

The Ecology of Dystopia: An Ecocritical Analysis of Young Adult Dystopian Texts

by

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B.A. (Hons), York University, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Children's Literature)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2014

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Abstract

Using the lens of ecocriticism combined with theories of the utopia and dystopia, this thesis focuses on the literary portrayal of nature and technology in three contemporary young adult dystopian texts: *Life as We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. This research takes a cultural studies approach and draws upon sources of environmentalist criticism and literary studies to investigate the ways in which the three primary texts represent the natural world and technology and then endeavours to uncover the relationship between the adolescent, nature and technology. This study is a part of a larger critical discussion about how the literary relationships between nature, technology and youth might influence readers' attitudes toward the contemporary anxieties surrounding impending climate change. The study interrogates the ways that the young adult protagonist is framed in relation to the non-human world, providing insights into the young adult's indeterminate and ambiguous relationship to both nature and technology and the future of human survival.

Preface

Portions of chapter 5 were presented under the title "Katniss as Environmental Champion: Eco-Media Literacy in *The Hunger Games*" at the Pacific North American Modern Language Association's 111th annual conference held in San Diego CA from November 1st- 3rd, 2013. Portions of chapter four will be presented under the title "Utopian Child to Dystopian Adult: Young Adult Identity in Dystopian Texts" at the "I Will be Myself": Identity in Children's and Young Adult Literature, Media and Culture Graduate Research Conference held at the University of British Columbia on May 3rd, 2014.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would never have seen its completion without the supervision, help, love and support I received from numerous people. I would like to thank my MACL program chair and thesis advisor Prof. Judi Saltman, who supported and mentored me throughout my studies at UBC, and who helped to shape my jumbled thoughts into beautiful sentences. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Margot Filipenko for her encouragement, invaluable feedback, and for asking the big picture and, as always, ruminating questions.

I extend my thanks to my MACL family—Megan Harrison, Yashaswi Kasanakurthy, Nafiza Azad, Janet Eastwood, Rachel Balko, Natalie Schembri and Einar Wong—it was an honour to study, caffeinate and share my love of children’s literature and research with you. I must extend special thanks to Megan Harrison, my fellow MACL, who became my best friend and trusted advisor during my time here at UBC. Without her to keep me sane with laughter, good chats, video games, takeout food and the occasional bottle of wine I might never have survived.

My family, both here in B.C. and home in Ontario has ever been supportive of my studies, thank you Mom, Dad, Melissa and all the rest.

Finally, I’d like to acknowledge the editing and constant support of my wonderful husband Mike Dror. Thank you for putting up with me and the countless Skype dates and phone calls. I couldn’t have done it without your patience and love.

To Mike.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Motivation for Research

Land and literature have shaped my life. I grew up in a military family, moving from one of Canada's many landscapes to another and living in relatively small, remote, tight-knit communities for short amounts of time. I loved living in the free space of the prairies and in the forested areas of northern Ontario. Looking back at life on an army base, I realize that in a sense it was like living in a utopia. We had our own community, our own resources, our own school, shops, housing. Everyone knew everyone else; it was a safe closed society. Of course, this is how I, as a child, outside the adult world of promotions, raises, and societal subtleties, saw life on the base. I did not know anything else, only the freedom allowed to children on an army base. I have, therefore, experienced real unsupervised freedom in green space.

The seclusion and safety, the sense of sameness and equality that the army base exhibits creates a utopia frighteningly similar to that of Lois Lowry's Newbery Award-winning *The Giver* (1994), but what might be one person's utopia, when closely scrutinized, can be another's dystopia (Booker 3). Dystopia, ironically, often arises from a society that strives for utopia, and I can see now that life on the military bases was not so Edenic. This truth stretches back to Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516), which alleges that utopia is a place that has never been seen or experienced, while dystopia is defined as a non-existent place so horrible no one would want to live there (Hitz & Ostry 3). My childhood experience in the liminal space of the army base, between utopia and dystopia, is

the reason that one particular book in my adolescent reading, Lowry's *The Giver* resonated with me so much.

The Giver presents an isolated community much like the Canadian army bases I grew up on; it is a dystopia that is at once compelling and shockingly similar to the world I was living in. It changed the way I read literature and the world around me. *The Giver* presents a world void of colour and of variety in landscape and people; they are living in a black and white world – not a green one. For Jonas, the green world only exists in memory, but for me now the green world is still entropic, it still exists and thrives. It was this environmental theme in my first experience of dystopia in *The Giver* that changed my way of thinking about the real, natural, environment.

The Giver was one of the first dystopia expressly written for children and my first experience with dystopia and recognizing the role of the environment in, not only the structure of the world, but in the realignment of thought that Jonas himself experiences. The first memory that is given to Jonas, the protagonist of *The Giver*, is the exhilarating experience of riding on a sled down a snowy hillside. He is amazed and unable to find the words that describe this memory: cold, snow, hill. He asks the giver, "Why don't we have snow, and sleds, and hills?" (Lowry 83). The Giver does not know because the memory is so old, but he speculates that snow and hills were inconvenient irregularities, making agriculture and travel difficult, and so they were eradicated. The suppression of historical memory is a tool that the unchanging totalitarian oppressor uses in the production of infantile citizens – which is perhaps why it is such a prevalent theme in contemporary young adult dystopia. Like many of the classic dystopias that helped to define dystopia as a

distinct genre, *The Giver* warns against the dangers of erasing variety and choice through a forced cultural amnesia.

Jonas, as the Receiver of Memory, continues to receive memories that are deemed "unsafe" for the average citizen. These memories are laden with the sensation and spectacle of a natural world long extinct. Memory, and in particular the memory of nature, becomes both a source of potential transformative change and the novel's final moment of possible utopian realization. Jonas feels nostalgia for a utopian ecology that is long gone; he feels sadness that his friends and family will never know snow or sunshine. While on one hand this speaks to literature's tendency to romanticize nature as an ideal edenic space, on the other hand it represents the speculative suggestion that nature, as we know it, will soon exist only in memory as the environmental crisis continues to worsen.

The Giver was a seminal work in dystopian literature and it engaged me, as a young reader in the ideas, themes and tropes of the dystopian genre, but most importantly its depiction of the environment motivated my interest in the ways that this literature in general, and this genre in particular, can be read through an ecocritical lens. The concern that motivates ecological criticism is that unless societal attitudes toward nature undergo significant change, the environmental crisis will continue at an accelerated rate. The ecocritic endeavors to unpack the ideologies present in literary depictions of the environment, and through these kinds of analyses, hopes to influence cultural attitudes in a way that contributes to a positive shift in the way that humans treat the environment. The rich subtext of the environment as a utopian space in the new crop of young adult dystopian novels recalled the significance that *The Giver* has to me and motivated me to

reread twentieth-century utopian and dystopian novels. My reading uncovered the important role that the environment has played in the creation of utopian and dystopian regimes thought through the ages. While each utopia and dystopia has its own aesthetic and political orientation contextualized within the concerns and fears of its own era, there is a preoccupation throughout these utopian and dystopian fictions with the threat of environmental destruction and collapse. In both reality and in fiction, rising sea levels, storms, droughts, the end of fossil fuels and impending climate change lead to depictions of social and military strife and economic collapse or, as in *The Giver*, a depiction of a landscape relentlessly changed by humans for ease of living and absence of suffering. Whether the young adult dystopia depicts a post-apocalyptic struggle for survival or a protagonist's valiant attempt at retaining individuality in a totalitarian world, these texts may provide young people with an entry point into real-world problems. Utopian and dystopian literature may encourage readers to think about the roots of social and political issues in new ways, or even think about these issues for the first time.

I am particularly drawn to young adult literature because of the abundance and variety available to teens today. I went directly from reading children's books to reading adult fiction and fantasy. One day I would be reading Brian Jacques' *Redwall* (1986) and the next Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). I read *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) in grades five and six and then delved into the adult fantasy realms of David Eddings, Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman.

Since that period of transition in my childhood reading, I have learned that there have always been plenty of wonderful books for all ages; they just have not had the marketing

power of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1995 – 2007) series. The astounding success of *Harry Potter* arguably brought the marketing potential of children's literature and its cross-over audiences to the attention of advertisers in a way unseen since John Newbery released *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in 1744. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008 – 2010), part of the recent influx of blockbuster dystopian young adult literature, is similarly interesting, because it is a novel that instigates political discussion surrounding media and consumerism, and ironic, because it is a novel that reflects on the commodification of youth. Further and paradoxically, is that the most horrific element of *The Hunger Games*, the spectacle of children being forced to kill other children, is now the centre of a feature length film aimed at young adults and children who get to watch children being forced to kill other children. This most of all has brought me to the quest of discovering what young adult dystopian novels truly offer to their readers. Young adult dystopian fiction, as a cultural artifact, is capable of providing a cultural critique posing a kind of 'what if' statement regarding the anxieties and concerns of the contemporary audience – i.e. the environment, technology, power dynamics and the economy. The study of young adult dystopia and my fascination with the ecocritical lens has brought me to the Master of Arts in Children's Literature Program at the University of British Columbia. My master's thesis is to be my first major step on the path to uncovering whether, and what part of young adult dystopian literature that addresses the concern for the environment can develop awareness and critical thought about how we, western human civilization, interact with, and treat the environment.

1.2 Research Statement and Discussion

In this study, the ways that dystopian narratives construct non-human nature, that is the natural environment and the built environment, and create representations of the adolescent within a selection of young adult dystopian novels are analyzed with the intention of providing insight into the young adult protagonists' indeterminate and ambiguous relationship to the natural and technological worlds. Dystopian fiction is a productive place to address cultural anxieties and threats as well as to contemplate the ideal or the utopia. For the purposes of this study dystopia will be positioned as a genre of its own, which has matured throughout the twentieth century and broken away from science fiction (Booker 19). The genre of dystopia will be discussed further in key terms and will be addressed again in chapter 2, the literature review. The young adult dystopia, then, derives many of its ideas and conventions from the wider traditions of utopian and dystopian literature for adults, science fiction, and children's literature. These texts recapitulate the conventions of the *bildungsroman*, using various forms of turmoil as a catalyst for achieving adulthood, but the dystopia itself, and most important for this study the environment of the dystopia, is an entity and plays a role in the young protagonist's development (Basu et al. 6). There is often a privileged relationship between the young protagonist, the utopia, and the environment, in which youth is hopeful, youth is uncorrupted or changed by society, and nature is the nurturer of youth – as is seen in *The Giver* when at the end Jonas escapes into nature and uses it to evade capture. Nature become both a dangerous space and a place of safety, Jonas chooses a natural life for

himself and for the child Gabriel, instead of the safety of the controlled dystopian community.

Dystopia as a genre began taking shape in the adult works of H.G. Wells, and it bloomed with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1935), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). These works of adult dystopia essentially present power complexes, power in an absolute form of government, which act as a solution to all of humanity's ailments – in other words, these regimes strive for utopia in that they keep their citizens safe, happy and occupied (especially in *Brave New World*) but in so doing create a dystopia because there is no choice or independence. These totalitarian regimes tolerate no flaws, no deviation in the pattern imposed on society and, therefore, create an unchanging society from which a dystopia arises and becomes the setting for these and other adult dystopian texts.

These adult works established the conventions and themes of the dystopia from which arises the young adult dystopia, which then also borrows conventions and themes from children's literature. From children's literature, the young adult text tends to "balance the desire to please and instruct" they have clear messages, with edgy covers (Basu et al. 5). The young adult dystopia, no different from the young adult fiction and children's fiction, sets youth at odds with adults and empowers young people to turn against the system. Youth can enact change in ways that the adults from *Brave New World*, *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* simply could not. The young adult dystopia, then, inherently offers a hope that is not present in the adult dystopia (Basu et al. 2). Perhaps what feeds the environmental dystopia of young adult literature is, as Greg Garrard points out in his

chapter entitled “Apocalypse,” the realization that the world is *not* about to end, and that human beings – namely contemporary youth – like the environment, are likely to survive even if our constructed civilization does not (107). Dystopia seeks to shock its readership into a realization of the urgent need for radical revisions of current human, political and social organization, and even of human nature itself. If people do not change, the future looks devastatingly bleak (Sigler 148).

Dystopian young adult texts focus, on the whole, on the actions of humans in the developed western world. They comment on an increasing reliance on technology, genetic modification, consumerism, and the massive environmental impact this lifestyle causes. The predominant environmental tension addressed in these texts is humanity’s survival in the face of climate change and how climate change will alter not only the landscape of the planet but the landscape of humanity itself. The natural will to survive of both humans and the environment are now in conflict, but humans are inextricably connected to nature and not vice versa, nature will continue with or without us, but humanity cannot continue without the earth (Garrard 103). Nature, in its traditional sense (a biodiverse world independent of humans) no longer exists, and, arguably, this idea of “nature” has never really existed in the scientific or real world but only within utopian ideals represented in literature through the ages (Garrard 106).

The utopia, which is exemplified in a pure natural state, and the utopia’s and nature’s intrinsic link to youth is innate to the resolutions of many Young Adult dystopian texts, as with *The Giver*, the young protagonist reaches for freedom in the arms of nature, and, therefore, ironically utopia. Is this a satisfactory conclusion? The young protagonist

escapes one utopian vision gone wrong to enter another, the utopia of a natural existence – which seems unfeasible as *The Giver* ends on a cliffhanger; can Jonas survive alone in nature? Perhaps it is this intrinsic link between youth and the environment perhaps partly to blame for the passivity of adults and children alike, who assume that it will be the next generation, or perhaps some single young hero, who will affect change and return us to an environmental utopia? As humans continue to struggle with sustainability, the impact of climate change on all levels of life, and the idea that technology is both the key to survival but also the root of many environmental problems, dystopian literature will be an interesting space in which to conduct ecocritical analysis.

1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

1.3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze, through an ecocritical lens that draws on the theories of Greg Garrard and Lawrence Buell, the representation of the environment and the young protagonist's relationship to it and to technology in a selection of young adult dystopian texts. In their introduction for *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry state that "a startling number of works in the dystopian mode for young adults deal with post-disaster and environmentally challenged scenarios" (12). Investigating texts that address young adults, those readers on the cusp of adulthood, is particularly interesting because they are experimenting with and solidifying their character, and by extension, their environmental identities are undergoing a transformation. The environment plays a critical role that often dislocates an ordinary perspective in order to force the young adult reader into "environmental literacy" (Buell

104-7). The dystopias selected for this study present environments, which, in one way or another, will aid the young human protagonist to reach for the utopian glimmer of hope ever-present in dystopias for young adults (Basu et al. 3).

1.3.2 Research Questions

1. What is the representation of the natural environment in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?
2. What role does technology play in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?
3. How does the young adult protagonist interact with the natural environment and technology in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?

1.4 The Significance of the Study

We live in troubled times. According to the United Nations, climate change is among the most serious and far-reaching threats to human life on earth. The UN Global Issues website states that "[b]y the middle of the 20th century, it was becoming clear that... the process of 'global warming' was accelerating. Today, nearly all scientists agree that we must stop and reverse this process now – or face a devastating cascade of natural disasters that will change life on earth as we know it" (United Nations 2013). With the literary strategy of depicting a threatening future, dystopian authors and texts offer a glimpse of such present-day worries, and provide the opportunity to explore the anxieties of their times. Today, with rising concerns for climate change, expanding genetic modification, and the western world's increasing reliance on technology, an additional element of cultural context is emerging in an over-riding concern for the natural and the ecology of all things. The fate of our world and our culture will rest in the hands of the next generation; it

follows, therefore, that literature for children and young adults can be an appropriate and effective vehicle for communicating adult hopes and fears about that future.

Hintz and Ostry write that "[u]topian and dystopian fiction is a productive place to address cultural anxieties and threats as well as to contemplate the ideal," and predict that "this genre will become increasingly popular and provocative" (12). The continued study of Lowry's *The Giver* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in classrooms, the best-selling phenomenon of Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy and the tide of popular cross-over Young Adult dystopias offer a measure of support for Hintz and Ostry's claims. Through this study's analysis of the representation of non-human nature, that is the environment and technology, within young adult dystopian texts, perhaps a purpose for this phenomenon will emerge.

This recent publishing boom of Young Adult dystopia will see a response in scholarly research on young adult literature in general, and specifically, on young adult dystopia (Basu et al. 1). Combining ecocriticism, theories of utopia and dystopia, and critical studies on young adult literature, I interrogate what the creators of dystopian young adult literature are communicating to young adults about the environment. While young adult literature has experienced rapid growth over the past two decades, dystopia as a literary genre has matured throughout the twentieth century and taken shape outside of science and speculative fiction (Cart 103, Booker 19). Young adult dystopian fiction has emerged as a political, cultural and aesthetic phenomenon which offers glimpses of a bleak future but always with the children's literature convention of offering a necessary glimmer of hope (Basu et al. 9). A focus on young adult dystopian literature is particularly interesting

because contemporary western society has a positive view of the potential of youth as stewards of the earth and these dystopian landscapes offer an interesting tension between despair for the future and hope for change. There is an assumption that the future rests solely on the shoulders of youth. To some extent this is inevitably true, however, contemporary youth will come to know a completely different natural world than the previous generations have known. The ramifications of an author knowing a nature different from their readers necessarily creates nostalgia for an environment of the past and a link to the author's own youth and the way nature once was.

In examining the implications of the representation of nature in a selection of dystopian Young Adult texts this study interrogates whether these texts call for a radical change in the way that the Western world thinks about the environment, as Carolyn Sigler suggests (148). Do these texts incite an alarmist reaction, or, by contrast, do they create anticipation for the inevitable apocalypse? So, is the environmental representation of these texts hopeful or pessimistic? Do these texts offer tools with which to enact change, or is the dystopian environment simply the backdrop of a fantastical speculative adventure story? This study will begin to fill the gap in research on Young Adult dystopian literature through the ecocritical lens. With the rise in publishing of Young Adult dystopia, this preliminary examination will hopefully add to the building blocks of further study in this realm.

1.5 Rationale and Criteria for Primary Text Selection

With the strategy of discovering the roots of dystopian texts which represented the environment, I initially began my search for texts aimed at a young audience in the 20th century. The classics from the 1950s stand out, including John Wyndham's post-apocalyptic

The Chrisalids (1955), and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, which present two very different landscapes. *The Chrysalids* is set after a global nuclear war and depicts a land as harsh, scarred and mutated as what remains of humans after nuclear fallout, while *Lord of the Flies* is set on a utopian island that becomes a dystopia as the boys struggle for survival by instating a system of government that descends into anarchy. Both books suggest that humanity is so far removed from the natural world that, when humans are returned to it, they revert to savagery while clinging futilely to an unnatural constructed way of life. These texts, initially published for adults, became teen reading fare studied in classrooms, but by the 1970s dystopias were being written directly for young adults, with O.T. Nelson's *The Girl Who Owned a City* (1977), in which children struggle to survive on the land in a world without adults. The cliff-hanger ending of Lowry's *The Giver*, published in 1993, leaves readers wondering if there is indeed hope for Jonas' survival in nature, and if there is hope for a society that is used to controlling nature.

