empathy and the value of female friendship. They achieve this by excelling in circumstances that typically require masculine skills and decisiveness. In my thesis, I propose that the female characters of the YA novels *Starters* experience a coming-of-age process by battling the authority that oppressive institutions hold over them. When students refine their moral and practical intelligence, they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Their maturity matches their resistance. After each tale, they have partially completed their journey, either by successfully upsetting the patriarchal system or by failing in their efforts. Coming of age for them coincides with the emergence of their subjectivity and the statement of their resistance; internal psychosocial development is correlated with external social and political change, and vice versa.

Literature Review

Two closely related concepts have stimulated dystopian discourse: the concept of totalitarianism and the concept of scientific and technological advancement, which occasionally has contributed to the establishment of dictatorships rather than driving humanity to prosperity. The traditional dystopias by Yevgeny Zamyatin *We* ([1924](#)), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ([1932](#)), and George Orwell's ([1984](#)) contain the earliest illustrations of a future in which the results of scientific and technological advancements were abused and have served as inspiration for several generations of authors. This novel describes the features of a dystopian society in which people cannot speak, act, or even think freely. They are always under obstruction. How can someone change to be human? In this narrative, people have to face oppression under a dictatorship, but fear leads to loyalty to an agenda. Dystopias have been predominantly associated with science from the 1970s to the present, pushed by projective images of scientific and technological growth. Which has also developed a more keen political vocation?

Multiple anti-utopian authors have recently claimed that Utopia is about to vanish if it is not already extinct. These authors base their arguments on the notion that we are currently experiencing a period of cultural retreat and the disappearance of genuine political convictions. They view the fact that contemporary authors are limited to writing dystopias as an indicator of humanity's inability to present optimistic visions of the future. Absolutely, did not have a novel concept; the death of Utopia dominated intellectual discourse throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Three factors largely served as the foundation of this death forecast. Ernst Bloch ([2000](#)) suggested a balance between ideal and idealization. The project belongs to the world of idealization, whereas Utopia belongs to the sphere of the ideal. Political-ideological Utopia arises from the interaction of the ideal and the idealization; if it appears to have a short lifespan, this is due to the idealization's inability to cross the boundaries of the difficulties it intends to solve. The immeasurable and everlasting, however, feeds the utopian dream. Utopia is, therefore, best understood as a tactic. Utopia is used to question reality and the present by imagining an alternative world in a fictitious present or a hypothetical future. Utopia, which takes the form of a process and rejects the label of a "hopeless dream," is a strategy for transformation and progressive improvement of the present. As a result, it serves as an instrument for bureaucratic, economic, social, moral, and educational reorientation on multiple levels.

Utopianism has finally evolved into a creative approach, opening the way for man's sole feasible path — the path of creation. When we examine the roots of the literary genre of Utopia, we find that various factors have made Utopia plausible. To begin, as Chad Walsh ([1962](#)) says in his book *From Utopia to Nightmare*, man has always dreamed of a perfect utopian society since ancient times because "man is an animal with imagination" and has always strived to "transcend himself and nature" by picturing a better future. Second, according to Martin Plattel's ([1974](#)) *Utopian and Critical Thinking*, the dream of a utopia "along paradise-like conditions since the Garden of Eden initial paradise, when "a human being lives in perfect harmony with creation and himself," has been "unconsciously present" in our psyche. People are therefore constantly looking to bring it back and reproduce it because they are "afflicted by the memory of the