However, it was Monica Hughes' *Isis Trilogy* (1980 – 1982) presents a future circumscribed by environmental degradation resulting from human actions in the reader's present, which made me realize that I wanted to analyze how the environment and the actions of the *present* are represented to contemporary young adults. The twentieth century saw the rise of the young adult novel and it has continued to develop in the twenty-first, and, remarkably, dystopian literature and film, in particular, have seen an astounding increase in publication and production (Basu et al. 2). These texts hold a contemporary context that mirrors the worries and preoccupations of our time.

In my research, I immersed myself in twentieth century dystopias read by young adults, which include those published for adults, children and young adults. Dystopia is the converse of utopia, it is a non-existent place and society that is so horrible that no one would want to live there. I quickly found myself struggling against other dominant genres that had been coupled with my definition of dystopia. While there is clearly a distinct overlap of dystopia with science and speculative fiction, dystopia is distinctly different from science fiction in "the specificity of its attention to social and political critique" (Booker 19). So much so that I would argue many books recently categorized as 'dystopia' are not actually dystopia, or, for the purposes of my thesis are not dystopian enough. A good example is Pittacus Lore's *I Am Number 4* series (2010- 2013), which places a persecuted alien race on earth, subsequently threatening earth with further alien invasion. I would argue that this text is predominantly an adventure story which draws on science fiction, for, while the system of government is privy to the dealings of aliens, their role is so minor that an overall oppressive dystopia, a critique of society, contemporary Western culture and politics, is simply not present. Similarly, *The Obernewtyn Chronicles* (1988 - 1999) by Isobelle Carmody and *A Resurrection of Magic* series (2007, 2009) by Kathleen Duey are excellent examples of futuristic fantasy where humans with magical powers are persecuted, reminiscent of Marvel's *X-Men*. While these novels feature intricate politics and a changing human eco-sphere, they focus on coming to terms with newfound powers and a fight for equality. These examples do not fulfill the dystopia's need for depicting a place so horrible that no one would want to live in it.

Many wonderful young adult dystopian novels are a healthy mix of romance, science fiction or fantasy. *Shipbreaker* (2010) by Paolo Bacigalupi, was immediately attractive to my study as it depicts the horrifying life of children small enough to scavenge ship-wrecked oil tankers. However, almost immediately the protagonist, Nailer, is swept away from the dystopia and onto an adventure to save Nita from his father. It results in an adventure, coming-of-age, and love story, which leaves the element of the futuristic dystopia of living on a beach stripping oil tankers in the background. The *Matched* series (2010, 2011) by Ally Condie, *Divergent* series (2011-2013) by Veronica Roth, *Delirium* (2011) by Lauren Oliver, *Wither* and *Sever* (2011, 2013) by Lauren DeStefano all begin by describing the tropes of dystopia – an oppressive system of government, dire circumstances for teens, and a threatening environment – but then their plots become consumed by romance. An interesting further study could focus on the utopia that romance offers within a dystopian world.

Many young adult dystopias are now published in trilogies or series. It became apparent that, for the purposes of this study, the first book in a series is the most fruitful because it generally gives the exposition and creation of the dystopian world. Focusing on the first text of a series proved to not only be more manageable, but allowed for the study of three distinct representations of the environment and the ecology of the dystopia. I, therefore, set out to discover texts that fulfilled the following criteria.

1. A text that is situated within a dominant dystopian environment.
2. A text that is stand-alone or the first in a series for young adults.

3. A text that depicts the relationship between the young protagonist and the environment and, therefore, incorporates a sufficient representation of the environment as a significant influence on the plot and characters.

I began to get closer to what I was looking for with M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* trilogy (2003, 2008, 2011), and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* series (2005-2007). These authors problematize young adult culture in terms of two of the culprits of our ecological problems: technology and consumerism. Western youth, more often than not growing up in urban spaces or indoors and with an increasing reliance on technology, inhabit a technological utopia that promotes consumerism and distraction. Contemporary western youth culture resides in what Elaine Ostry describes as a technological 'utopia' and these three dystopias depict the dystopian outcomes of continuing to live with, and heavily rely on, technology ("Young Adult Culture" 101). Anderson, Bertagna and Westerfeld posit that technological utopias cause youth to be detached and apathetic to global issues. They imply that if this apathy goes unchecked, and adults continue to be inactive, relying on youth for change, then change will never occur. These books implicate teenagers in environmental doom. The books pose a moral panic around the idea that despite the current environmental crisis, the role of nature in the world of children and youth is decreasing. Again the representation of teenage apathy in young adult dystopia would make for a rich and fruitful study, but *Feed*, *Exodus* and *Uglies* fail to fulfill my requirement for an environment interacting with, and reacting against, the young adult. However, they inspired a fourth criterion. I realized that the dystopias for which I searched, with an environment directly affecting and affected by humans, would feature technology as a

counter to the environment. At the same time, these books depict a future in which humans rely on technology to survive and the environment is controlled by technology. Humans may continue to live in relative utopia – but it begs the question, what would these worlds look like without technology? Therefore, the fourth criterion is:

4. Texts in which technology plays a role in the creation of the dystopia and interacts with the young protagonist.

A few texts in particular drew my interest for study with this criterion in mind. Moira Young's *Blood Red Road* (2011) is a fascinating and gripping novel, which presents a vivid and treacherous landscape that is mirrored in the disposition of the protagonist, Saba. The dystopia is both within the ravaged setting and in the mind of Saba. Reference is made to the Wreckers, or our contemporary civilization, though it is made quite clear that our world has been destroyed and the humans presented in Saba's time are all that remain. Saba's world is most definitely an eco-dystopia, but within a social critique reminiscent of *The Chrysalids* and *Lord of the Flies*, it depicts a humanity that has descended into anarchy, human corruption, drug dependence, cruelty and barbarism. This civilization has little likeness to our own; it is a world far removed from the technology of today, and does not critique contemporary western youth in relation to the environment sufficiently for my purposes.

Neil Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007) is another dystopia that captured my attention. In classic Young Adult literature fashion this dystopia, more than any other, pits youth against the adult world. When a child reaches the age of 13, their parents or guardians may have them unwound using a new technology that can dismantle a body while keeping their

consciousness intact, their body parts being used as a kind of organ donation (rather than mending a broken limb or nurturing an infection, transplants from unwinds are used). This story escalates western society's reliance on technology. The protagonists find refuge in an old airfield, stripping broken airplanes for parts to sell. Therefore, while this barren and blisteringly unforgiving landscape and work draws a blunt comparison to the children's own bodies, the book lacks a substantial comment on environmental degradation. Rather, it is a novel that posits a horrific method of dealing with overpopulation and the issue of abortion in the United States, and merely hints that things will get worse for humans at human's own hands before the environment will ever have its chance to wreck havoc.

My final selections for this study were *Life as We Knew It* (2004) by Susan Beth Pfeffer, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) by Patrick Ness. Each of these books has been lauded in book reviews and received awards: Pfeffer's novel was included on the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults list in 2007 and it won the Booklist Editor's Choice Award for Books for Youth (Older Reader's Category) in 2006; *The Hunger Games* won the California Young Readers medal and was a *Kirkus* and *Publisher's Weekly* best book of 2008. Patrick Ness' novel was a Carnegie medal shortlist and won the Booktrust Teenage Prize in 2008. In addition to featuring a predominant dystopia, it is notable that each of the primary texts has been lauded by teen readers and won awards for young adult books as it signals that these are books that teens have and will continue to read and engage with.

Life as We Knew It, the first of the Moon Crush series, takes place in Northeastern Pennsylvania and is the closest to contemporary readers' era. In this book the relationship

between humans and nature and technology is particularly interesting as the inciting incident is beyond that of human agency. This dystopia arises after an asteroid hits the moon and environmental apocalypse ensues. The only antagonists in this story are those of nature and the experience of waiting – waiting for everything to go back to normal, waiting for the government to solve the problem. However, when the broadcast from the President of the United States is heard, it provides false information and builds a false sense of hope. Sixteen-year-old Miranda and her family are faced with loss when the earth changes entirely in the span of one week. The family's reliance on technology is hard to give up as the electricity, gas and manufacturing of food all stop. The epistolary nature of Miranda's narrative, in the format of a journal, documents how she and her family come to grips with this new way of living and describes life through the first six months post-moon crush. Miranda witnesses the fates of her friends, as they turn to extreme faith, are sold to older adults, and die of plague or starvation

Life as We Knew It presents a dystopia unlike the other two texts of this study as it is the most based in contemporary reality. It is in many ways a layered dystopia, where the natural disaster occurs outside of human control. Then, slowly, life as the characters knew it *before* the moon crush disappears. They can no longer use any of their technology because of the loss of power; they can no longer go to school, or engage in any of their old life activities. Actually, for much of the narrative Miranda and her family don't seem to do much of anything but stay put, eat up their reserves of food and struggle to survive. In her essay comparing the first and third texts of *The Moon Crush* series with Bertagna's *Exodus* trilogy, Claire P. Curtis examines agency and community building in the two post-

apocalyptic texts which depict life immediately following a crisis. Curtis finds Pfeffer's Miranda lacking in agency, saying that "young readers are done a disservice" by Miranda not having a voice and action in the text (97). This is an interesting look at the post apocalyptic narrative; however, it does not delve into the nuanced relationship that Miranda and her family engage in with the environment. Pfeffer's book doesn't so much depict community as a survival when nature goes wrong and technology is lost. The relationship of the changed environment to Miranda is complex and what I focus on is how the loss of technology, as a result of the environmental crisis, is what truly creates the dystopia of *Life as We Knew It*. More than anything else, the family waits. They wait for instructions; they wait for the sky to clear and earth to return to normal – but more than anything else they wait for electricity to power their technology. They organize their life around the little spurts of power that they receive. They don't move on and they don't see any other way of living; it is this unchanging, almost apathetic, attitude that is the true antagonist of the novel. *Life as We Knew It* is a critique of western civilization for its reliance on technology, a commercial economy and the government infrastructure which Miranda and her family futilely hope can fix the earth.

The Hunger Games, the first of a trilogy, portrays a dystopian future in which the world that we know has been ravaged by environmental apocalypse, war and rebellion, and replaced by Panem, a country comprised of the Capitol city (the seat of power) and 12 outlying and suffering districts. Most of the narrative takes place within the Hunger Games themselves, a manufactured and pliable natural space wherein sixteen-year-old Katniss can tap into her knowledge of, and reliance on, nature to outwit the Capitol who depend wholly

on technology. It is Katniss' knowledge of the natural, her differing point of view on technology, and simple luck that give her the skills and perspective essential to her survival, both outside and inside the Games.

The Hunger Games is a rich text full of interesting western cultural commentary and critique. There have been numerous critical articles and two book-length anthologies of essays published on *The Hunger Games*. Although interesting, many of these articles focus on the whole trilogy and are comparative and historical – looking at the myths and legends behind the series, assessing gender dynamics and sexual identities, or finding metaphors – like Peeta as bread maker. There have been neither critical works that focus on the text through an ecocritical lens nor with the dystopian genre as a primary perspective – although the use of technology and the pervasive Capitol have been examined intriguingly, usually using a Foucauldian lens. However, what I am primarily interested in is the binary opposition between the natural and the technological, not simply the use of the technology but how the technology is representative of the dystopia. The text sets up this binary from landscape to landscape, from District 12 where power is intermittent if they get any at all, to the Capitol, which eerily resembles contemporary western life; the citizens of the Capitol rely on technology and, to a great extent, abuse it – playing with genetic technologies and using it to maintain their control over the districts. Then there are the Hunger Games themselves, in which a blended landscape of technology and natural environment is showcased in the gladiator-style Games. *The Hunger Games* offers a critique of western civilization represented by the Capitol, through the eyes of an outsider, Katniss. It is worth noting that since the 2012 release of the film adaptation, directed by Gary Ross, the critique

of the use of technology in games showcasing kids murdering children is brought straight to the living rooms of the very people the text critiques. This extra dimension of analysis lies beyond the scope of this thesis but will be briefly addressed and offers a suggestion for a fascinating further study.

Finally, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* takes place on a planet that has been colonized by a religious group seeking to flee earth's rampant consumerism and technology. Seeking to live a life off the land, the colonists establish Prentisstown, which they had originally hoped would be earth's redemption. However, while the new planet offers similar life-sustaining qualities to those of Earth, it has an additional natural effect which makes men's and animal's thoughts audible. This audible thought is called the Noise. Raised in Prentisstown, a closed community of men led by Mayor Prentiss, fourteen-year-old Todd Hewitt has grown up believing that the Noise is a germ, a disease that killed all the women and which men now have to cope with as it invades their privacy and plagues them all daily. Harkening back to the importance of language found in Orwell's *1984*, Ness' *The Knife of Never Letting Go* plays with the significance of language and knowledge distribution, graphically showing the Noise as chaotic and pointing to the subtle difference between calling the Noise a disease as opposed to recognizing it as a natural attribute. Surprisingly it isn't the Noise that has been subject to critical attention. The planet was once a real utopia, with the world and its creatures all connected by the Noise living in harmony until humans arrived, bringing with them preconceived ideologies and technology.

Readers and Todd are in the dark for much of the text, but as Todd voyages across the planet accompanied by Viola, the female co-protagonist whom he rescues after her spaceship from Earth crash lands on the planet, and his dog Manchee who can communicate via the Noise, the truth is slowly revealed. Viola arrives on the planet and brings with her new technology and news of more colonists arriving. This sets the plot in motion as Todd and Viola race to escape the horrible Mayor Prentiss and his lackey Aaron. This first installment of the *Chaos Walking* series foreshadows the power that this group voice can have. The book takes a fresh look at the lengths to which humans will descend into brutality for control and power. Surprisingly, it isn't the Noise that has been subject to scholarly attention, but the trauma that Todd and Viola are subject to throughout the series. I am interested in the power relationships between the natural environment, the human men unwillingly connected to it and the human women who are identified by their silence and who, via Viola, are also identified with technology. How is the planet's non-human nature portrayed and what is its significance to each of the factions who must interact with it? With this last book I wonder whether it is the environment or the people who create the dystopia.

Each of these novels meet the four criteria: they are all the first in a series and feature the dystopian genre; they each present an interesting and realistic natural environment; and technology plays an essential role in the dystopia and in relation to the protagonists. From Pfeffer's environmental collapse and loss of technology, to Collins' juxtaposed wasteland of Panem and technology-laden Capitol, to Ness' depiction of humans resisting nature and forcing their control over it, these novels embody the contemporary attitudes

toward the natural environment as depicted within the genre of young adult dystopia. They are valuable works to study in this context because together they comprise a commentary on western civilization's attitudes towards nature and technology. The texts each present a time after environmental collapse and speculate at human response, and, in through this approach, they have the potential to offer up ways that youth can reshape their attitudes about their treatment of, and relationship with, nature and technology.

1.6 Significant Terms

Biocentric: Biocentric states that humans are unique subjects and speakers, the stand out in evolution and nature as momentous. This is considered by critics as an unwarranted claim, and that "humans are not the 'goal' of evolution any more than tyrannosaurs were during their sojourn on Earth" (Manes 22).

Dystopia: J. A. Cuddon's *The Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines dystopia as the converse of utopia. Dystopia forecasts "the doom awaiting mankind" and can range from whimsical fantasy to politically charged fiction (959). Dystopia is a speculative representation of reality and of humanity and now, as I argue, of nature.

Ecocriticism: Cheryl Glotfelty's oft quoted introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.... [It] takes an earth centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty xix).

Ecology: Ecology is broad term that I am not using in the scientific sense, but rather the metaphorical. For this thesis the ecology is the interconnection across the historical, political, human, technological and natural – and the environment that is created from those interconnections.

Ecomimesis: Ecomimetic texts are those that feature a realistic environment with an environmental agenda and contain ecological content. This "idea of nature writing" is a dangerous critical trap according to Homer Morton, because it creates an illusion of a pure representation of the environment without any aesthetic framework (8). Morton claims that many ecocritics are blind to nature as an encoded political concept. "By setting up nature as an object 'over there'—a pristine wilderness beyond all trace of human contact—[nature writing] re-establishes the very separation it seeks to abolish" (125). Morton insists that the ecocritic must be wary of writing, and believing that any writing can be ecomimetic because these texts can undermine ecocritical analysis.

Genre; Dystopia: Genre is notoriously tricky to define. In the *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* it is simply "a literary type or class" (Cuddon 342). Dystopia as a genre of its own is a complex and contested matter. Keith M. Booker in his 1994 book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* argues that dystopia has broken free from the larger science fiction genre in that it is more critical of a select work of fiction's contemporary audience. This is the stance that I will take, as I argue that dystopia is distinct from science fiction not only in its critique but in its intrinsic ties to utopia. A dystopia is a description of a society in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok.

Green Subject: From the caretaker perspective of literary ecocriticism, green subject is defined as a steward/actor for the environment – from the caretaker perspective of literary ecocriticism. A character or object that begins to act as, and for, nature, such as Simon in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, who becomes, or even arguably starts, as a green subject. His motivation is rooted in a connectedness to nature and, as such, he is the only

character who has a sense of morality *not* imposed by civilization or society. Rather, he has an ecological perspective, motivation and moral code of morals.

Technology: Technology in young adult utopian and dystopian literature can represent both the darkest fears and brightest hopes, as readers are exposed to anxieties about technological dependence and overuse while simultaneously being shown the wonders that it can perform (Hintz & Ostry 11). Portrayals of technology vary and the rapidity and intensity of new technologies and globalisation present enormous challenges in terms of posthumanism, ecological sustainability, and the utopian goal of a stable and just world order (Bradford et al. 182). For the purposes of this thesis technology, whether derived from the natural or manufacture world, when used by humans has the capacity to become the "techno-menace," a destructive force that drives much of science fiction – and many contemporary anxieties (Buell 57).

Utopia: Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopia as "the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (3). Utopia is a perfection that can never be attained. It is this impossibility that is the point; the fantasy is the compensation for the deprivation of reality – it is the dream of perfection, the hope and will to strive for utopia that drives the fantasy (Levitas 236).

Young Adult Literature: The Canadian Children's Book Centre's recommended annual list of "Best Books for Kids and Teens" defines Young Adult Fiction as books that are "ideal for Teens Ages 12-18" (21), and the Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book Award defines Young Adult literature as books that appeal primarily to youth aged thirteen

to eighteen. For the purposes of this study, I define Young Adult literature as books that are intended to appeal to youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

1.7 Chapter Overview

The scope of the research for my thesis is broad, and my literature review, which follows in Chapter 2, reflects both the wide range and the interconnectedness of the different disciplines upon which I draw in this study. In analyzing the connection between the environment and the dystopia within young adult fiction, I establish links between genre, young adult narrative, ecology and technology. I first introduce, as my focal theory, ecocriticism as well as the subsidiary theories surrounding technology in literature, and finally consider the genre history and theories of utopian and dystopian writing in both adult and children's literature. In chapter 3, the methodology section, I fuse the ideas and theories discussed in my literature review and construct a lens through which I ask the research questions of my selected primary texts. Following the literature review and methodologies chapters, I use the subsequent Findings Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to explore each of the three primary texts individually. In Susan Beth Pfeffer's *Life as We Knew It*, I analyze the creation of a dystopia after an unstoppable environmental catastrophe and the resulting loss of technology. I then discuss the fusion of technology with the environment in *The Hunger Games*. Finally, in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, I explore how humans resist nature with ideology and technology in an attempt to dominate and control the natural world. In chapter 7, Conclusions and Discussion, I answer the research questions, make general connections and comparisons across the texts, discuss limitations of my research, and recommend directions for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Young Adult Literature: In Defense of Distinction (Background)

Young adult literature struggles to distinguish itself from the larger category of children's literature. Many scholars, librarians and teachers treat books for all ages as one homogenous children's literature category (187). For example, while Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003) note that children's literature, like adult literature, can be categorized by genre and era they go on to argue that books for young readers "have enough in common to be identified as children's fiction – as do even those texts for older children about apparently unchildlike matter that are often labeled as literature for young adults" (187).

Nodelman writes in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (2008) that young adult literature "seems to involve an intersection of qualities of children's literature with ideas about adolescent readers and various types of adult fiction;" however, he remains unwilling to recognize significant differences in fiction written for adolescent readers from that written for younger children and therefore does not treat young adult literature as separate from that for younger children (97). Like Nodelman, in his book *Sticks and Stones* (2002) Zipes indicates his support for a single category of children's literature that includes books across the age range from young children to young adults (41). However, while many have argued that young adult literature is a sub-division of the larger category of children's literature, many have argued that because young adult literature is written for or about, young adults; that it centres on conflicts experienced by young adults; that most characters are young adults; and that the language is that spoken

by adolescents it is a genre separate from the larger category of children's literature (Basu et al. 2).

Just as the notion of Young Adult as a genre is disputed, the exact origin of Young Adult literature is also contested. The Young Adult novel evolved into its own category separate from that of children's literature in the late 1960s with the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) (Cart 25). While other novels labelled "young adult" had, in fact, been written before *The Outsiders* these novels were often the "problem novel" created by adults for youth to model family relationships and the prescriptive behaviours of society (Cart 29). *The Outsiders*, however, re-envisioned books for young adults. Written by 18 year-old S.E. Hinton for her peers, it depicts in first person the realities of young adult subjectivity, which had heretofore been lacking in young adult literature (Cart 26). Hinton was writing in a time of growing social unrest in the 1960s, and a society—especially its younger members—that was ready for change and imminently aware of its own identity formation. As the social and political climate was exactly right for the birth of exciting new ideas and new literary forms for young people, young adult literature transitioned "from a literature that had traditionally offered a head-in-the-sand approach to one that offered a more clear-eyed and unflinching look at the often unpleasant realities of adolescent life" (Cart 29).

Like S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, the twenty-first century young adult novel reflects trends and issues of subjectivity in our time. This stream of literature is pivotally preoccupied with the formation of subjectivity – that is the development of notions of

selfhood. Robyn McCallum's *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (2000) posits that:

... concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people, and while this dialogue is ongoing, modern adolescence – that transition state between childhood and adulthood – is usually thought of as a period during which notions of selfhood undergo rapid and radical transformation.(3)

The texts and protagonists within these texts, then, are in dialogue with the contemporary context forming a subjectivity that is in dialogue with the reader.

Kimberly Reynolds in her *Radical Children's Literature* (2010) asserts, "many children's books offer quirky or critical or alternative visions of the world designed to provoke that ultimate response of childhood, 'Why?' 'Why are things as they are?' 'Why can't they be different?'" (3). Indeed Reynolds is echoed in Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva's *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture* (2012) asserting that young adult fiction metaphorically links political and emotional instability to social critique (1). Hilton and Nikolajeva are careful to point out that young adult literature is not always located in the present, stating that, "dystopia... for teenagers... offers excellent possibility for creating situations in which young people's dilemmas can be represented and tested" (15). Indeed, many texts created for younger readers recognize the "fact that children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it" (Reynolds 14). This reader-character identification presents a useful position from which to examine the portrayal of the natural world given the

tendency in young adult literature to locate the narrative within a setting that reflects the preoccupations of contemporary reality and within a protagonist that will, alongside the young reader, inherit the future.

2.2 Ecocriticism, Roots and Definitions

Ecocritical thought rose out of the explosion of environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s; however, ecocriticism did not coalesce into a critical academic practice until the early 1990s (Glotfelty xviii). Early seminal works, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) which presented an ecological apocalypticism and Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) which critiqued pastoral literature, were categorized as pastoral, regional or interdisciplinary. Ecocriticism began to take root as a formal academic critical practice with the publication of Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974). This early ecocritical text addressed anthropocentrism, proposing that the environmental crisis is caused primarily by the tradition in the West to separate and elevate culture as distinct from nature. Using Dante's 14th century epic poem *Inferno*, Meeker illustrates the impact a hero whose moral struggles are more important than mere biological survival has on the natural world. Glotfelty (1996) takes exception to the work of these early ecocritical writings. In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, she writes: "One indication of the disunity of the early efforts is that these critics rarely cited one another's work; they didn't know that it existed...Each was a single voice howling in the wilderness" (xvii). Consequently, ecocriticism failed to crystallize into a coherent movement until the 1990s when institutions began offering courses that addressed literature and the environment.

Ecocriticism, then, as defined by Glotfelty and Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment... ecocriticism takes an earth centred approach to literary studies" (xviii). One of the implicit goals of the ecocritical approach is recovery from what Glotfelty calls the "undervalued genre of nature writing" and to move from first wave ecomimetic analysis into an interdisciplinary and political criticism (xxxi). Laurence Coupe in his *Green Studies Reader* (2001) describes ecocriticism as a critical and political inquiry that ecocritics must pursue; they must ask diverse questions as they observe and describe representations of nature, landscape, and human-nonhuman relationships (4). In order to be fully ecocritical, the ecocritic must reflect on the inherent values and ethics of texts with respect to the representation of nature and change behaviour to encourage a resistance to planetary pollution and degradation (Coupe 4). Glotfelty, Richard Kerridge, Greg Garrard, Lawrence Buell, Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd consider ecocriticism in a time of environmental crisis and this crisis is anthropogenic – human caused – resulting from what Meeker initially posited, the privileging of human needs and, more recently, above all else, technology.

Indeed, this political and interdisciplinary approach is fundamental to what Buell calls the second wave of ecocriticism, and Glotfelty points out, "believing that the environmental crisis has been exacerbated by our fragmented, compartmentalized, and overly specialized way of knowing the world, humanities scholars are increasingly making an effort to educate themselves... and to adopt interdisciplinary approaches" (xxii). Ecocriticism now requires that the critic reach beyond ecomimetic literature, and often

beyond the literary world in order to make an ecocritical inquiry. Ecocriticism works toward intervening in the way that western culture thinks about things, i.e., non-human life and objects, asking about the nature of representation and the relationship between the rhetorical, the literary, the imaginative and the material. In the words of Ursula K. Heise, ecocriticism cultivates a "triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world" (505). Most human experience now occurs within a social and urban environment and most of western civilization now inhabits technology saturation, so how does the ecocritic handle contemporary cultural materials?

The problem with ecocriticism, as ecocritics Lawrence Buell, Greg Garrard, Joseph Carroll, and Serpil Opperman have claimed, is that "despite all the attempts to define [it]... there is no guiding strategy of interpretation, and no monolithic theory to support it" (Opperman 205). Ecocriticism is commonly paired with Marxist, feminist, Foucauldian, and postcolonial theories. It may be considered a hodgepodge of theory and literature. This is a dilemma, which can lead to some critics, such as Joseph Carroll, suggesting that "ecocriticism, might seem little more than a special topic area within the general field of contemporary literary study" (85). However, it is Greg Garrard's review of ecocritical theory between 2007 and 2008 that offers a way through this dilemma. Garrard claims that the issue stems from the very word "ecocriticism". He explains that "while 'ecocriticism' risks sounding faddish or raising scientific expectations, it is the most prevalent and widely accepted name for cultural criticism from an environmentalist perspective, and I call it 'ecocriticism'" ("Ecocriticism" 1). Ecocriticism is then a form of cultural critique, just as

young adult literature mirrors youth culture and dystopian literature reflects the anxieties and moral ambiguities of its contemporary culture.

2.2.1 The Apocalypse and Ecocriticism

In several essays and their book *Ecospeak* (1992), Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer note the propensity for environmental writers to employ apocalyptic rhetoric. Buell, in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), describes this literature, including Carson's *Silent Spring* as "environmental apocalypticism" and as "the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). Generally, apocalypse is equated with foreboding doom and human eradication. Some critics have pointed to texts like *Silent Spring* as environmentalist hysteria, the products of authors who claim, like *Chicken Little*, that the sky is falling, or worse—cry wolf to achieve selfish ends (Buell, *Imagination* 285). However, given a growing focus in the environmental movement on preserving ecological and human health for future generations, apocalyptic seems a limiting, inaccurate description of the environmentalist's objectives. Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* points out that these "rhetorical strategies have provided the green movement with some of its most striking successes" and that several of the most influential books make use of the apocalypse trope as a form of activism (85, 93). Garrard goes on to detail the characteristics of the apocalypse narrative: the warning, the "good guys" who are admired without question, and the "bad guys" or faceless bureaucrats corrupted by commercial success (95). This apocalyptic narrative mirrors and feeds into the literary dystopia, where "even the most egalitarian utopia must eventually revert to conflict and competition for scarce resources" and therefore, fall into

dystopia (Garrard 94). In texts like *Silent Spring*, for example, disaster cannot be averted because the threat is so pervasive and irreversible, however the message lies in what actions are taken now, to lessen the damage.

From these strands of the apocalypse narrative the young adult dystopia arises, as Killingsworth and Palmer note, in their article "Science Fiction and *Silent Spring*," (2000): "the conflicting narratives of apocalyptic doom and millennial hope strive for dominance" (190). They point out that *Silent Spring* immerses itself in the impending blighted world while also holding out the possibility of an "other solution" (190). The aim of the apocalyptic narrative then is to guide, to reassure their audiences that it is not too late and that action, change and reorientation of thought are possible. Apocalyptic narratives are not so much a warning about the future but a cautionary tale meant to guide human choice in the present, as perhaps "the real moral and political challenge of ecology may lie in accepting that the world is not about to end, that human beings are likely to survive even if Western civilization does not. Only if we imagine that the planet has a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it" (Garrard 107).

2.3 Ecocriticism and Young Adult Literature

While the environment has been present in children's literature since the arrival of Robinson Crusoe on an edenic and isolated island in Daniel Defoe's classic *Robinson Crusoe*, it was only in the 1990s with the growth of formal ecocriticism that an ecocritical lens was utilized in the field of children's literature (Gaard 11). Several problems confront the undertaking of ecocritical analysis of children's literature. The first issue is the fact that much early ecocriticism holds to the belief that ecocriticism should only focus on

environmental, or ecomimetic, literature – which is simply not predominant in children's and young adult literature. However, as Garrard attests, the field has opened up significantly since 2000 and it is now a more multifaceted discipline, encompassing more globalised and multicultural views as well as embracing a range of literary genres and themes ("Ecocriticism" 1). This works well with Glotfelty's definition of an ecocriticism that has shifted into a more open cultural studies sphere. *The Ecocriticism Reader* articulates the idea that "literary studies in an age of environmental crisis" may work towards ameliorating the environmental collapse at hand and a narrow focus of ecocriticism on ecomimetic writing will only perpetuate dualistic (culture/nature) thinking and invert the binary to privilege nature over culture (Glotfelty xv).

Many children's literature scholars, including Sidney Dobrin, Kenneth Kidd, Seth Lerer, Perry Nodelman, and Mavis Reimer agree that "the study of children's literature is cultural studies, not just in that it draws on literary, socio-historical, and economic methods of analysis, but in that it may serve as a test case for the syntheses of current cultural criticism" (Lerer 9). As such, children's literature and environmental criticism are well matched for study. Interestingly, however, the only book-length anthology of ecocriticism on children's literature to date is *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004) edited by Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. Dobrin and Kidd argue in their introduction to *Wild Things* that children, especially those in urban settings, are deprived of experience with the natural world, which is necessary for the child to develop positive attitudes towards and a desire to preserve, the environment (7). They point out that the relationship between nature and the child seems twofold. The first belief is that children

are innocent, virtuous and pure; a line of thinking that persists from the Romantic period (6). The second is that the relationship between the child and nature, though inherent, must still be made available, and therefore mediated, by adults – such as teachers encouraging children to get involved in community gardening. Dobrin and Kidd, by invoking these Romantic and Victorian ideas of the nature-child intrinsic link, infer a kind of nostalgia for a lost connection with nature and for a nature that they themselves connected with in their own childhoods, which the children of today will never know.

The chapters in *Wild Things* ranges between analyzing ecomimetic writing, crafting a pedagogical approach to ecocriticism, and ecocritically analyzing fiction texts. Of the sixteen essays in *Wild Things* only two address texts for older children (C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series (1950-6), and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) and none of the essays assess texts specifically for young adults at the older end of the age spectrum. Nonetheless, *Wild Things* is a definitive beginning for ecocritical analysis of fictional representations of the environment in literature for children and youth. No other book-length anthologies of criticism could be found in a search for books published in or after 2004 with the terms "young adult literature" (or adolescent literature/fiction) and "ecocriticism." What does arise is a small representation of chapters that focus on regional literature for young adults (notably in Afrikaans literature and Antarctic literature). In 2012 and 2013, more essays and chapters have explored the utopian and dystopian trends in literature for young adults and some of these utilize an ecocritical lens.

As noted previously, of late there have been a few book chapters and articles published dealing with dystopian young adult literature through an ecocritical lens. In

2008, Clare Bradford, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum's *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature* includes a chapter on ecocriticism two dystopian texts for young adults, Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* and Justin D'Ath's *Shadow Master* are analyzed. The analysis emphasises the binary between the anthropocentric (the belief that humans are special within the world-order) which is prevalent, and biocentrism or a life-centred approach. They argue that utopian fiction for children and youth is meant to "offer shape to children's anxieties and aspirations" and the utopia and dystopia are, therefore, merely "tropes, modes, themes or settings" where the young protagonists build their own subjectivity (11-2). While I agree that this could be true in some cases and perhaps in the literature for children, Bradford et al. openly state that dystopian and utopian literature for adults is a distinct genre and therefore, arguably, young adult dystopian literature is distinct as well – a debate that remains open among critics and that will be returned to in section 2.5, Young Adult Dystopian Literature. Bradford et al.'s analysis of the young adult text is primarily based in colonial and post-colonial thought, which is blended with the ecocritical lens. Although they adhere to the ecocritical first wave necessity of analysing ecomimetic texts, it does speak to ecocriticism's determination to break down binaries, and here Bradford is also alluding to racial, sexual, gender, cultural binaries, in order to bring about a "new world order in which nature and culture are rewoven and the world is made green again" (104). Similarly, in *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture* (2012), Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva feature a chapter by David Whitley which interrogates the adolescent's seemingly inherent subjectivity with the natural world and concludes that continued "questioning of human centred perspectives" –

that is, anthropocentric – "in recent fiction can clearly explore the possibilities of new kinds of environmental philosophy and may also break away from the solipsistic concern with the inner life of protagonists that has arguably limited the scope of the dominant tradition within young adult fiction" (31) .

If literature for children and young adults is an expression of contemporary reality and cultural attitudes, then its purpose is to model reality and shape our cultural attitudes towards the natural environment (Opperman 112). In light of the ongoing environmental crisis, an understanding of how young adult literature shapes the young adult and his or her relationship to the natural world is an important step towards understanding the cultural messages being conveyed in this literature to young readers.

2.4 Utopian and Dystopian Literature: Roots and Evolution

In his famous treatise *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More describes a place that has never been seen or experienced; he describes an imaginary island where everyone is treated fairly within a "perfect" social and political system. *Utopia* has captured the imaginations of scholars, theorists and writers and permeated Western culture through the ages. Likely the concept of utopia has sustained public interest because of the powerful resonances and philosophical ideas it stimulates: religious roots in paradise, political roots in socialism, economic roots in communes and hopes for the future which rest in technology and the systemic control over nature (Gordon et al. 1). More's *Utopia* functions as a satirical portrayal of England in 1516, a work that "the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent xii). Lyman Tower Sargent argues that the critique begins with the very word, Utopia and its

apparent confusion between the Greek for "no place" and "good place," as the prefix eu-, meaning "good" resonates in the word, with the implication that the perfectly "good place" is really "no place" (Sargent 138). Utopia and the vast majority of the utopias written prior to the twentieth century conform to More's tradition of critiquing a contemporary context by imposing order in a world of disorder for "humanity's own best interests" (Fern 14). Chris Fern in his *Narrating Utopia* (1999) details many of the pre-industrial revolution utopias, positing that "many of the earlier utopias emerged from historical contexts in which the promise of civil order must have seemed especially appealing" (14). The appeal of this kind of utopia declined, ironically, with the development of the political, economic and technological means with which such a society might have been achieved.

Indeed the faceless, regimented, unchanging, pro-colonial narrative of More's *Utopia* is resonant of the twentieth and twenty-first century dystopias. As many utopian and dystopian scholars, including Lyman Tower Sargent, Keith M. Booker, Chris Fern and Tom Moylan argue, dystopia is inextricably connected to utopia as "much of recent utopian thought can be read as a gradual shift from utopian to dystopian emphases" (Booker 15). Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash in their introduction entitled "Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time" (2010) are careful to point out that despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia as, "[a] true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither of these things; rather, it is a utopia that has gone wrong" (2). The connection between utopia and dystopia, like the dream to the

nightmare, requires that they be considered in concert since they are both driven by an impulse to posit a better future.

Utopia and dystopia as literary forms have uniquely captivated both general reading audiences and critics alike because they address existing cultural concerns and provide a critical exploration of contemporary society while portraying either an ideal or nightmare social vision as comparison and critique. However, the establishment of a set genre, distinct from science fiction, has been contested, avoided or assumed since, what M. Keith Booker has called the "long 1950s [1946-1964]"—"the great period of American Cold War hysteria" (3). Tom Moylan charts the creation of the literary "critical Utopia," which "was in keeping with the spirit of the youth movement of the 1960s" and returned to the human agenda within the categories of utopian concern: cooperation, equality, mutual aid, liberation, ecological wisdom, and peaceful and creative living (*Scraps* 9, 10). Following the critical utopianism of the 1970s, the 1980s brought with it "economic restructuring, political opportunism, and cultural implosion" which resulted in what Moylan terms the "critical dystopia" (*Scraps* 186). "Critical," as Moylan writes, is meant "in the enlightenment sense of critique—that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as 'critical' in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction" (*Demand* 10). As dystopia moves into the 1990s, Moylan notes that the "contemporary moment... is one in which a critical position is necessarily dystopian," and he goes on to speculate that perhaps this dystopian moment had been present since the onset of twentieth-century capitalism and technological invention (187, 188). It is interesting to note here that the critical utopias and

dystopias had began to bloom simultaneous to the ecocritical works and the budding ecocritical lens. The contemporaneity of these developments perhaps points to the distinct connection that contemporary environmental awareness has with late twentieth and twenty-first century utopian and dystopian literature.