vanished paradise." This is the origin of utopian illusions (Manuel, 1967). Most early literary utopias had every aspect of the perfect place to live. Plato's first utopian work, *The Republic*, is divided into three classes, according to Nell Eurich's (1967) book *Science in Utopia: A Mighty Design*, with "leadership based on intelligence and character, not royalty of blood or inheritance" (Eurich, 1967, p. 63), includes philosophers (the ruling class), guardians (the middle class), and labourers (the lower class). Elimination of private property results in the establishment of a "community pattern of existence" in which "each man contributed according to his nature," eradicating envy and unfairness. As a result, the state now has a greater influence over men's education, employment, and exclusive elements like weddings. Everyone should defend "the objective of virtue founded on knowledge and understanding" because it is "the fundamental requirement of human beings, the response of his pursuit of happiness and, in turn, the vision of a perfect society" (Eurich, 1967, p. 69). The Republic's utopian civilization was founded entirely on the ideas of justice and ethics, as George Kateb (1963) stated: "The just man... will go to any length... to ensure the survival of the just state" (25-26). When he handled it personally, he avoided all wrongdoing. Thomas More's (1895) book *Utopia* explored issues similar to those in Plato's Republic and established this literary genre. Walsh (1962) notes that More's society is also built on the idea of communism, where everything is shared and everyone works for the success of the state and, hence, the commonwealth rather than their own gain. Everything is everyone's property; thus, there are no personal conflicts, and the idea of money is abolished, along with the idea of jealousy and egotism. The prince has a lifetime appointment, although he can be removed if he is found to be abusing his position. The government is made up of people who have been elected by the people (Walsh, 1962, p. 41). The remaining utopias, including Wells' *A Modern Utopia*, *Christianopolis* by Andreae, and *City of the Sun* by Campanella (2007), were all part of the canon of utopian literature and covered related issues.

Similar to this, according to Northrop Frye's (1965) claim in his article, "The majority of utopian societies, according to "Varieties of Literary Utopias," depend on the "disciplined," "just," and "rational" particular, who, by utopian ideals, is equal to "the free individual. Moreover, utopians believe that reason and argumentation are what lead individuals and that establishing a better society takes priority above personal aspirations. Therefore, they did not see a need to distinguish between individual and collective happiness (Walsh, 1962, p. 71).

Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on the idea of the psychological pressure caused by dystopia and its solution in the shape of an idealized society known as Utopia. Utopia and dystopia are fundamentally different from one another because Utopia is a civilization that demonstrates an ideal and perfect state, while, on the other hand, dystopia is the absolute reverse of Utopia. Dystopia refers to a chaotic and miserable civilization. However, these two psychological disorders are comparable and are the focus of this study. This study explores the dystopian element in Price's *Starters*. The background of the study is to identify that if there is negativity, then there is positivity in that situation as well. This research aims to determine the effects of traumatic life and adverse circumstances on an individual's life and how they affect the psychological state of humans. Keith Booker (1995) wrote a theory and research guide on dystopian literature, a type of speculative fiction that depicts the future. Dystopias are societies in terminal decline, with characters battling environmental disasters, technological domination, and government oppression. The most threatening aspects of the human mind and nature are explored in dystopian fiction. According to modern definitions, dystopia can be apocalyptic. An apocalyptic warning concerns the effects of global warming. Dystopian literature depicts the flaws and failures of imaginative societies.

Text Analysis

"I'm Tally Youngblood," she replied.

"Make me pretty."

– Scott Westerfeld, *Uglies* (200)

Tally Youngblood, the protagonist, is about to be sixteen. Before the surgery, she shared the stigma of being "ugly." Tally is ready to escape Uglyville, become a "Pretty," and spend her days with The New Pretty Town's wonderfully attractive youth. Shay, Tally's best friend, resists social norms and runs away to join a group of rebels who oppose the forced way of life and decide to be "ugly." by refusing to undergo surgery



for the remainder of their lives. Tally is advised that the operation will not help her if she does not comply. Tally unintentionally assumes the role of a spy and infiltrator as a result. While she is here, Tally discovers the true motives behind people's "prettying."

The main topic of the research is examined in this section via the prism of the protagonist's coming-of-age narrative, which finally sheds light on her rebellion against the societal structure and the ideology it upholds. The film *Uglies* analyzes how the damaging cycle of beauty ideals affects young women. The plot delves into the idea of "improving" one's external appearance through cosmetic surgery and into the American concept of beauty. The top five esthetic procedures performed on women are liposuction, facelifts, nose surgery, eyelid surgery, and breast augmentation (Newswire). Approximately 6.6 million Americans underwent cosmetic surgery in 2002. Tally, the young protagonist, is cited as an example of an adolescent girl in America who, as a result of the cultural milieu, develops irrational anxiety and an obsessive need to improve her looks through cosmetic surgery. In Westerfeld's (2011) novel, she capitalizes on the country's obsession with appearance. The three parts of Westerfeld's book (2011) are titled "Turning Pretty," "The Fog," and "Into the Fire." Each segment represents the various stages of Tally's life. The first section is about Tally's time spent in Uglyville, the second is about her trip into the wilderness and her time spent in the Smokies dissident camp, and the third describes Tally's initial actions of resistance as well as how the camp was destroyed under specific circumstances.