The critical dystopian vision has continued into the early 21st century. In 2001, utopian scholar Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson were pessimistic about the potential of the utopian narrative in the twenty-first century because, in their words, "our current social arrangements condemn most of the world's population to poverty and premature death, and subject even those of us who are very affluent to forms of alienation, repression, competition and separation from each other, which are incompatible with a fully human existence" (Levitas and Sargisson 13). These, for Levitas and Sargisson, are some of the reasons "for the dominance of the dystopian mode in contemporary culture" (Levitas and Sargisson 14). Utopia in 2001 has lost its critical potential because neither the presence nor the absence of hope for change is apparent— rather, this hope is ironically present in the twenty-first century's critical dystopia. Fredric Jameson, four years later, argues that contemporary western cultural "imaginings are hostages to our own mode of production" and therefore, "at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment... and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (xiii). The purpose then of twenty-first century utopianism seems to be in turning to its counterpart, the dystopia, in order to reframe utopian thought and offer critique and hope from a different, but complementary, narrative perspective.

2.4.1 Technology

Throughout this chapter, technology has been mentioned as having roots in the utopian and dystopian modes as well as being part of the founding instigating criticism of the ecocritical movement. Technology has played a major role in the history of utopian thinking and in the modern turn from utopia to dystopia (Booker 5). Thomas More's notion of technology differs greatly from twenty-first century technology, however, *Utopia* did present technology and science in a way that had intensely beneficial impacts on human society while simultaneously illustrating an "atavistic desire to return to what is perceived as an earlier better time in history" (Booker 5). So, forward-looking science and technology are at odds with utopian literature's desire for a return.

By the turn of the twentieth century many of the technological achievements predicted by early scientists and utopian writers were being realized, but it was becoming clear that "science would not have an entirely emancipatory effect on humanity" (Booker 6). The industrial revolution was one of many "demonstrations of the amazing capabilities of the human mind to understand, dominate, and control nature – but these same advances were dominating and controlling people as well" (Booker 6). Here Booker is hinting at the utopian thought behind the technology that eventually leads to the utopia's downfall or its transformation into a dystopia.

There is a convergence between the treatment of technology by the dystopian impulse and ecocriticism. The ecocritic Lawrence Buell in his introduction to *Writing for an Endangered World* says that "with accelerated techno social change has come greatly intensified anxiety about 'the environment,' and with it a redirection of traditional

discourses and a plethora of new ones" (3). By "the environment," Buell is referring to "both 'natural' and 'human-built'" dimensions of the palpable world, which must be distinguished between, but are also increasingly blurred, as humans move into the twenty-first century (*Writing* 3). Human transformations of physical nature and creations of new technologies have made the nature-culture distinction increasingly indistinguishable. While the thought behind technological development is one that is based in utopia, there is a contrasting notion that in order to fashion a better, safer, more enjoyable world we ironically destroy the one we have. Buell notes that "perhaps only the last half-century has witnessed what Bill McKibben apocalyptically calls 'the end of nature': a degree of modification so profound that we shall never again encounter a pristine physical environment" (*Writing* 3). However, it is not only a technophobia related to nostalgia for a lost natural environment that is critiqued in twenty-first century dystopias but also the fears of the effects that technology has on the minds of humans, and most specifically young adults. Mark Bauerlein goes so far as to call young adults unintelligent and selfish in his *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008). Bauerlein argues that teenagers exist in an endless web of social media, and that despite having access to more information than ever before, technology makes them self-interested: "[T]echnology has contracted their horizon to themselves, to the social scene around them... the rising generation is camped in the desert, passing stories, pictures, tunes, and texts back and forth, living off the thrill of peer attention" (*Writing* 10). Concerns about social media and communications technology's overuse and the pervasive way it controls language and information is a concern closely tied to the dystopia. Tom

Moylan notes that: "Throughout the history of dystopian fiction, the conflict of the text has often turned on the control of language and information" citing Newspeak from Orwell's *1984*, the book people in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and the control over information and history in Huxley's *Brave New World* he argues that "control over the means of language, over representation and interpellation, is a crucial weapon and strategy in dystopia" (*Scraps* 148-9). The effects of technology not only on the environment but on the children and youth of the upcoming generation are scathing and often techno-phobic with the "post-modernist claim that we inhabit a prosthetic environment" being extended so far as to recognize that humans might also inhabit a simulated human existence (Buell, *Writing* 5).

The reality of a blended non-human environment of technology and nature has added a new dimension to Earth's ecology as, now more than ever, people are interconnected by communication technologies. Yet, the human urge to set out boundaries and create distinct binaries between culture, nature and technology still pervades. Ecopolitician and Green party advocate Marius De Gues, writing in 1999, sets out the distinction between the "utopia of abundance," or the technological utopia, and the "ecological utopia" (De Gues 22). With an eye to Gross National Products and sustainable development De Gues argues that "the basic difference between these utopias lies in the notion of whether an ideal society should enjoy material abundance and luxury or be based on satisfaction and sufficiency" (21). For De Gues, there must be an ideological shift in the way the developed world determines the quality of life. This should be based on sufficiency and not abundance otherwise ecological responsibility will never occur (21). However, he does recognize that

the world is becoming increasingly urban and that the technological is not going away. However, De Gues' theories may start a shift in Western civilization to stop seeing nature "as an instrument to satisfy the incessantly increasing desires of humankind" and to start recognizing its intrinsic value (22).

Technology is a part of western civilization and is now enmeshed in the landscape. Like young adult literature, it is a product of its culture and when represented in this literature it is also, therefore, a part of the cultural critique. Having its roots in the history of utopian and dystopian writing and human civilization, technology, now an active subject of debate in the political world and daily life, is an important element of young adult dystopian cultural critique. In particular, I believe, when read from the literary ecocritical perspective.

2.5 Utopian and Dystopian Literature for Young Adults in the 21st Century

When asked whether or not children and young people can handle pure dystopia and what they need to cope with it, Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*, responded:

"Young people handle dystopia every day: in their lives, their dysfunctional families, their violence-ridden schools. They watch dystopian television and movies about the real world where firearms bring about explosive conclusions to conflict. Yes, I think they need to see some hope for such a world. I can't imagine writing a book that doesn't have a hopeful ending." (Hintz & Ostry 199)

This excerpt from an interview conducted by Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry for their *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), is one of the first

volumes of criticism on children's and young adult utopian and dystopian literature. The preface by Jack Zipes suggests that all artistic creation has a "utopian tendency" to reshape our current society in order that readers may reflect on their own contemporary setting (ix, x). Childhood itself, explain Hintz and Ostry in their introduction, is often theorized as a utopia that exists until adult intervention (1). This is a conservative, pastoral-driven, Romantic impulse that fits into a utopian frame easily – but also an ecocritical one with the child's intrinsic Romantic connection to nature mediated by adults and abandoned once adulthood is reached. Interestingly this utopian impulse is often found in the dystopian narrative, in which, through totalitarian strategies, the regime – such as those of Big Brother in *1984*–fashions citizen subjects as child-like or young. This is reminiscent of how the adult (parent, author, critic) often colonizes and simplifies the child in children's literature. The infantilized state of the populace is produced by strict codes and morés of the regime, and this uncomplicated state is often seen as utopia. This utopia is produced by adults and governed by the strict rules and morés of adult society, it is an uncomplicated and often depicted and viewed with nostalgia as the utopia of childhood. Karen Sands and Marietta Frank in their *Back in the Spaceship Again* (1999) remind us that there is little hope for the subject to change or gain agency within the dystopian regime. While Hintz and Ostry point out that this representation of children and the "child state" is unsatisfactorily one-dimensional, for "real children face a variety of social and psychological pressures. No child knows utopia" (6).

This neatly opens up the central issue of utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults, which is, "At what point does utopian cooperation become dystopian

conformity?" (Hintz and Ostry 7). The lack of hope described by Sands and Frank actually gives the reader hope, for just as the young reader begins to reach for understanding of their world and the system they live in, the young protagonists also reach for independence and comprehension—a breaking away from childhood into the self-reliance and responsibility of adolescence and young adulthood. Hintz and Ostry see this literature as subversive for a similar reason, because in these texts, the child, who is almost always pitted against the adult, succeeds (6).

The difference between young adult dystopia and texts for children is that the young adult dystopia is often blended with the coming-of-age novel, which features suffering and a loss of innocence (Hintz and Ostry 9). Hintz and Ostry are unwilling to give utopian and dystopian writing a specific definition, saying that "it is impossible to rely on genre" since the form of these works is varied (3). However, much the same as the adult dystopian narrative that Moylan described, the narrative of the young adult dystopia focuses, often, on a single subject in the dystopian world (150). The storyline develops around an alienated protagonist as he or she begins to recognize their situation for what it really is and thus to trace the relationship between individual experience (the egocentricity of childhood) to the operation of the entire system (adult society) (Moylan xiii). What makes the young adult dystopia distinct from adult literature is the reliance on the young adult for agency, to reach towards a resolution; these texts "give teenagers an important Romantic characteristic, as they often save the world from destruction" (Hintz and Ostry 10). Young adult utopian and dystopian writing, then, has a central conflict in that the despair of the dystopia genre runs counter to the trope of hope for a better future which rests on the

young adult protagonist. If, as Sargent says, "Utopia caters to our ability to dream, to recognize that things are not quite what they should be, and to assert that improvement is possible" then perhaps the young adults, as agents of hope, possess the utopian possibility within themselves, unlike the adults of their worlds or even of this genre (26). These texts show the various power discourses at work on the young adult as he or she moves from metaphoric childhood "utopia" – or controlled state – to metaphoric adolescent "dystopia" – or liberated adult life. Indeed, Baccollini and Moylan in their *Dark Horizons* (2003) remark on the ways "the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance" (5). This sounds, in relation to the young adult dystopia, decidedly bleak. The young protagonist living in a dystopia must uncover the corruption and the truth and make their way towards a utopian ideal, however, in doing so they necessarily come of age and set aside any last remnants of childhood. This begs the question, one that Rebecca Totaro articulated in her chapter "Suffering in Utopia: Testing the Limits in Young Adult Novels," (2003) of how much suffering in dystopia and utopia is acceptable (127)? Totaro concludes that the suffering in these texts is useful to avoid the "'happily ever after' utopian world" which she, Monica Hughes and Carrie Hintz argue is "a trap to be guarded against" (136).

Balaka Basu, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz, in their *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* (2013), build on Hintz and Ostry's discussion of the young adult dystopia, defining it as a "genre [that] belongs to the wider traditions of utopian/dystopian literature, science fiction, and children's literature" (6). The dystopian worlds emphasize the trials of adolescence, coming into subjectivity, but that they use "political strife,

environmental disaster, or other forms of turmoil as the catalyst for achieving adulthood" (Basu et al. 7). While this turmoil might inspire rebellion against the status quo, "it might also teach their protagonists to strike a compromise between chance and acceptance: to come to terms with an imperfect world" in a way that overcomes the escapism that some of these novels embody (Basu et al. 7). The collection features two sections pertinent to this study, one focussed on ecocritical analysis, and another by Kristi McDuffie, entitled "Technology and Models of Literacy in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction." In three of the texts McDuffie analyzes (M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, Ally Condie's *Matched* and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*), she identifies the texts as opening into a technological utopia where the protagonists are illiterate and unable to critically engage with the technology and the world around them, although Condie and Westerfeld's protagonists gain the desired literacy (145 – 149). This contrasts with Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008), which presents a protagonist not immediately blind to the sinister ways in which technology can be used, but in fact incredibly agentive in that he manipulates and practices surveillance on his world using his technological prowess (145 - 152). McDuffie concludes on the note that these dystopias present different levels of literacy, but that the "productive approaches to technology and literacy include both old and new literacies and respect young adults and valued citizens and agents of change... This respectful view is likely to be more effective for reaching and engaging with [young adults]" (155). This is an interesting chapter in that it argues for a nuanced and positive depiction of technology, and in particular, communication technologies, but does not comment on sustainability, the environment, or environmental literacy.

The most interesting and useful essay to my study in Basu et al.'s collection is Elaine Ostry's "The Role of the Young Adult in Environmental Degradation." Ostry's chapter blends, as I do, the reading of the environment with the reading of technology –reflecting the reality of the contemporary world of young adults. The technological utopia "echoes youth culture with its love for technology, consumption and distraction" contrasts with the ecological utopia which "promotes maturity with its emphasis on self-reliance, self-restraint, hard work, decision-making, and community" (101). Ostry argues in the analysis of M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, that these texts set up a binary between non-human organic nature and fabricated technological nature, calling to mind De Guesse's separation of the utopia of abundance (technology) and the ecological utopia (nature). They each represent a kind of utopia, but in these young adult dystopias are unable to be attained together – it is, one or the other. This binary that Ostry sets up in young adult dystopia is interesting and, I think, common, as it is visible in the three texts used here for my own study.

Interestingly, Basu et al.'s collection circles around the question of whether or not "young people, with enough encouragement and inspiration can in fact create a better world," however, as no consensus is reached it seems the future of the world, the environment and humanity remains uncertain (13).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The theoretical framework for this study will be informed predominantly by theories of dystopia and ecocriticism. Although *Life as We Knew It*, *The Hunger Games* and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* are not traditional environmentalist texts – that is, they are not ecomimetic and do not focus on the real environment - it seems logical that their natural settings serve as a part of the literary fabric inherent in their genre – dystopia. Drawing from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, it is clear that since the 1960s, science fiction, and in particular dystopian and apocalyptic narratives, have taken a keen interest in ecology and environmental activism in humankind's relation to the nonhuman world (i.e., technology and nature). As Lawrence Buell notes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005): "No genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking 'environment' better than science fiction does," and he goes on to describe how science fiction and dystopia continually testify to the fact that "we're probably stuck, whether we like it or not, with the world we've got" (58). Buell here is re-asserting what Greg Garrard argues in his chapter on "Apocalypse," that the world is *not* about to end, which is why apocalyptic, science fiction and dystopian literature is so relevant when paired with the ecocritical lens, because humans must start to think about survival as opposed to demise.

Garrard, in his chapter "Futures: The Earth," urges the need for "ecocritics to give greater consideration than they have thus far to the transformation in the dominant meaning of the word 'earth': from the most immediate ground of existence, the soil, to life's largest relevant context, the biosphere" (162). The idea that the ecocritic should be able to expand their criticism beyond the immediately obvious representation of the environment

and think more largely about human life in general is particularly useful when addressing texts like *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, in which the planet presented is not technically Earth but still possesses environment, indigenous species, and human life. Garrard continues in the same vein, stating that "the need [for the ecocritic] to not only 'think globally' but to think about the globe demands a politicised reading practice more akin to social ecology and Cultural Studies than to deep ecology and traditional literary studies. Such a practice would consider constructions of the Earth provided by... literature, TV and film" (162). Hence, examining the cultural construction of the natural world through artifacts of culture, which for this research study will be three young adult dystopian texts, provides insight into social attitudes not only towards the natural world but also towards young adults in terms of what speculative literature written for them says to them about the environment (technological and natural), the future, and how literature constructs the relationship between these entities.

For the purpose of constructing an ecocritical cultural-studies approach to the examination of the portrayal of nature in young adult dystopian literature, Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism is the most useful because it has the broadest scope. She contends that ecocriticism "is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). This leaves space for literary dystopian fiction and the "physical environment" of the fiction to be analyzed ecocritically so that it might be applied to the contemporary context. Ecocriticism requires the critic to read in a way that facilitates analysis of "a text's orientation both to the world it imagines and to the world in which it takes shape, along with the conditions and contexts that affect that orientation

whatever it might be" (Kern 260). Indeed, Moylan, in reference to Sargent's work on utopian and dystopian literature, states that textual critiques of a dystopian or utopian text "should take care to work not only with the text itself but also with the contexts of its production and its reception" (Moylan 73). It is, therefore, important to this study that the contexts of the young adult reader in Western culture be taken into account so that the representation of nature, the development of the young adult's green subjectivity, or the dystopian critique might be more accurately decoded.

In order to explore the representation of the natural environment in a selection of young adult dystopian texts, to interrogate the role technology plays in the narrative, and to explore how the young adult protagonist interacts with nature and technology, it is necessary to construct a theoretical lens that includes multiple threads of analysis. As my principal theoretical questions centre on non-human nature – the environment and technology – I position myself primarily within the theory of ecocriticism and rely on the critical writings of Lawrence Buell and Greg Garrard, which also deal with technology, apocalypse, and the dystopian genre. For instance, in terms of the close reading that is common to literary analysis, and which I employ, Garrard's text *Ecocriticism* will be useful in his consideration of the patterns and metaphors revealed through a literary close reading, as he employs this technique as well, saying, "I will be reading culture as rhetoric, although not in the strict sense understood by rhetoricians, but as the production, reproduction and transformation of large-scale metaphors" (7). As well, it will be useful to employ the perspectives of Tom Moylan and M. Keith Booker in their definition and

analysis of the dystopian genre "with its complex relationship to the utopian impulse" in order to "address the social imagination represented in these works" (Moylan 122).

I am most interested in the convergence of the idea that the natural is the utopian and that childhood is a utopian identity, intrinsically connected to the natural. As Garrard, Buell, Dobrin, and Kidd contend, the natural is intrinsically utopian, connected somehow to the truths and ideals of contemporary society while, conversely, man-made landscapes, technology, and other fabricated non-human nature are linked to dystopia and disconnected from a natural, holistic way of being. The dystopia, often arising out of a utopian ideal gone awry, may be viewed in this construction as intrinsically connected to the young adult. The young adult protagonists, situated in this discourse, begin their narratives on a journey towards subjectivity. Of seminal importance to this study is in what ways the non-human environment, the natural environment, and technology are represented in interactions with the young adult, who is on the threshold of adulthood and is departing a utopian state and entering into the dystopian realization.

Miranda, as the young adult protagonist in *Life as We Knew It*, is lacking in agency and in her potential as agentive hero. Using Mark Bauerlein's argument that, "the youth culture of American society yields an adolescent consumer enmeshed in juvenile matters and secluded from adult realities," it is argued in this study that the social dystopia that arises post-apocalypse was, in fact, already in place before the moon crush (15). The people of America in *Life as We Knew It* are infantilized dystopian subjects, who live in a perceived utopia of abundance, but when their technology is lost they are plunged into uncertainty. Losing electricity and communications effectively postpones life and action as the Evans

decide it is safer to stay in their home. *Life as We Knew It* explores family drama and the coming of age of Miranda, but it is most predominantly a text that revolves around waiting. The Evans wait to hear from their family; they wait for the government to take action; they wait for electricity to return; and they wait for a return to the life they once knew.

To uncover the ways in which Miranda's relationships with her particular dystopia, nature, and technology are depicted, Chapter 4 will begin by discussing the structure of the dystopia and then deconstruct the layers of control and consumerism at play in Miranda's life. To give the chapter an environmental structure, each of the settings in the text will be addressed: America and Howell Pennsylvania; Miller's Pond; and the Evans' home. In each of these locations, Miranda's powerlessness and fear grows, and while the natural environment offers a place of respite from the post-apocalyptic lifestyle she must endure, it is used as an escape and not as intrinsically valuable in and of itself. Miranda, then, in not fostering a reciprocal relationship with the natural environment, does not become the symbol of utopian hope expected of the young adult in a young adult dystopian text. As a new social order is not established in *Life as We Knew It*, it is intriguing that the text most grounded in contemporary reality is the least hopeful of the texts studied in this thesis.

In the dystopian tradition, Susan Collins' *The Hunger Games* also offers a critique of contemporary Western culture. Collins envisions the "post-modernist claim that we inhabit a prosthetic environment" and extends it in her dystopia to recognize that humans might also inhabit a simulated human existence (Buell, *Writing* 5). The reality of a blended non-human environment, made up of technology and nature, is realized in *The Hunger Games*. The perceived binary between nature and culture is the hubris of the Capitol, and in

particular the Gamemakers and President Snow. Nature plays a remarkable role throughout the first installment of the series, as Collins engages in the postmodern debate around the idea of “representation.” *The Hunger Games* constructs a dystopia that presents nature as adversarial, for instance; the natural environment in the Districts is a dangerous space, off-limits to humans. The natural environment is never fully free of the machinations of humanity; indeed, throughout much of the narrative, it is a technology-laden built environment. Essential to Katniss's survival is her forbidden knowledge of and relationship with the natural world as the natural world awakens her understanding and ability to undermine the dystopia that the system of government has created, and that President Snow reinforces. Panem is a world where survival depends upon learning not only the rules of play, but also the systems behind those rules, lest one be consumed by the Capitol.

In order to unpackage the ways in which Katniss uses her relationship with nature to undermine the dystopian regime of the Capitol, each of the three settings in *The Hunger Games* – Panem, the Capitol, and the Hunger Games themselves – are examined. In each of these locations, Katniss undermines the latent consumerist cycle of Panem and uses the natural environment in ways that undermine the intentions of the Capitol. Nature is an entropic system that constantly adapts and evolves even as humans continue to affect it. Katniss adopts this natural behaviour, and, by deviating from expected behaviours, she transitions from gamer to Gamemaker. Through Katniss, Collins invites the reader to engage critically with their own world's ecosystem, an ecosystem that incorporates nature, politics, and media. While it is true that our world has been irreversibly altered by humans,

it is not extraneous to us nor are we from it. While it continues to evolve and survive, so too must we humans.

Patrick Ness' *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, as with the previous two texts of this study, is a dystopia that focuses on the coming-of-age story of its young protagonist, Todd Hewitt. The novel is set on New World and presents a planet whose natural environment is similar to that of Earth, except for the Noise, which makes all human male and animal thought audible. The human colonists immediately term the Noise a 'germ' and blame this naturally occurring element of the planet for the deaths of all the women colonists. Todd grows up in this environment without knowing anything but the history and context that the Mayor Prentiss has fabricated in order to maintain his regime. As Moylan notes, control over language, information, and historical context are key components of a dystopian society, as is privacy. For Todd, even his mind, where he is constantly bombarded with Noise, is a dystopian place because he has been brought up to think that the Noise is unnatural. The Noise of the male and animal thoughts in Prentisstown interferes with Todd's thoughts, and as he moves from the egocentrism of childhood to the subjectivity of adulthood, he must navigate the overwhelming social pressures to conform to his culture and his culture's definitions of the Noise, what it means to be a man, and what it means to be human. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is implicitly metaphorical of twenty-first century reality with the most obvious critique being the constant bombardment of Noise, which directly parallels contemporary Western society's incessant information feed and network of connections and communications.

The Knife of Never Letting Go presents one whole interconnected world, which acts and reacts in a consistent manner regardless of where Todd's journey takes him. Rather, in this text, Todd's relationship with the natural environment, and his undermining of the dystopian thrall of the Mayor and Prentisstown, is developed through his relationships and connections, or disconnections, with three other characters in the text – all introduced in the first chapter. Manchee, Todd's dog, is the voice of nature that is at first scorned by Todd, but eventually comes to have value and even garner Todd's affections. Viola is in direct opposition to Aaron, the corrupt Prentisstown preacher who tracks Todd down for the purpose of forcing Todd to complete the ritual step to becoming a man by Prentisstown standards. Where Aaron enforces the agrarian and extremist religious culture and customs of Prentisstown, Viola represents change, undermines the accepted history of Prentisstown, and bring with her technological advances and a new way of communicating. In this study, the dystopia of the text is first examined with reference to Tom Moylan and Keith Booker's discussions of the utopian and dystopian impulse. Each of the following sections focuses on individual characters, and their impacts on Todd's acceptance of the Noise and of the natural world as intrinsically valuable and interconnected. In relating to each of these characters, Todd grows closer to the natural world, acceptance of the Noise, and becomes the utopian hope in Prentisstown's dystopian future.

Chapter 4: *Life as We Knew It*: When Natural Disaster Strikes

Post-apocalyptic fiction focuses on life after global catastrophe and illuminates the possibilities of beginning anew, of creating a new community out of the survivors from the old way of life. The aim of apocalyptic narratives is to reassure the audience that it is not too late and that action and change are possible. This differs from dystopian fiction, which often focuses on the community that has arisen from the ashes of an apocalypse, as with the other texts in this study. Although traditional dystopia examines the everyday lives of everyday people in "a social 'elsewhere' that appears to be far worse than any in the 'real' world," Susan Beth Pfeffer's social dystopia in *Life as We Knew It* is not elsewhere at all, but rather in twenty-first century North America (Moylan xiii). The novel begins more within the bounds of dystopian fiction than post-apocalyptic. While the inciting incident is the apocalyptic "Moon Crush" that seemingly pits the environment against Miranda Evans and her family, it becomes apparent, although perhaps not to the teen reader or 16-year old protagonist Miranda herself, that the social problems that arise post-apocalypse were actually present before the apocalypse.

By creating a cataclysmic event that is outside human control, Pfeffer's text realizes the epitome of human powerlessness in the face of natural catastrophe. In this way *Life as We Knew It* embodies contemporary anxieties surrounding global climate change as Garrard points out that there is a necessary nihilism that accompanies apocalyptic narratives (106). Garrard compares the contemporary climate change narrative to that of the apocalypse, as it "is inevitably bound up with imagination, because it has yet to come into being" (93). There is fictional quality to climate change and a sense that even radical

social change will be ineffective. Humans feel powerless at the earth's inevitable temperature shift and therefore any action is perceived as futile. *Life as We Knew It* presents an apocalypse that mirrors Carson's *Silent Spring* as there "is little hope that catastrophe may be averted because the threat [Carson] outlines is so pervasive and irreversible" (Garrard 95). The very survival of the human species is questioned, forming apprehensions surrounding the lives of humanity's future generations. What environmental problems will they face if the current populace does not change their behaviours, and even if behaviour is changed, will it help? Pfeffer's text, unlike Carson's, relieves humans of any responsibility for the environmental disaster, and indeed paints the environment, portrayed through Miranda's journal entries, as the antagonist of the story. Yet, through the course of the novel it becomes increasingly clear that the Moon Crush is really the instigating event that leads to the uncovering of the "truth of the system" and to a "scrap of hope, appearing within the militant dystopia" (Moylan xiii). In other words, if the environment had *not* collapsed, Miranda might not have grown conscious of her dystopian lifestyle.

Traditionally, the dystopian text "opens in *media res*, within the nightmarish society," and the reader is forced to engage with the text in order to learn about that world and come to understand its dystopic system (Baccolini & Moylan 5, italics in original). Although I argue that Pfeffer's text opens in the dystopia, to the reader and Miranda herself, Miranda's life begins not in a nightmarish state, but rather in a utopia of abundance, in relative contemporary normalcy. Miranda is a high school student with typical interests, no extraordinary power or skill, and divorced parents. She lives with her mother and her

younger brother Jonny, while her older brother Matt is away at university. Miranda's life is recognizable as that of a middle-class teenager from small town America. This life and, perhaps more pervasively, the text of *Life as We Knew It* itself, is what Mark Bauerlein sees as part of the fabric of the "dumbest generation." Miranda lives in the digital age, in a world of instant gratification where people of all ages can "seek out what they already hope to find, and they want it fast and free, with a minimum of effort" (110). Miranda's special interest is figure skating, which seems harmless enough, but, having been unable to take lessons because of an injury, all she can now do is involve herself in the online community of fans of her hometown Olympic figure skater. Her mother gets to the core of the issue when the two argue about whether or not Miranda can take skating lessons again. She says, "skating lessons are very expensive and I can't help thinking you only want them so you can gossip about Brandon Erlich on the message boards" (7). Miranda ignores the accusation and argues that the fight is really all about money and that her mother favours Jonny since he gets to go to an expensive baseball camp. The mother later concedes and agrees to let Miranda undertake skating again, which according to Bauerlein, shows that the mother, as a mentor figure, lacks the courage to risk "being labeled a curmudgeon and a reactionary" by denying her daughter the indulgence of being involved in an online community (29). However, by conceding to her daughter's social pressures, the mother is also denying the potential for a reorientation of thought regarding the established normalcy of the utopia of abundance. Adults, Bauerlein argues, are equally to blame for the "dumbing" of generations as they too concede to the powerful temptation of instant gratification and consumerism, and are fostering in their children "routine irreverence and

knowledge deficits" (144). Since everyone else is relying on communications technologies and engaging in consumerist behaviours, then Miranda and her family do not *need* to change their way of thinking about the world. The behaviours can continue unquestioned because they seem to benefit the individual.

In a scene in which Miranda and her family go carolling with the survivors on her street, she notes that:

The other people I didn't know at all. But our road is funny. Even in good times we didn't socialize with most of our neighbors. Mom says when she was growing up she did, but so many of the old families have moved out and new people have moved in and neighborliness has changed. Now being a good neighbor means minding your own business. (280)

The consequences of engaging with online communities and with family over long distances, as opposed to sustaining tangible connections, exchanging local history, and building family context and community culture jeopardize the potential for community building once the online and long distance communications methods are lost. There is an "essential connection of knowledge and democracy", explains Bauerlein; in order for a democracy, a national community, to work, there needs to be an "informed electorate" (169). Before the Moon Crush, the Evans family happily resides in a utopia of abundance, where consumerism and the consuming of technology and indulgence create a disconnected, uncomplicated, and individualistic lifestyle. However, post-Moon Crush, it becomes clear that it is not only the reliance on such technologies which has triggered a regression in the progress of humanity, but rather the disconnection within the national community, the philosophy that the individual is more important than the whole, that creates the "civic decay" and causes the post-apocalyptic dystopia (Bauerlein 169).

There is an ignorant reliance on the government inherent in *Life as We Knew It*, because "individual freedom means the freedom not to vote, not to read the newspaper, not to contemplate the facts of U.S. history, not to frequent the public sphere—in a word, to opt out of civic life" (169). Indeed it is the individual's reliance on the system, on the "someone else" to make the choice to change and take action, which fashions and maintains the dystopia in which they unconsciously reside. *Life as We Knew It* presents the dumbest generation, in its opening utopia of abundance, with the challenge of surviving an environmental disaster – and the generation fails utterly.

4.1 America and Howell, PA

According to dystopian Moylan, an essential dystopian strategy is control over the means of language, the suppression of historical memory and "the present reduced to the empirica of daily life" (149). Shrinking the narrative point of view to Miranda's daily journal entries quite literally reduces the reader's context to the minutiae and tedium of daily life. Furthermore, Miranda's narrative quite quickly establishes that historical memory and history as a concept have lost their significance to youth. She cites history as boring and although it is easy to excel in, it is something beyond the scope of her everyday life (5). She is surprised when the asteroid colliding with the moon is transformed into an historical event emphasized at school and in history class. She cites the extent to which her life is egocentric and individual, saying, "I never really thought about how when I look at the moon it's the same moon Shakespeare and Marie Antoinette and George Washington and Cleopatra looked at" (11). When working on her history paper, she decides to focus on the 1969 Lunar Landing and is surprised to find that many people had been more

interested in the latest *Star Trek* episode. She once again notes her difficulty in linking history to a contemporary context: "I wasn't exactly sure how to turn that into a paper, so Mom and I talked about it, about how fiction can have more power than reality and how in 1969 there was a lot of cynicism because of Vietnam and the sixties and all that and there were people who didn't think men were really on the moon and thought it was a hoax" (13). Recounting this history is in fact recapitulating the moment when American society began to distance itself from national history and bring itself into the daily tedium of the "here and now" (Bauerlein 183). Her history teacher, as mentor, perpetuates this shift from thinking historically to promoting analysis of only the immediate. Furthermore, Miranda continues to repeat history as she is not considering the imminent asteroid strike on the moon as a serious historical, national, and global event. Pfeffer, by drawing attention to the fact that the narrative is fiction, is attempting to give Miranda's journal credibility and attribute importance to this document as fictional historical knowledge. However, Pfeffer undermines this credibility because Miranda is not aware of the systematic dystopia of America, but in fact belongs to it. Miranda cannot imagine a life that is different from the one that she is living, and she has no framework with which to question the system that she lives in, as she has no sense of history or global issues. She resides firmly in the here and now.

Moylan says that "the dystopian subjects usually lose all recollection of the way things were before the new order, but by regaining language they also recover the ability to draw on the alternative truths of the past and 'speak back' to hegemonic power" (150). By focusing on Miranda as narrator of the text, the opening of *Life as We Knew It* comes more

clearly into the dystopian sphere. Miranda is given control over the dissemination of information from text to reader. The reader therefore learns only about Miranda herself and we quickly learn and hear repeatedly that, even if she could get information about the world she lives in, she has no desire to do so. Most of what the reader does learn about in the text is life as it was just before the Moon Crush, framing the environment as the cause for the disruption of the utopia of abundance lifestyle. Bauerlein, however, suggests that the perceived technological utopia of abundance and reliance on the democratic system is actually to blame for the inaction of the Evans family, the American people themselves, and the subsequent hardships they endure (Bauerlein 10).

After the moon is crushed, Miranda attends one day of school and, ironically, it is History class that is interrupted by cacophonous thunder and lightning. The classes are shuffled into the hallway in case of a hurricane and Miranda has the words of the National Anthem stuck in her head: "I thought, at least nobody's singing 'The Star Spangled Banner,' and I started laughing all over again. The phrase 'By the dawn's early light' got stuck in my mind, and I kept hearing it over and over again. 'By the dawn's early light.' 'By the dawn's early light.' I wondered how many people had sung 'By the dawn's early light' yesterday and were dead today" (31). Miranda is set firmly in the here and now – history is drowned out, literally, by nature, but also by immediate egocentricity. The importance of history in contemporary existence is drowned out, and only each day's "dawn's early light" is important because it foreshadows either Miranda's continued existence or her imminent death. The passage blatantly indicts, through a repetition of only fragments of its national anthem, the American government and people's historical memory loss. Miranda expresses

sarcastic disdain towards the anthem since it communicates the hope instilled in the country and its government – the hope that the government can somehow ensure the next dawn's early light – a hope that she cannot help but participate in, despite her skepticism.

The need for Miranda's own history is further undercut when her neighbour Mrs. Nesbitt, just before her death, burns her own journals, saying, "I didn't want you to be tempted" (233). Exploring Mrs. Nesbitt's journals would have enabled a sharing of context, history, and culture, a desire for which Bauerlein says is desperately missing in contemporary youth (76). Instead, Mrs. Nesbitt burns them, in an act that benefits only the individual, in order to keep the life that she knew private. Throughout the text, technology undergoes de-evolution, from internet to telephone to radio. Having the Evans family uncover what life had been like before the technology-filled dystopia might have helped them cope and learn how to live with more basic technologies. However, by burning the journals, writing is situated as a futile activity useful only for oneself in a state of egocentricity. It is, therefore, an allowable activity for youth, but it is not to be taken seriously or read as though it were telling a true history, which discredits individual history as nothing more than recreation. Miranda's lack of will to actually explore and learn about her new world or the world's history, and her lack of reflection on how life was and how it is now, diminishes the potential that journaling had as an activity that could reform historical memory and control over language. Instead, Miranda's story takes on the familiar tone of the contemporary anxieties surrounding climate change. Like Carson's *Silent Spring*, it arouses a sense of despair for the children of the future and their potential for survival in a world so ravaged by human inaction. As the only unique activity that Miranda

undertakes, her journaling is now only useful as an artifice through which Pfeffer can communicate her version of the dystopian family drama tale.

The first line of Miranda's journal announces that "Lisa is pregnant," beginning the story with the prospect of new life in a broken world (1). Miranda is then named the child's Godmother. However, this is not a role that she takes on willingly; rather, it is clear that Miranda has been forced into this responsibility. She writes:

I could tell from his laughter that he'd grabbed the phone away from Lisa.
"Miranda, please say yes. It would mean so much to us for you to be the
baby's godmother."
So I said yes. I couldn't exactly say no... I hope Lisa changes her mind and I
won't have to deal with it. (2-3)

This is the first moment in Miranda's journal and therefore a pivotal one because for Miranda life has changed entirely. Now she, like the adults around her, has donned a caretaker role. Opening the story with the creation of life and dissemination of responsibility for that life is an interesting revision of the more sinister opening of Huxley's *Brave New World* wherein students, future working members of society, take a tour of The Hatchery and learn where they came from, how they were created, and that their destiny has been programmed. The conditioning of individuals both genetically and psychologically for their "inescapable social destinies" ensures the stability of Huxley's caste system and the conditioning makes them incapable of adequately performing any other function than that for which they were created (16). Miranda's mechanical, yet unwilling, compliance with her father's wish for her to be Godmother echoes Huxley's conditioning. It also frames the child identity as both subordinate to and dependent upon the adult, a relationship echoed on a grand scale with the general populace as infantilized, looking to the

government as authority and caretaker. This sense that there is a caretaker figure, or steward of some sort, watching over and protecting the people, pervades the first half of the book and is expressed through phrases such as "[t]hey can't let people freeze to death" (44). Later, in a discussion with Dan, Miranda's brief love interest, the sentiments of the people are given voice:

"I try not to think about it," he said. "What'll happen next, I mean. But of course I do. And I get so angry. I know it's nobody's fault, but the government should have done something."

"Like what?" I asked.

"It could have warned people," he said. "It could have evacuated people from the coastlines. Even if it turned out to be a false alarm. And there's got to be something they could do about electricity. And gas prices. And food. Somewhere there's got to be supplies of food that aren't getting to us." (83)

While American society expects the government to find a solution to the fallout of the Moon Crash, the population continues to try and live life as they knew it – which, ironically, involves environmentally-harmful activities like driving and stockpiling unnecessary commodities. Their arrant consumerism leads to their hunger later as the weather continues to worsen. The people passively complain that the 'government' has not done its job and their quality of life is dropping. They do little, and often nothing, to change their circumstances.

What the people of America know and how they live dictate what actions are possible for them within their space. Miranda's family, like many others, stockpiles preserved foods, clothing, water, and gasoline instead of trying to find long-term solutions because they have unfounded hope that the environment will change back, and, for the most part, Pfeiffer's narrative encourages this mindset. The government and adults'

perceived ubiquitous power are often emphasized in Pfeffer's narrative, creating a pervading sense of powerlessness within society as a whole and Miranda herself. Her mother often voices both the need to listen to the radio and the government, for news and direction, but also her extreme discontent with the President and the current system of government:

And then, out of nowhere, was the president. Mom hates him like she hates Fox News, but she sat there transfixed.

"I am broadcasting to you from my ranch in Texas," the president said. "The United States has suffered its worst tragedy. But we are a great people and we will place our faith in God and extend a helping hand to all who need us."