The plot of the book mirrors Tally's developmental stages. The plot itself contains elements of the bildungsroman structure. Each chapter explores a distinct subject; for example, "Turning Pretty" explores young people's fascination with cosmetic surgery. The protagonist's awareness is described in "The Smoke" as being affected by nature. She stood up in "Into the Fire" to rebel against the repressive government. The theme that stands out most in Tally's coming-of-age tale is the love of beauty and its repercussions on young women, even if every theme is interconnected. Tally, who lives in a hostel in Uglyville, is curious about what is going on in New Pretty Town, especially because the three-month-old Peris has been designated a "Pretty." She sneaks in to visit him and marvels at the perfect, scar- and mark-free new skin. She meets and befriends Shay on her journey back to Uglyville, where they play practical jokes on new, ugly children and visit off-limits locations. Shay tries to persuade Tally that they are simply regular kids, not freaks, but Tally desires beauty to see Peris once more, attract attention, and lead an opulent life. Tally has one week until surgery, so she is unsure about what to do. Peris appears in her dorm to exert pressure on her and remind her of her commitment to him. Immediately after being escorted to Special Circumstances to visit Dr. Cable, Shay, Tally reveals a runaway, who is then forced to become a spy. Her goal is to enter the Smoke and find hiding places for rebels. Tally looks in the mirror quite a bit because she has been treated like a walking disease. She appeared to be worried about the procedure alone. In [the pretties'] wide and flawless eyes, the author writes, "There was something magical, something that made you want to listen to what they were saying, to keep them safe from harm, and to make them happy." They were incredibly lovely. Tally is unable to give up her desire for "a lifetime of being gorgeous" despite her friendship with Shay and her exposure to Shay's provocative comments. The first part of the book does not help Tally mature. However, it allows Tally to explore self-awareness and disclose operational information. Young and naive Tally longs to be one of the affluent and privileged Pretties who live in the City. She must make a difficult decision: either accept the infiltrator's role seriously and get the operation as compensation, or refuse to accept Dr. Cable's pawn and stay ugly forever. She is referred to by Levy as a young, frustrated, and somewhat immature protagonist. However, it opens the door for Tally's quest for self-awareness and disclosure of several procedural facts. Tally, a young and naïve girl, dreams of living in a city among wealthy and privileged Pretties. She takes the infiltrator's role seriously and obtains the operation as compensation, or she refuses to take Dr. Cable's pawn and remains ugly forever. She is referred to by Levy as "a young, frustrated, and somewhat immature protagonist."

According to Trites (2014), almost all teenage protagonists suffer some form of the following resistance model: Transcendence is manifested as (over)regulation, repression, and acceptance in teenage literature. This is an example of the normal domination-repression pattern of institutional discourse. In Westerfeld's (2011) book, the obsession with controlling teenagers' appearances and eliminating any sign of individuality is used as an illustration of (over)regulation. By providing instructions on how to get to the camp, Tally is forced to conceal her spy status, which causes an intolerable uprising. There is still time for

transcendence. Another thing to note is that some authors, even when trying to portray female adolescents as rebels, nonetheless prefer to exploit gender stereotypes. Many young adult dystopian novels feature female protagonists and prominent female friendships, but Child notes that these friendships are often sacrificed to reconcile the hopelessness of dystopia with the optimism of young adult fiction. For more information, let us assume that the protagonist is originally "Pulled into rebellion" by the initiative of her friend. Because of her social transgressions, undoubtedly, adolescence is a crucial time in a person's life because it is during this time that the human agent is asked to realize their sociopolitical agency and form a cohesive sense of self. The majority of YA literature is focused on How bigger social structures and processes influence smaller social structures and processes. This study elaborates on Robyn McCallum's (1999) definition of subjectivity as a starting point. According to McCallum (1999), subjectivity is a person's sense of personal identity as a subject—in the sense of being subject to some degree of external coercion—and as an agent—that is, being capable of conscious and purposeful action and thought. Due to this dual nature, subjectivity is created through connections with others, via language, and/or in relation to social and cultural forces and ideologies.