"Idiot," Mom muttered, and she sounded so normal we all laughed. (25)

Questioning the system of government in this text reads as a running joke or tongue-in-cheek parody, rather than a dystopian counter-narrative. All authority in *Life as We Knew It* is presented as a joke, as Miranda's mother is unable to enforce her rules, as evidenced by Miranda's skating lessons, or maintain any institutions, such as schooling, which falls by the wayside to survival and, eventually, loses to apathy as Miranda and her brothers *choose* not to learn anymore. The meager teen rebellion that Miranda experiences throughout the text mirrors the ineffectual discontent that her mother and the American people have towards their system of government. It also mirrors the contemporary twenty-first century feelings of anxiety and hopelessness regarding climate change and a global shift in environmental consciousness. It becomes clear that, unlike in most young adult dystopias, *Life as We Knew It* is not presenting the reader with a protagonist that embodies hope. Miranda and her family are in no way motivated to change the dystopic system in which they live, and they feel that, even if they tried, their attempts would be ineffectual.

4.2 Miller's Pond

Nature has multiple representations in *Life as We Knew It*. It is primarily adversarial as the Evans perceive the Moon Crush to be the cause of their catastrophic situation. However, nature is also a safe space where Miranda can explore her growing autonomy, but only when she denies that the world has forever changed. Miranda's autonomy, therefore, can only become an actuality when she imagines that the world has reverted back to the way it was before the Moon Crush. Early in the novel, after the asteroid, the first example of this occurs: "I looked up, and I could see the moon in the morning sky. It was still bigger than it should have been, and it didn't seem quite as washed out as it usually looks in the daytime. I stopped looking at it, and concentrated on the dogwoods instead" (29). Focusing on the dogwoods allows her to ignore the moon and the changes that it represents for her lifestyle. Later, trying to think of a place where the swim team can practice, now that indoor swimming pools are out of commission, Miranda suggests Miller's Pond. At first, she swims to keep her mind off the worsening food situation: "Swimming and shivering kept me from thinking about how hungry I was," and to keep up a pretence that the world will experience a return to her "normal" (55). Miller's Pond presents an ecological Utopia, or what Marius De Gues calls a "utopia of sufficiency" (22). In nature, Miranda can escape the infantilizing control of her family and the dystopian system. She has the opportunity to enjoy, in a nostalgic way, the childhood that she is outgrowing. At Miller's Pond, she experiences her first brush with romance in a relationship with Dan, a fellow swimmer. The summer at Miller's Pond is a short respite, but it is a childish one, as she says, "[t]he best part of every day is swimming at the pond. When I'm in the water I feel

as though nothing bad has happened. I think about the fish, how they don't know what's going on. Their world is unchanged" (88). Miranda likens herself to the fish, but what she fails to realize is that she, like the fish trapped in Millers Pond, is trapped in her own, individual egocentrism.

4.3 The Evans' Sunroom

Each day Miranda spends at the pond, she ignores the inevitable change her life will see, while the dangers of the real world grow. She risks being bitten by a mosquito carrying the West Nile virus, and, more importantly, she avoids helping her family prepare for their future. When her mother becomes angry at Miranda for going to the pond, it is not a moment of realization, but a moment of apathetic surrender:

I found Mom in the sunroom. "Where were you?" she shouted.
"Out," I said. One of the great all-time answers: Out.
"I know that. Where out? What have you been doing?"
"Swimming," I said. "At Miller's Pond. Which I intend to keep doing all summer long, so don't give me any lectures about mosquitoes, okay?"
I don't think I've ever seen Mom look so angry. For a moment, I actually thought she was going to hit me, which she's never ever done.
I'm not a complete idiot, so I apologized. "I'm sorry," I said. "What exactly did I do wrong?"
"You left here without telling me where you were going or how long you'd be gone," Mom said.
"I didn't realize I had to," I said. "I've gone out without telling you for years now."
"These are not normal times," she said, but I could see she'd calmed down if only a little. "I thought you were old enough to realize that."
"And I thought I was old enough to go out in broad daylight without it being some kind of crisis," I said.
"Age has nothing to do with it," she said. "How would you feel if you turned around and couldn't find me and had no idea where I'd gone or why or when I'd be back? Think about that, Miranda. How would you feel?"
So I did think about it, and my stomach clenched up. "I'd be terrified," I admitted. (84-5)

Terror is Miranda and her mother's response to change and the transformation of the natural environment, and in this instance adults and children share the same reaction to the outdoors. On one hand, nature offers Miranda a chance to hold on to her childhood innocence, but on the other it encourages her ability to claim ignorance of reality, and of her need to grow up and accept, and enact, change in her lifestyle.

Miranda's anti-heroism, hinted at in the absence of a pre-apocalypse sense of community and in her obstinacy towards accepting the permanence of environmental change, is further fostered by an episode in which Miranda includes a friend in food hand-out. Her mother says, "I will not have Jonny or Matt or you starve because you want to include a friend. This isn't the time for friendships, Miranda. We have to watch out only for ourselves" (101). Instead of promoting the idea that resources should be shared, her mother perpetuates the dystopia by demanding the preservation of the individual. The line is long and full of individuals taking government hand-outs for their individual families. The narrative denies the reader a hero figure and instead presents the American philosophy that the individual is more important than the whole. The Evans fear letting people into their home, and are unwilling to share food and medicine with other people. Since these reactions are occurring in the sympathetic protagonists of the text, the readers find themselves in a subtly antagonistic space.

The loss of electricity, and therefore communication, has led to a self-preservation mode for the Evans and those around them. This mode, however, does not work as a survivor mechanism. Miranda hears about countless preventable deaths, from allergic reactions to starvation. Instead of finding a proactive solution to life in the new world the

Evans, and, apparently, the rest of the Nation, are reactionary. As the weather worsens and electricity is no longer available, they begin to hibernate. Though this might seem like a pragmatic approach to life, given the circumstances, it is yet another echo of contemporary Western civilization's disconnection with community and with nature. At first, "Mom makes sure at least one of us goes into town every day," but they eventually deem it unsafe for women, and then anyone, to travel anywhere alone, and so Miranda and the Evans become prisoners in their own home (157).

Stuck inside her home with only her family, Miranda longs for the privacy of nature and when the opportunity arises she decides to go skating on Miller's Pond where she meets and skates with Brandon Erlich, her figure-skating idol whom she had never met. However, without online chat boards to announce to the world that Brandon has survived, Miranda is plunged back into the reality of her situation. As soon as she returns home she finds that her mother has sprained her ankle again, and Miranda finally realizes that she can no longer run off to Miller's Pond – it is too dangerous, it burns up too much energy, and her selfish trips there alone are hurting her family's chances of survival. A shift occurs in Miranda, as she writes, "I spent a lot of yesterday trying to decide if it all really happened or if I just made it up. Me skating with Brandon Erlich. Us actually talking. Him being so nice. I've made up stranger stuff than that" (230). Miranda has effectively stymied any further rebellion within herself. Her world has shrunk to the sunroom of her home, as she writes, "my world keeps getting smaller and smaller. No school. No pond. No town. No bedroom" (236). While she longs for the freedom, innocence, and privacy she once felt in nature, there is no further suggestion in her narrative that she longs to leave the safety of

her home. She, like her mother and older brother, stop struggling to survive and begin to merely live for Jonny, the youngest of the Evans. Jonny is the only one who suggests that they fight harder for survival and move on:

"Do you think we should go?" Jonny asked. It felt so strange, because he sounded like I do when I ask Matt stuff like that.

"We can't leave Mrs. Nesbitt," I said. "And to get in our car and drive someplace, without knowing where we'd end up, or if there'd be food there and a place to live? Some people can do that. I don't think Mom can."

"Maybe one of us should go," Jonny said. "Matt or me. You could stay here with Mom and Mrs. Nesbitt."

"You're not old enough," I said. "So stop thinking about it. We'll be okay. We have food, we have wood, we even have some oil for the furnace. Things are bound to get better. They can't get worse."

Jonny grinned. "That's what they all say," he pointed out. "And they've all been wrong." (158)

The narrative is identical the next time Jonny asks if they should leave. The answer is negative because leaving would mean being cut off from communications with their loved ones and the government. They would have no way of knowing when, and if, things started to get better. The Evans fear to leave the safety of their home and they fear for the lives of their family group.

Fear pervades the text in a realistic way and is one of the reasons *Life as We Knew It* has been lauded as a great young adult dystopia, one reviewer writes: "told in diary entries that vary in length and intensity, [this book] creates a riveting and deeply frightening account of the individual experience of a worldwide catastrophe" (Spisak). However, the paralyzing effect of fear is frustrating in this young adult dystopian text because it obstructs Miranda's potential as a young adult beacon of hope. Miranda grows from a yet-undeveloped youth having the potential to be an agentive young adult, into an overdeveloped, complacent, and reactionary adult who perpetuates the dystopia. Miranda

fears, and fears for, the future and she responds to it in non-heroic ways, leading ultimately to a worrisome sense of necessary self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice, by the time it is actualized, has a sense of inevitability as the lives of future generations have become essential to sustain, as therein rests hope for radical change. The current generation, as voiced through Miranda's journal, is incapable of accepting a shift in environmental thinking. When Miranda dons the role of Godmother, she becomes responsible for the life of the next generation – upon which responsibility for the survival of humanity is placed – instead of being a part of it.

As the Evans family's stores of food dwindle, her mother begins to eat less so that her children can eat more and asks Miranda and Matt to do the same and save more food for Jonny, the youngest sibling. This is at first a point of contention, as Miranda feels less loved than Jonny, but grows into a feeling of anxiety about the likelihood of any human survival: "What if the volcanoes aren't the last bad thing to happen? What if the earth survives but humans don't? That could happen, couldn't it? And not a million years from now, either. That could happen now or next year or five years from now. What happens then?" (152). Miranda begins to internalize the feeling of living through a pointless struggle, writing in her journal:

I remember a few months ago how angry I was that we weren't eating as much as Jonny, how unfair that seemed. But now I feel like Mom was right. It is a possibility only one of us is going to make it. We have fuel and we have water, but who knows how long our food will last. Mom's so thin it's scary and Matt certainly isn't as strong as he used to be and I know I'm not. I'm not saying Jon is, but I can see how he might have the best chance of making it through the winter or spring or whatever. Probably if only one of us really is going to survive, Matt would be the best choice, since he's old enough to take care of himself. But Matt would never let that happen.

I don't want to live two weeks longer or three or four if it means none of us survive. So I guess if it comes to it, I'll stop eating altogether to make sure Jon has food. (271-2)

After she helps her family recover from the flu, Miranda's journal takes on a tone of resignation. Miranda gives up. Her journal entries through the winter become shorter and more strained as she relays only information and conversations surrounding food, and the returning electricity. Ironically, it is only in these last days that Miranda realizes that electricity, technology, and a reliance on the utopia of abundance have truly been the antagonist of the novel. She says, "I know I should be excited because we've had electricity 3 days in a row, but we need food more than we need electricity. A lot more. Unless electricity can make us some canned vegetables and soup and tuna fish, I don't know what good it's going to do us" (322). Miranda has finally realized that her family's reliance on electricity and the nation's reliance on their government re-establishing "power" have immobilized her. She has not yet recognized the environment for the resource that it is and still wishes for "magical food" in the form of consumer products like canned vegetables. Furthermore, this realization is too late to effect change, as she has already embraced the inevitability of her death.

As they near the last ten days of food supplies, Miranda prepares to sacrifice herself. In order to spare herself from dying in front of her family, and to save rations of food, Miranda declares: "I was leaving home to give Jonny just a little better chance" (328). In an action reminiscent of that of Jonas in *The Giver*, Miranda, in order to save the life of her younger brother, walks off into the snowscape to die. Leaving the world in the hands of the resilient young is a familiar contemporary mentality regarding climate change, in which

children are charged with overcoming the environmental decay caused by the social structure and culture that the current generation feels incapable of changing. Even though she herself is a youth, she undermines this by simply giving up and refusing to accept responsibility for the future, joining the failed caretaker generation and passing that responsibility on to the next generation.

Yet Miranda's final decision is undermined and rescinded when Pfeffer supplies the Evans with "magical food." Miranda's decision to willingly take her life in order to save her family, although bleak and anti-heroic might have been an empowering step towards assuming ownership of her own future and finally leaving the cocoon of her family's sunroom. However, once she does finally make it to town, food awaits her. Free food is miraculously being delivered to those who wander into town to claim it. The realization that either functioning communication technologies or a physical communication with community members might have spared her family two weeks of starvation deeply affects Miranda and leads, both the Evans' and the reader, to the conclusion that the Evans were correct in their decision to do nothing and remain in the safety of home and in life as they knew it.

4.4 Conclusion

Rather than exploring the counter-narrative of resistance, Pfeffer encourages the Evans's apathetic mindset by rewarding their decisions. They believe that their enemy is the natural world gone awry, while in fact the true enemy is inaction, spurred on by the perceived futility of their rebellion. In Claire P. Curtis' examination of *Life as We Knew It*, Miranda is found to lack an agentive role in the counter-dystopian creation of a new post-

apocalypse community (97). I too find Miranda's apathetic outlook on her situation troubling, though I would argue that the text itself is lacking in counter-dystopian narrative. From the outset it seems unlikely that the Evans family will survive the apocalypse, or even the winter, let alone save the world. It is Pfeffer herself who in many ways undermines Miranda's heroic potential for counter-dystopian rebellion. The only hints of rebellion arise in Miranda as she undergoes her coming-of-age narrative, growing from adolescence to adulthood. Her outbursts against authority are ineffectual, and often ironically humorous, mirroring her mother's own vain rebellion against the government by complaining about politicians appearing on her television. Furthermore, the authority of her mother and the government are consistently supported by the narrative. At one point Miranda writes: "I've been choosing not to see how our supplies are holding out, because I don't want to know. I want to believe everything is just going to work out and food will magically appear. In some ways it already has, and I want to think it always will" (192). Miranda admits her unwillingness to take responsibility for their situation and expresses her trust in her mother's ability as caretaker and provider for the family. She openly admits to the fact that their survival has an air of *deus ex machina* to it, and food really does seem to 'magically' appear throughout the text. Indeed, the most subversive and unbelievable part of *Life as We Knew It* is the reinstatement of food delivery, a symbol that Pfeffer's government remains effective, in power, and able to provide care for its citizens. But where is the food coming from? Who is producing food? How did it reach Howell, Pennsylvania? These questions are ignored by the text, and the most important, subversive, and almost

anti-dystopian moral of the story for Miranda is that the government *will* fix her problems for her.

The Evans's reactions to the apocalyptic ending of their world are, at times, refreshingly discordant to those of the typical young adult dystopian narratives, but also worrisome in the overall portrayal of possible action pre- and post-apocalypse. Miranda and her family do little to ensure their survival, which echoes the inaction of contemporary humans concerning their relationship to the natural world. The loss of technological utopia as a result of the environmental crisis is what truly allows the dystopia of contemporary life to surface in *Life as We Knew It*. Before Miranda can recognize and rebel against this dystopia, those in power secure the system once again by offering its citizens a return to their old life. Their choice to wait and to organize their life around the little spurts of power and the 'magical food' that they receive is reinforced at the end of the text. They do not undergo a reorientation of thought because it is unnecessary. Implied throughout the text is a re-establishment of the views and values that are negatively affecting the natural environment and bringing about rapid global climate change. This unchanging and almost apathetic attitude, reinforced by the author, plays a role in her inability to deny her characters' need for food and survival. The very tense of the title *Life as We Knew It* hints at how historical memory has importance, but that it will once again be forgotten as the post-apocalyptic world is concerned only with the here and now. These attitudes are the true antagonists of this text. *Life as We Knew It* is a negative example of a dystopia. While dystopia is meant to critique its society, this text is anti-dystopian in its conclusion's reinforcement of Western civilization's and the dystopia's lifestyle. While lack of human

responsibility for the environmental apocalypse in *Life as We Knew It* leads to a further sense of human ineffectuality in the text, it paradoxically offers an element of hope to the climate change narrative; while the characters are powerless, the reader is not. Miranda does not represent the young adult beacon of hope, but, if the reader recognizes that Miranda's society is dystopian, due to its overreliance on technology, a commercial economy, and government infrastructure, then perhaps the text *does* promote the awareness that a reorientation of dominant ideology is necessary for both the survival of humanity and the environment as we know it, before it is too late.

Chapter 5: *The Hunger Games*: A Designer Environment

The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins is one of the latest bestsellers in young adult literature. Unlike its blockbuster predecessors, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997 - 2007) and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005 - 2008), Collins' trilogy is not rooted in the paranormal – no magic, no vampires – but instead resides firmly in the science fiction dystopian impulse. Katniss is an ordinary person; however, she has bravery and resilience, which fosters her will to resist and to question known truths about her society. She is, in essence, the classic dystopian young adult hero; she is the ray of hope in an otherwise bleak, dark world. As in texts by Huxley and Orwell, the distinct lack of, or restriction from, interaction with nature in the dystopia is central in the awakening of Katniss to the realization that she is living in a dystopian society. Recalling its literary dystopian predecessors, *The Hunger Games* presents an interesting blend of *1984* and *Brave New World*. The districts live in an Orwellian dystopia while the Capitol exists in a world that strongly resembles that of *Brave New World*—many Capitol citizens don't seem to notice that they are living in a controlled society or recognize the cruelties their government commits in order to maintain this lifestyle. Most district citizens, on the other hand, are too preoccupied with daily survival and too frightened of the Capitol to act against it. One element that ties these two worlds together, however, is Panem's institution of the Hunger Games. All of Panem revolves around the annual Hunger Games. The Capitol prepares for it all year, and, ironically, by supplying the Capitol with resources and tributes, so do the districts. While it is touted as the reconciliation for the revolution of 74 years before, it has really become an institution that keeps the Capitol in power. In addition, it is

Panem's primary consumer product. It is televised and distributed throughout the country: a sport to the Capitol and mandatory viewing for the districts.

Along with climate change, genetic modification, oversaturation of media and Hollywood aesthetics, increasing global reliance on consumerism, and technological development, dystopias are including a new element of increasing relevance: a concern for not only the natural, but how the natural interacts and blends with the technological, the political; and the human. While *The Hunger Games* series of books and films has received criticism for what some consider unnecessary violence—children killing children is as unsavory to us as cannibalism is to the Capitol—I would argue that the graphic content is not needlessly gratuitous but instead a reflection of our own world. Collins is often quoted as saying that she was motivated to write the novels after watching footage of the invasion of Iraq amidst reality T.V. (Margolis). Juxtaposing the ruthless realities of the war on Iraq, regardless of political affiliation, brings to the fore the frivolity of the manipulated "reality" of the T.V. competitions for money and fame. Collins is criticizing a culture that prefers "reality T.V." and does not question its verity. Indeed, rather than criticizing the novels for gratuitous violence, a more critical gaze should be cast on the blockbuster movie, true to the violence of the texts, and its box office profits. The film, directed by Gary Ross (2010), is faithful to the horrors of the text, depicting child tributes in bloody battle for survival, and that is what the audience has paid to see. Indeed, it is ironic that the first film alone earned over 152.5 million dollars in its opening weekend ("Biggest Opening Weekend"). The film's dialogue even reflects this irony:

GALE: What if they did? Just one year. What if everyone just stopped watching?