To put it another way, growth happens in these books because the characters come to comprehend how the world works and the consequences of their own decisions, which finally leads to self-awareness. It should be emphasized that in the technologically advanced world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, life has changed. Teenagers are influenced by new circumstances, and their growth is affected. As a result, many contemporary YA books show personal development taking place while the protagonist transitions from, Rather than from a rural to an industrial context, a technologically primitive community to a technologically more advanced community. According to Levy, a bildungsroman typically features a protagonist who typically lacks a father figure or who simply grows up without parents but is ready to adapt to a new setting. In addition, the protagonists of these books are typically in their mid-to-late adolescence, yet at the end of the story, they are either adults "but just barely" or have unstoppably grown. On occasion, the promise that adulthood will resume later may be broken. The design of many modern YA narratives spanning multiple novels demonstrates this potential. The development of a protagonist is purposefully delayed by authors who create trilogies or sequels.

However, feminist critics have regularly discussed gender issues in bildungsroman settings. On page 100, Levy expresses his disapproval of "the improperness of applying such a male-centered term to female protagonists." Abel notes that any definition of the bildungsroman currently in use assumes "a range of social options available only to men" when evaluating previous models of works with female heroes who develop only female characters that have already dealt with societal demands (such as marriage and parenthood) and finds that they lack experience, maturity, and fulfillment. When a stereotypical female hero realizes that marriage is not fulfilling, she typically rebels. They revolt as adults, to put it another way. The voyage of the female protagonist is "a self-determined regression" from fully engaging in adult life rather than a deliberate and willing decision to do so.

"Blake squeezed my hand as the wrecking ball smashed through the reflective façade of the body bank." – Lissa Price, *Starters* (2012). The protagonist of Price's book experiences several issues after a neurochip is inserted into her brain. Her physical integrity was endangered three times: once by the firm and twice by Redmond, Helena's technician. To allow Helena to kill the senator, he flips the "stop-kill switch" and strengthens the women's friendship. After being a witness to Helena's murder, Callie wants Redmond to alter her neurochip so that she is not tracked by the body bank. He tells Callie, "You're on your own now," and she says, "It's okay. I've been like this for a long time. Because Callie is permanently wired to Helena's brain and BCI and is neither a regular human person nor a cyborg, she is a liminal topic, in my opinion. Callie is given access to private information essential to the development of the narrative because of this unusual union of flesh and data. Hers is Ender's first body to be shared with a girl. She is inextricably linked to the group of young adult female heroines that their authors characterize as both strong and weak, both passive citizens and prospective leaders. Callie must accept her liminality to acquire the moral and practical understanding required to spark and influence societal change. She also desires to alter her surroundings so that they are more equitable, progressive, and, eventually, free. Callie may be seen in other universes as a paradox of power and weakness, of struggle and resignation. The protagonist of *Starters*,



unlike Tally from Westerfeld (2011), expertly balances adolescence and adulthood, imprisonment and disobedience, and posthumanism and humanity.

The book tells the tale of Callie Woodland, a 16-year-old who, among other things, brings down an organization known as Prime Destinations or the Body Bank, which uses young people's bodies for profit. Could you list the qualities that you believe an ideal young female character should rebel against? What do they look like in Callie? Anyone, in this example, a young woman, has the freedom to oppose the PM, which she regards as a terrible institution. Before the Spore Wars decimated her entire world, I felt the reader needed to realize that Callie was an ordinary middle-class girl. I wanted the audience to identify with her. Even in dangerous situations, Callie must be smart, vigilant, and fearless. She feels compelled to uphold her moral values.

A neurochip was implanted in Callie's brain almost entirely from the start of the book, and Helena's influence has changed it. Callie is ultimately a human individual, but she has special technology embedded in her head. How and in what ways does this situation impact her development as a person? Callie discovers that the chip allows anyone, at any time, to access her body, which is both invasive and terrifying. Who would want to live in such a manner knowing that they are subject to another person's will? Throughout the novel, Callie has ongoing conversations with several significant figures, including Senator Harrison, Helena, Prime Destinations, and the Old Man. How do her run-ins with the law relate to her emergence as a powerful rebel and force for social change?

The Enders, who have all the sway in this society, have Callie fully at their mercy in the beginning. However, he knew he could not trust them after learning about their schemes. Instead of weakening her determination, that discovery strengthens it. To outsmart them, she must rely on her intelligence. In Starters, rebellion has a female essence. How is the novel influenced by a combination of sex and revolutionary practices? Should Callie be viewed as a feminist representation of modern (young) femininity? Rather than focusing on male/female differences, the Starters series highlights the age difference between Starters and Enders, or young and old.

Every time Callie is mentioned as a strong female protagonist, it makes me happy. Her decisions are driven by the need to protect her younger brother and survive in a hostile environment. The purpose of this study is to show that this post-apocalyptic book not only addresses but also explores contemporary issues, such as climate change and the relationship between humans, animals, and machines. The study of these dystopian narratives is strongly concerned with the relation between embodiment and the means that enable an end to these apocalyptic conditions in favor of a new future. It is through their imaginative speculation that these novels posit embodiment as crucial not merely for ethical relations but for humanity's very survival— and even more specifically, for an existence that consists of more than just survival.

It also frequently imagines counter-scenarios that call into question humanity's interconnectedness in response to contemporary fears. The goal of evaluating these elements of dystopian literature is to show that it frequently imagines counter-scenarios that require a reckoning with humanity's interconnections with the nonhuman world, in addition to showing that it engages with contemporary fears or issues. The stress on this inextricability endangers the gloomy scenario and makes way for a more hopeful future by defining humanity's relationship with the nonhuman environment. Even works that imagine a pandemic brought on by biological warfare as the cause of humanity's extinction, such as Lissa Price's Starters (2013), may branch into science fiction stories with technology that is considerably superior to what is currently available.

Conclusion

The critical discussion is summed up by asserting that Price's Starters emphasizes female insurrection in the process of converting one from dystopia to Utopia. The teenage protagonist grows mature and self-conscious as he attempts to rebel against oppressive adult authority. Her rebellion is, however, put down because young adult books teach readers that making concessions can help them survive the power structures that society expects them to join as they approach maturity. Despite her ultimate acts of resistance, Callie Woodland, in Westerfeld and Price's first book of stories, never completely overcame the

system of rules. To continue, their insurrection must be judged "acceptable" by the authorities. If they want to reduce the system, they must make concessions and cooperate with adults. However, I have come to believe that the stories' triumphs are framed by the heroines' extraordinary perseverance and endurance despite hardship. These initiatives may not be sufficient to topple established power structures, but they undoubtedly cause significant social unrest. Their maturation is a result of their coming-of-age experiences, which involve leaving familiar environments for foreign ones. By doing this, they become more conscious and begin to see problems with the system. They soon realized that the previous generation did not succeed in bringing about a more equal or environmentally friendly world. For this reason, they opt to publicly critique the established social order.

By analyzing characters, themes, and situations in the text, this study highlights how society has become so fake that even nature is fake in this techno-culture, and it also speculates on the drastic consequences of techno-orientalism. The protagonist is conscious of these drastic social changes caused by the dominance of technology, but she is helpless. Technology may have given us opportunities and ease, but it has taken away our liberty, values, and originality. Our social, cultural, and environmental constructs are being rigidly challenged by technological advances. To alter the scope of dystopia, we must move toward Utopia. The need for an hour is to slow the speed of this process and move toward the development of technology rather than dominance.

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