KATNISS: They won't, Gale.

GALE: What if they did? What if we did.

KATNISS: Won't happen.

GALE: Root for your favorite, cry when they get killed. It's sick.

KATNISS: Gale.

GALE: If no one watches then they don't have a game. It's as simple as that.

(Ross 6:19)

This conversation is absent in the book and is a remarkable addition to the film as it immediately breaks the cinematic fourth wall when Gale speculates about what might happen if the audience, Panem but also, arguably, the movie's actual audience, stopped watching the Hunger Games. Gale and Katniss reflect on the use of media technology and the social institution of the Hunger Games, noting that the point of the Games is for them to be watched. If no one watches then the Capitol will lose its power, no one will die, and the cycle of consumption will cease. They begin to stimulate revolutionary consciousness, which is the one of the themes of *The Hunger Games*. It is a novel that is at once dystopian in its critical and political discussions surrounding media, consumerism, and environmental neglect, and yet it is also poignant; it advocates against and reflects on the commodification and consumption of our most precious natural resource: children.

5.1 Panem

Panem is "the country that rose up out of the ashes of the place that was once called North America" (*HG* 18). The reaping, the ceremony in which the tributes for the Games are chosen, begins the novel, opening with a propaganda film, which portrays the rebellion of the Districts against the Capitol and justifies the Hunger Games as a system instituted in order to maintain peace. This is the only story of Panem's past told in the novel, and both the reader and Katniss must interpret history through the Capitol's version. In a brief

reflection on the dissemination of knowledge and history, Katniss says, "I know there must be more than they're telling us ... But I don't spend much time thinking about it... I don't see how it will help me get food on the table" (*HG* 42). This 'history' sets up the structure of the world. Tom Moylan notes that, "Throughout the history of dystopian fiction, the conflict of the text has often turned on the control of language and information." Citing Newspeak from Orwell's *1984* and the control over information and history in Huxley's *Brave New World*, he argues that "control over the means of language, over representation and interpellation, is a crucial weapon and strategy in dystopia" (148-9). Knowledge is spread through media and consumed by a public that is too preoccupied with its own survival, putting food on the table each night, to question it. In *The Hunger Games*, it would be an act of rebellion to question the structure of Panem. The dystopian lifestyle of the Districts becomes a normalized narrative that is justified because it goes unquestioned.

What the people of Panem know and how they live dictates what actions are possible for them within their spaces. Each district has a perimeter fence that keeps the populace apart from the natural world, and travel between Districts is restricted. In this way, Panem's hierarchical structure is geographically organized as a differentiation between the Capitol and the surrounding districts, and can be construed as analogous to that between center and periphery in the world. The districts are responsible for the provision of raw materials such as coal, cotton, lumber, and fishing and the manufacture of commodities. For example, District 1 produces diamonds. As such there is further stratification between the districts as the lower numbered districts have preferred status over the higher numbers and are allowed more privileges, including training their tributes for the Hunger

Games. The Capitol citizens are left to engage in various kinds of consumption and, if they do work, it is using the resources delivered to them from the Districts in the service, media, or information industries—food preparation, aesthetics and design, or entertainment. The urban wastefulness of the Capitol in opposition to the rural, natural, and hard working Districts highlights an interesting element of Collins' text. While District 12 is an exceptionally small District, and a community in which everyone knows everybody else, the Capitol is immensely populous, giving the impression that, in Panem, the rich vastly outnumber the working poor, making it all the more difficult to imagine and conduct a revolution. The Capitol's decadent technological splendour and its apparently unlimited populace defined as consumers represent modern Western civilization and are portrayed as without morality or purpose, in direct contrast with older forms of labour such as hunting and gathering, bartering and a generally honest work ethic.

The hierarchy between the Capitol and the Districts, and among more and less prosperous Districts, is further compounded and paralleled by class divisions within District 12 itself, between the miners and the merchant class. District 12 is located on the edge of Panem's civilization and is encircled by an electrical fence, which is meant to keep wild things out but really serves to keep the citizens penned in and under surveillance. Though technology and its pervasive control over knowledge, the Capitol holds the power of segregation and judgment while its citizens have limited or no access to that power. The citizens are too afraid or incapable of reflecting on and questioning their conditions, and, therefore, have little agency or ability to engage with and reflect on the societal powers that govern them.

Katniss accesses the ability to question the boundaries controlling her life by leaving the District's perimeter. Originally, due to the necessity to hunt for food and bring outside resources into District 12, Katniss increasingly takes pleasure in leaving the surveillance of the Capitol and the controlled space of Panem. As quoted in the title of this paper, Katniss searches for herself, katniss the plant in order to consume it, and for her own agency, which by the end of the series is arguably consumed as well. When she breaches the perimeter with her hunting partner Gale Hawthorn, she gains the freedom to cultivate her own thoughts and reflect on the structure of Panem and the institution of the Hunger Games. She gains a sense of autonomy and freedom, revealing that she is only her most authentic self with Gale in the woods, hunting (*HG* 6). The forest gives Katniss and Gale a space in which they can freely reflect on their society: "Deep in the woods, I've listened to him rant about how the tesserae¹ are just another tool to cause misery in our District. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers... and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another" (*HG* 14). Nature becomes a space free from surveillance, where Gale and Katniss progress from analyzing their game structure to reflecting and collaborating on it. Together they build their knowledge of nature as a reciprocal system and hone their survival and sustainable living skills. However, escaping the limits of District 12 also allows them to question those limits. Why will the Capitol not allow them to hunt freely? Why is it illegal to bring in outside resources and sell them throughout the District? The answers are simple—because then they would move from a

¹ Children between the ages of 12 and 18 can apply for tessera in order to receive a year's supply of grain and oil for one person. Each tessera taken requires the child to put an extra ballot with their name on it into the draw for the Hunger Games. Tessera may be taken for family members and the tessera are cumulative. Gale's name is in the draw for the 74th annual Hunger Games 42 times (*HG* 13).

dependence on the Capitol's consumerism to a dependence on themselves, creating a sustainable economy that would shift the power away from the Capitol. In nature, Katniss is afforded an understanding of her position within the larger political game structure of Panem, and enables her to question, agree with, or disapprove of that position.

Unfortunately, although Gale and Katniss recognize the powerful and cruel system in which they are prisoners, they feel helpless and unable to enact change as the daily struggle for survival keeps them occupied.

However, unwittingly, Katniss *has* begun to undermine the segregation of the people and the carefully constructed dystopia of the District. The wilderness holds unpredictable dangers, yet as Gale and Katniss hunt in order to survive, they become so adept at it that Katniss says:

The woods became our saviour... I was determined to feed us. I stole eggs from nests, caught fish in nets, sometimes managed to shoot a squirrel or rabbit for stew... Plants are tricky. Many are edible, but one false mouthful and you're dead. I checked and double-checked the plants I harvested with my father's pictures. I kept us alive. (*HG* 51)

Nature has become a space extraneous to Panem as a construct where Katniss can practise trial and error. This is another feature of dystopian literature. The narrative of the young adult dystopia will focus on one subject in the dystopian world and the storyline develops around the alienated protagonist as he or she begins to recognize their situation for what it really is, and to trace the development from individual experience (the egocentricity of childhood) to the operation of the entire system (adult society) (Moylan xiii). Hunting in the forest provides Katniss with the ability to transcend social boundaries and form relationships with all classes in District 12. She deals with the town butcher, the baker, the Peacekeepers, the black market's Greasy Sae, and she even sells strawberries at the

Mayor's back door (HG 11). This subversive commercial activity is positioned as favourable compared to Peeta's family's bakery, which works on a more classic consumer system earning money by selling decorated cakes to rich citizens. Crossing into the natural environment around District 12 undermines the Capitol's hold on Katniss. Nature has become a place for political reflection, a resource to be negotiated with, and an agent for transcending powerful social boundaries. Katniss has begun to not only learn the rules of the game within *The Hunger Games* but to push against them by leaving its limits and acquiring new knowledge, perspective, and resources. She has begun to test the limits of the system in powerful, subversive ways.

Katniss distinctly becomes an agentive character when she volunteers to become tribute at the 74th annual Hunger Games. She refuses to let the Capitol reap the most valuable thing in her life, her little sister Prim, and in so doing she refuses the Capitol a victim. At age 12, with no fighting experience, Prim would not last long in the arena. Katniss' volunteering for the Hunger Games is reminiscent of Miranda's self sacrifice for her little brother Jonny, and recalls the climate change narrative of leaving the clean up for the next generation – but Katniss is not so apathetic as Miranda. Katniss immediately adopts a survivor attitude, and just as a dystopian hero is expected to, she begins to engage with and question the structure of Panem, her dystopia. Katniss begins to think strategy almost immediately, saying to Prim who refuses to let go of her, "I don't want to cry.... everyone will make note of my tears, and I'll be marked as an easy target. A weakling. I will give no one that satisfaction. 'Let go!'" (HG 23). Already, Katniss demonstrates her understanding of the power that media and perception have over the citizens of Panem

and, most importantly, the citizens of the Capitol and the other tributes. She knows that she will be constantly televised and she has to learn how to manage that intrusion in her life. Immediately following this exchange between sisters, the citizens of District 12 refuse to clap for Katniss as a tribute and instead salute Katniss as an individual player. This is both a foreshadowing of the use that Katniss will make of the cameras within the Games themselves and a televised blatant act of insurrection, which will be watched throughout Panem. "Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong" (*HG* 23).

In District 12, the natural environment is a space where the structure of Panem can be reflected upon, where new skills can be learned, and where resources extraneous to the construction of the Districts can be harvested and brought in for trade. By employing these skills and sharing the natural resources, Katniss breaks down social barriers within and among the Districts. Katniss' sacrifice and her District's dissension are broadcast to the whole nation. Katniss knows what is wrong with Panem, and though she is preoccupied with her own survival, it is her tenacious will to survive and her connection with the people and with nature that has begun to fan the flames of rebellion throughout Panem. Katniss, the girl on fire, is undermining the very intention and purpose of the Hunger Games.

5.2 The Capitol

Katniss and Peeta Mellark, District 12's male tribute and supporting character throughout the series, finally reach the Capitol with their mentor Haymitch. The metropolis of the Capitol is presented as an entirely artificial world compared to the coal mines and woodlands of District 12. The distinction between the natural, humble District and the built

environment of the Capitol is a constant point of comparison for Katniss, who cannot fathom her host, Effie Trinket's garish fashion, mocks the Capitol accent, and tries to calculate how much Lamb stew would cost in District 12. However, with the help of Haymitch and her personal stylist Cinna, Katniss begins to understand what effect using this artifice in her performance can have on the citizens of the Capitol. One of the effects that the televising of the Games has is to underscore the power of the Capitol. Haymitch, the only previous District 12 winner and Cinna, a fashion designer elevated from his position in District 4 because of the popularity of his style, are constant reminders of this. Haymitch lives as a celebrity but is set apart from the rest of District 12's citizens; he is also required to mentor the District 12 tributes. It is a miserable task, which has led to his alcoholism.

The Capitol, metaphorically representing our western civilization, is the epitome of decadence. Its people are constantly consuming and are indoctrinated with a concern for aesthetics. As they see it, they live in a relative utopia. Through totalitarian strategies, the Capitol manipulates and fashions the citizen subjects to be child-like and naïve in much the same way as Huxley's elite As of *Brave New World* and, as the previous chapter argued, contemporary Western civilization in *Life As We Knew It*. The infantilized state of the Capitol populace is produced by strict codes and regulations with the intention of maintaining an uncomplicated utopian state and passive populace. The Capitol and the Districts are ruled in much the same fashion, so that the inhabitants are kept unaware about what life is like beyond their perimeters, communications and travel are kept to a

minimum, and their lives are preoccupied with mundane day-to-day activities so that long-term thinking is discouraged and undermined.

With the use of fashion and spectacle, Cinna creates "Katniss, the girl who was on fire," and Haymitch uses Peeta to make the pair of them "the star-crossed lovers" (*HG* 67, 135). The Capitol's citizens are simply not aware enough of their own oppression to understand the ways in which they are bombarded with aesthetic consumer products. They become 'the masses' in the background and hardly mentioned until they are useful. The reader, like Katniss, will be able to see and question how being at once preoccupied with aesthetics and unable to critically read them makes the Capitol's citizens easy to manipulate. Katniss begins to use the impressionable masses to her advantage, unwittingly walking the precarious line between spectacle and revolutionary. By the time Katniss has entered the Hunger Games she has built a persona that the Capitol masses adore. She has become a symbol of resistance against the corrupt government, and she has begun to understand that through media technology she can manipulate the Games of the Capitol. Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of the Gamemakers' use of and simultaneous underestimation of the "pretty berries," which Katniss uses to manipulate the Gamemakers into allowing herself and Peeta to survive. This foreshadows how, later in the trilogy, District 13 and General Coin attempt to use Katniss as an icon of rebellion, but underestimate her natural will for independence and survival.

A particularly interesting location in the text is the garden on the rooftop of the training centre in the Capitol. It is a built natural space, protected by a force field—in some ways a miniature version of the Hunger Games arena. It is also an echo of the natural space

from District 12 in that it is a space of beauty and rest, a space where Peeta and Katniss can reflect on strategy and the construction of the Games' space, and criticise the Capitol without worrying about being overheard. "Here in the garden, on this windy night, it's enough to drown out two people who are trying not to be heard" (*HG* 81). Katniss divulges the story of the red haired Avox², which demonstrates the reach of the Capitol's power and how the boundaries of Panem are carefully overseen and guarded (*HG* 82). When the two meet on the roof again, after Peeta has confessed his "love," Peeta says that he knows he does not stand a chance of winning the Games and that, "I want to die as myself... I don't want them to change me in there... I wish 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" (*HG* 141). Peeta, like Gale before him, reflects on the institution of the Games and how the Capitol controls dissemination of information via communication technologies such as mandatory television and propaganda. As in the natural environment outside District 12, it is only in the natural space of the rooftop that Katniss and Peeta can share information, experience, and tactics with each other. They engage in collaborative reflection in order to maximize their potential to win the Games – though it is not clear whether or not their conversation is a private reflection as there may be surveillance in the garden.

The 'natural' space in the Capitol is interesting because it reveals two things. First, the natural world is not as safe from the Capitol and its technologies as Katniss thinks it is. For example, the mockingjay bird call before the arrival of the hovercraft that captures the Avox in the forest outside District 12 is the same as the bird call in the Games before the

² A servant whose tongue has been removed as punishment for a crime.

hovercraft takes dead bodies away (*HG* 83, 237). The ease with which the Capitol found the Avox girl and her accomplice hints at hidden surveillance in the natural surroundings of the Districts and the quickness with which people can be consumed by the Capitol never to be heard from again is much like the hidden surveillance within the 'natural' world of the Capitol and the Games themselves.

Second, Peeta, like Gale before him, has recognized that even within the framework of the Games, he has the potential to break free for long enough to express individuality. The Capitol has constructed nature as a perceived haven where dissension and sedition are discussed and planned. However, throughout the series the Capitol, or at least President Snow and the Gamemakers appear to know everything. So, while the possibility of insurgency maintains an unsteady peace, a rebellion is not foreseeable because inter-District resources and communications are limited. Nature as an autonomous system that pervades thought and media, even throughout the Capitol, is largely ignored by the populace. As a tactic, Katniss does not display that she can hunt with a bow and arrow until she is alone with the Gamemakers, but throughout the training period she demonstrates her knowledge of plants, trap-making and basic survival skills – things that are considered by the other Tributes and the Capitol citizens as the least useful of skills. Perhaps this is in an attempt to perpetuate the drive in the tributes to kill one another as opposed to outlast one another, but also another way in which the Capitol, removed from nature and inundated in a technological utopia, is simply ignorant of the power that nature has. Katniss, who reflects on how the Game is won and lost, reverses the intended use of nature in the Games and outplays the Gamemakers of not only the Games, but of Panem.

Technology, and particularly television, lies at the heart of the Capitol's power over its people, from regulating travel and communication between Districts to encouraging genetic manipulation in the name of beauty. Technology is both the power and the weakness of the Capitol, and arguably of current Western civilization. Katniss, as wielder of natural resourcefulness, begins to undo the structures and processes behind the broader game being played in Panem.

5.3 The Hunger Games

Katniss enters the Hunger Games armed with a character the audience loves, a sense of ease in nature, the skills to hunt and survive, and the ability to assess the structure of Panem's dystopian system. The Games, held in a remote location where real nature is combined with the Gamemakers' artificial elements, are broadcast live and are mandatory viewing for all of Panem. Katniss has prepared for the Games by watching recordings of the previous victors. She notes that:

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. (43)

Katniss clearly understands the rules active in the arena, that the Gamemakers must make the most pleasing show possible for the Capitol audience to consume, and that they have power over the natural elements themselves. She also notes the importance of food behind most of the action in the Games. The competitors are left struggling to fulfill their basic needs: food, water, and shelter. The audience will constantly watch for the game to fulfill their need for entertainment—the death of the tributes, and in their viewing they are quite literally consuming the combatants, and their performance in the Games.

The reader of the novels, and the audience watching the films in theatres or at home, are with Katniss as she constantly considers her audience and the Gamemakers. Her actions are calculated and strategic and push back against the power of the Capitol. They reinforce her position as independent of Panem's hierarchy of power. At first she is set on ensuring that the audience can maintain confidence in her—on showing that she is capable of survival. In a demonstration of both her ability to understand a natural ecology and her media literacy, she overcomes her first obstacle, finding water. As she hunts for water, she realizes that in order to make the Games more salaciously bloody the Gamemakers have placed the largest water source in the middle of the arena, in the hopes of drawing tributes into battle over this basic necessity. She realizes that the forest is a game board, technologically manipulated by the Gamemakers to look attractive, to instigate confrontation between tributes, and to make survival difficult. However, she also understands that Haymitch would not have her returning to the battlefield after having advised her to stay away from it, nor would he waste precious sponsorships³ for water. It is important to exhibit to the audience that Katniss is able to prevail on her own, and crucial that she make a good impression on the Capitol crowd. Katniss quickly adapts to the new blended reality of the Games and begins to communicate with her mentor through the surveillance of the Game. If Haymitch is silent, she must be close to, or already know the answer. In a demonstration of her knowledge of nature and media literacy, she hears

³ Capitol citizens will sponsor a tribute with money, which can be spent for supplies or weapons for that tribute in the game.

Haymitch's silence and understands that she should keep moving and use her own instinct to follow the forest undergrowth until she discovers a source of water.

Fulfilling her basic survival needs, she begins to look for a partner and settles on Rue, who is a clever, quick, and industrious tribute from District 11. Rue is also willing to transgress and help Katniss with her own knowledge of natural remedies. Befriending a girl from a different district, who does not stand much of a chance against the larger, stronger tributes, pairs Katniss with a loyal companion and earns her sympathy with the District crowds. Although she notes that she "can hear Haymitch groaning as I team up with this wispy child," she disregards it, citing the need for teamwork in order to survive (*HG* 281). She ignores what she is 'supposed' to do (there are no 'rules' after all), and instead takes Rue under her wing. Working in tandem, they destroy the food source of the favoured tributes, making it a true game of hunger and, as they know how to live off the land and the rich spoiled 'career' tributes⁴ do not, they gain the advantage.

When Rue is killed during the plot to destroy the tributes' food supplies, Katniss realizes that the cameras broadcasting the Games can be used directly against the Capitol. She recognizes that the Capitol, in a display of power meant to enforce the necessity of the Hunger Games, always broadcasts the corpses of the slain tributes. Subverting the intention of this broadcast, Katniss visibly honours the slain child to dramatize the injustice of the Games, decorating her corpse with flowers (*HG* 236). She transforms Rue from a consumed

⁴ Those tributes from the more prosperous and privileged Districts (1 - 3, generally) are known as career tributes. They train as children from a young age for competition in the arena, and these children will volunteer for the games. These districts have accepted the games to such an extent that it is a heroic fate, reminiscent of the gladiators who volunteered to fight in the ring and trained in *luduses*, gladiatorial training arenas.

commodity into an anti-consumer symbol. The white flowers, placed in the arena by the Gamemakers simply to look beautiful, now represent humanity, innocence, youth, and loss; Katniss begins to take apart the constructed space of the Hunger Games. It is no longer merely aesthetic; it now also harbours real natural elements that can be a resource for her own game. She begins to use the aesthetic preoccupation of the Capitol and the Games against her most dangerous enemy —President Snow. In a direct act of defiance, District 11 (Rue's District) acknowledges Katniss' empathy, by sending her bread, showing that she has effectively broken down the barriers between Districts. In response, the Gamemakers change the rules: two tributes can now win the 74th annual Hunger Games.

Katniss is unsure of what the rule change means and immediately seeks out Peeta. Employing the natural defense mechanism of camouflage and demonstrating his excellence in cake-decoration, Peeta, now injured, has disguised himself as a riverbed. Tethered to a wounded and sick tribute, Katniss recognizes that they are easy prey. Instead of being daunted, Katniss "remembers the importance of sustaining the star-crossed lover routine," and "imagine[s] the teary sighs emanating from the Capitol" (*HG* 281). In a deliberate attempt to manipulate the Capitol masses, she begins the 'star-crossed' lover performance in earnest. In response to her manipulations, the Capitol citizens begin sponsoring her through sending stew and soup to the 'lovers'. The Gamemakers further respond by drawing her out in the hope of engaging her in battle with the stronger tributes. Katniss enters the fray in order to retrieve medicine for Peeta, and survives only because Thresh, the male tribute from District 11, spares Katniss' life. Realizing that Katniss had partnered with Rue and buried her with dignity, he lets her go, "for the little girl" (*HG* 288). This is a

powerful moment, as Katniss' subversion of the perceived nature of the Hunger Games has now not only provoked empathy from the Capitol audience and made sponsors of the outlying Districts, but has also resulted in other players sparing her life. Katniss has moved from manipulating to reinventing the way in which the Hunger Games are played and consumed.

Katniss and Peeta are the last contestants standing when it is announced that, "The earlier revision has been revoked. Closer examination of the rule book has disclosed that only one winner may be allowed" (*HG* 342). The two performative lovers are tortured by the thought of becoming the surviving murderer, which is exactly what President Snow and the Gamemakers seek to achieve. To maintain the power of their system, they must take away the power and agency that Katniss has gained, and to do this they must force the tributes to play the Games the Gamemakers' way. Katniss, thinking that "death right here, right now would be the easier of the two [options]," realizes that the only recourse for them, the only way to maintain control, would be to die on their own terms (*HG* 344). She will not allow the Capitol to have a victor who has really been beaten – and self-sacrifice is their answer to the challenge. Like Miranda, who, at the end of *Life as We Knew It*, would rather spare her family the sight of her own death and the extra rations that Jon might be able to use, Katniss turns to a natural death. Nature is part of the Games environment, yet it is underestimated or overlooked by the Gamemakers and is used by Katniss against the Game itself. She uses the threat of double suicide to checkmate the Capitol. Death in the arena ceases to be a reaffirmation of the Capitol's power and consumption, but instead becomes an act of refusal, of agency, of rebellion against oppression. Katniss has reversed

roles with the Gamemakers. They are now at her mercy. With the threat of having no winner, of being revealed as murderers to the Capitol citizens, the Gamemakers relent and allow Katniss and Peeta to both win.

5.4 Conclusion

The Hunger Games points to the way in which our own world's ecology incorporates politics, technology, and nature in an ever-changing and reactive system. Recall the quote at the beginning of this paper, in which Gale suggests that they simply refuse to watch The Hunger Games, and in this refusal the practice will be stopped. Just as the Games are mandatory viewing, broadcast throughout Panem, the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* was broadcast worldwide in 2012, grossing hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue ("The Hunger Games (2012)"). It is one thing to read about children slaughtering children, especially when it is done through the meta-fictive eyes of our female protagonist Katniss, but quite another to sit where the Capitol citizens sit and watch. Audiences worldwide paid to watch the 74th annual Hunger Games in all its aesthetic beauty and harsh brutality. More recently, with the release of the second film *Catching Fire* (2013), came an onslaught of products and advertisements for Cover Girl's Capitol Collection and Subway's 'Catching Fire' Chicken Sandwiches (Long). It is ironic that a book that protests against the masses' love of spectacle and global hunger and which calls for a recognition of the organic way that nature and humanity are part of the same system, has been transformed into a Hollywood product for consumption.

Chapter 6: *The Knife of Never Letting Go*: A Noisy World

6.1 Introduction

"If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence." (qtd. in Ness i)

This passage from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is the epigraph to Patrick Ness' *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (*Knife*). Not only does this passage lament the human disconnection from the natural world but it also references two of the central values of the novel: that nature is not simply a silent bystander to human life, and that the sublime experience that silence can be in a world inundated with information. *Middlemarch*, is a novel that presents and criticizes its contemporary reality and focuses on the dominant culture of its time in nineteenth century England. It is also a novel that Virginia Woolf famously called "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people" (Woolf 172). By situating *The Knife of Never Letting Go* beside *Middlemarch*, Ness announces his desire to mirror the real contemporary world in his speculative planet New World, and also implies that the novel will engage with the issues of becoming an individual in a culture with rigid identity constructs. The contemporary young adult novel necessarily engages with the transition state between the egocentrism of childhood and the subjectivity of adulthood (McCallum 3). *The Knife of Never Letting Go* endeavours to break down rigid male and female gender identities, interrogate what can be categorized as natural and unnatural, and question the distinction between the child, the young adult, and the adult. The text's dialogue with the construction of identity in contemporary Western civilization, a world inundated with constant information, instant communications, and constant visual and

audible noise, makes *The Knife of Never Letting Go* a true twenty-first century young adult novel.

The Knife of Never Letting Go is a complex and rich text, the first in a trilogy that addresses numerous topics of contemporary twenty-first century concern including genocide, histories of colonial conquest, terror, implicit gender identities, media-induced information overload, technological dependence, and ecological disaster. This chapter will focus on Todd Hewitt as he grows from child to adult and endeavours to form his own identity. As a child born in New World, the Noise, the audible thoughts of man and nature, is normative to him. The Noise, a metaphor for the twenty-first century's constant instant communications and inundation of information, is the unique feature of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and this chapter will analyse Todd and how he copes and engages with continuous Noise. As Todd Hewitt is the narrator of the text, his character constantly feeds the reader information, and it is through interactions with the rest of New World, beyond Prentisstown, and with other characters that he becomes an individual.

Arguably, it is Prentisstown and not New World itself that is the true dystopia of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. In line with the traditional structure of a dystopian narrative, Todd's story opens within the dystopia of Prentisstown and his character must face adversity and awaken to the history and context of that dystopia in order to contend with it. Life in Prentisstown is relatively primitive and mundane; it is a community comprised of only 146 men and Todd, the last almost-man, or so he thinks. The history of Prentisstown, named after Mayor Prentiss, is kept secret from boys until they become men; it is Todd's journey to recover historical memory in order to recognize and rebel against the dystopia.

In keeping with the previous two texts of this study, Ness' text draws from the classic dystopian literatures of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell. Ness, in the tradition of Huxley, depicts New World as what dystopian critic M. Keith Booker would call an anti-utopia (2-3). It is an example of a world that began with utopian intentions but which devolved into a dystopia. The planet of New World, as Ness presents it, is a natural utopia and had the potential to fulfill the utopian hopes of the earth colonists. Yet even this potential future of New World is what M. Keith Booker would call a false utopia. He states:

[D]ystopian literature is specifically that literature which 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 social examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (*Dystopian Literature* 3)

Booker's assessment of the dangers of arrant utopianism, the assumption that a pure utopia is achievable, is helpful when considering the nature-culture dichotomy presented in Ness' text. While Booker's definition is rather bleak, as it blatantly argues that utopia is an impossibility, while dystopia is all too easily achieved, it does make clear why the settlers failed in their attempts to establish a utopia on the planet of New World. Their expectations were preconceived, for, as Garrard points out, "the idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to the New World environmentalist" (Garrard 59). Garrard's term, "New World environmentalism" refers to the belief that "Creation is not prefabricated for human use and comfort, and that every living thing down to the smallest transmicroscopic creature has intrinsic value" (68). Ironically, Ness' colonists, naming their planet New

World, expected the exact opposite. They expected another Earth, a fresh start in a place made perfectly for them. Upon discovering the Noise, they begin to foster what Garrard calls "Old World Wilderness," which is when people "are inclined to view the fruits of their labour as the consequences of a struggle against nature rather than its blessings... [this] is a crucial turning point, marking a 'fall' from a primal ecological grace. Agriculture becomes both the cause and the symptom of an ancient alienation from the earth that monotheistic religion and modern science then completed" (Garrard 60). Once their arrant and idealistic utopian dreams are inevitably dashed, the settlers fall from what could have been a symbiotic relationship with the environment into a life that becomes a constant struggle with the Noise and nature. The settlers left Old World to escape technology, and turn instead to monotheistic religion and to developing ways to control and harness nature and men, through the Noise.

It is implied that this resistance to the Noise caused the settlers of New World unnecessary hardships, as Ben (Todd's guardian) explains, "times were hard all over New World and getting harder. Crops failing and sickness and no prosperity and no Eden. Definitely no Eden" (391). The passage's brief reference to Eden is very important to the representations of nature, technology, and humanity in this text. Linking New World to the biblical Eden sets up the human settlers' initial expectations of New World and when those expectations are undercut they react with resistance to the new form that "Eden" has taken. Furthermore, had the settlers been willing to listen to the voice of the planet and embrace its own uniqueness, they may have had more success in their settling on New World. Instead of harvesting the planet's natural resources, they bring with them their own

animals (sheep, cows, dogs) and crops from Earth, and they succumb to sicknesses rather than seeking out natural remedies available in the nature of the planet⁵. Indeed, at least for the first years of settlement on the planet, humans discarded all of their technology, in order to get closer to God and further from the corruption of Earth, but also, ironically, resumed the Earthly mentality that they merely live atop the planet and therefore struggle, as opposed to living with it symbiotically. Resisting all technology is not within human nature, but resisting and destroying the natural environment is a detriment to human survival. A vicious cycle is created as the history of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* mirrors the anxieties surrounding climate change in contemporary twenty-first century; the history of environmental destruction at human hands begins to repeat itself on New World.

6.2 The Noise

The nature found on New World is not silent, as it is perceived to be here on Earth, but instead, "[e]verything on this planet talks to each other...that's what New World is. Informayshun" (391). The Noise is a naturally-occurring phenomenon of the planet, which affects, or *infects* according to the citizens of Prentisstown, the men and animals of the landed settlers. Men, unwilling to be assimilated into the nature of New World, resist the Noise and try to control it, cure it, and tame it. The creation of such a pervasive force outside of human control in the fictional world, gives a literal manifestation of the extent to which nature affects human life in contemporary twenty-first century. The Spackle, the indigenous "aliens" of the planet, also called "spacks" by the Prentisstown men, give a

⁵ Ben and Cillian create painkillers from roots and herbs and Francine uses "smelly brown root water" to heal Todd's fever (309).

physical form to the natural world, a form that can be warred with and destroyed. What at first eludes the settlers of New World is the understanding that the Noise is the language and culture for New World and the Spackle.

Todd describes the natural Noise of the swamp as in direct opposition to the Noise of men saying that the swamp is "a different kind of loud, because swamp loud is just curiosity, creachers figuring out who you are and if yer a threat. Whereas the town knows all about you already and wants to know more and wants to beat you with what it knows till how can you have any of yerself left at all?" (10). In the swamp, with his dog Manchee, Todd can have his own thoughts free of the chaos of men. In the chapter "Wilderness," Greg Garrard discusses language at length, saying that "[e]ven human language, the supposedly unassailable marker of culture, is wild in the sense that it rises unbidden and eludes our rational intellectual capacities" (83). Ness very literally employs this idea in his use of the Noise of New World. The Noise causes men's thoughts to rise unbidden, escaping their minds and entering into the world despite their desire to keep them hidden and to themselves. In the swamp Todd basks in the simple way that nature works and communicates in a calm chaos unlike the Noise of men which is an angry red, and which "pokes... like sticks" (383). Prentisstown Noise is built up in artificial layers and layers of lies. A man is both unfiltered and filtered as Todd explains:

...men lie all the time, to themselves, to other men, to the world at large, but who can tell when it's a strand in all the other lies and truths floating round outta yer head? Everyone knows yer lying but everyone else is lying, too, so how can it matter? What does it change? It's just part of the river of a man, part of his Noise, and sometimes you can pick it out, sometimes you can't.
(242)

Men resist the invasion of privacy and power by cluttering their Noise with half-truths and lies so that their intentions and shame are hidden, but the Spackle Noise, and the Noise of the animals, is clear and uncluttered. Language in the form of the wild and natural Noise can be "domesticated for educational or other purposes" like language on Earth, but the Noise proposes that communication and language are not meant to be chaos and lies but rather a wilderness that "epitomises the free self-organisation of nature" (83). The nature-culture tension is heightened as man is unwilling to accept the nature of New World as a self-organized system in existence with or without humans. The Noise is given centrality in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* as it is the vehicle through which Todd Hewitt tells his story. In an interesting reflection of the contemporary need to become media literate, this first installment of the *Chaos Walking* trilogy highlights the tension between the need to know what is true in the Noise, in the constant flow of information, and what is false. While the Noise of men is difficult to navigate, the Noise of animals and nature are clear.

An important aspect of the dystopian system, and so Prentisstown, is the "control over the means of language, over representation and interpellation" (Moylan 149). For Todd, In New World, the means of language and communication is the Noise. As with the citizens of *Brave New World* and *The Hunger Games*, Todd has been conditioned to accept the history, beliefs, and laws of those in power, who are the adult men of Prentisstown. Therefore, despite his anger about the circumstance of Prentisstown, Todd does not have the capacity to truly interrogate or engage with the structure of it. For Todd, there are no alternatives to Prentisstown life, as he believes, "There ain't nowhere else on New World *but* Prentisstown" (40). As Todd never questions the history or structure of

Prentisstown or New World, his existence mirrors that of the citizens of *1984* and *The Hunger Games*'s outer districts. He has no ability to question Prentisstown because he has no history but the one created by Prentisstown, and, as he says, "History ain't so important when yer just trying to survive" (166). Mayor Prentiss is the Orwellian Big Brother figure of the novel. He lives in the centre of town and consequently hears everyone's Noise, day in and day out, monitoring for variance and dissonance. Referring to the way the Mayor rules, Todd says that the Mayor "has a Point of View," which references the Mayor's ability to *watch* and *read* everyone's Noise from a distance (18). The Mayor has eradicated all knowledge and institutions that might undermine him, closing the school, and burning all videos and books. Yet these images of the past still have the potential to fuel the doubt that Todd needs to question the Mayor and Prentisstown. He notes that:

[T]he spacks are bigger and meaner looking in the Noise than in the vids, ain't they? And Noise women have lighter hair and bigger chests and wear less clothes and are a lot freer with their affecshuns than in the vids, too. So the thing to remember, the thing that's most important of all that I might say in this here telling of things is that Noise ain't truth, Noise is what men *want* to be true (23).

Todd questions the authenticity and truth of the Noise, referencing videos that he used to watch, but which have since been outlawed by Mayor Prentiss (18). Knowledge and history, which used to be learned through books and other media, are now solely accessible by reading the controlled, and often untrue, thoughts of men. Todd also indicts his own narrative as potentially biased and untrue as this passage references that he himself is doing the "telling of things" (23). Furthermore, when Todd interacts with the first adults he has ever met outside of Prentisstown, they acknowledge that "'[N]ot all of us feel the same.' / 'Bout what?' I say... / 'Bout history.'" (194). As Todd navigates and struggles to

survive through his voyage across New World, he also has to cope with multiple versions of the truth and the questioning of his own indoctrination through Noise. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, the Noise, and therefore nature, has been appropriated by men, and particularly Mayor Prentiss, as text and as cultural artifact.

A consequence of the purging of traditional printed literature from Prentisstown is Todd's illiteracy. Todd's inability to read traditionally seems to affect his ability to read the Noise of men critically, as well as his ability to control his own Noise. Ben is the foil for Mayor Prentiss throughout the series and, as one of Todd's caretakers, attempts to teach Todd "Noise literacy." Ben is different from the other men of Prentisstown. His Noise is described in natural terms as "all so smooth and non-grasping it's like laying down in a brook on a hot day" (36). Ben's attempts at teaching Todd traditional literacy are punished by the Mayor, so Ben turns to alternative methods of teaching Todd how to cope with New World. Ben's stratagem for Todd is closely linked to nature, as Todd explains, "you close yer eyes and as clearly and calmly as you can you tell yerself who you are, cuz that's what gets lost in all that Noise. *I am Todd Hewitt*" (16). Ben recognizes, and seems to embrace, the simple, natural order of Noise and instead of claiming it as his own, he simply joins it. The technique is to both think and be the same thing at the same time so that there is no dissonance between one's identity and Noise. The animals of the planet, like Manchee, seem to do this naturally, but for men it takes effort. Women are not physically affected by the Noise; their thoughts are silent and therefore threatening to man as a woman can learn to "read" the Noise of men. Growing into an independent man on New World is made all the more difficult for Todd, as he must learn to control himself, and discover his sense of self,

before he can learn to control his Noise. Throughout the text, Todd uses the repetition of his name in the Noise as a way to calm himself and regain his own sense of identity, which can easily be lost amidst all the Noise in his own head and of the surrounding men.

The idea that the natural world is one continuous circle is something that recurs throughout the series in both the natural world and in the oppressive dystopia. Both nature and humans are working within the framework that the Noise is part of nature, but there are two different readings here of the argument that "the wild ramifies through the civilized and sustains it" (Garrard 83). The few who allow themselves to be connected to the natural world have a serene, Edenic Noise that is comforting, while those who resist and try to control it, like the Mayor, can use Noise to their advantage and, in a more technological way, project Noise as a weapon. The first intimation that Noise can be manipulated as a weapon occurs as Todd passes the Mayor's house:

[Y]ou can hear him... doing these thought exercises, these counting things and imagining perfect shapes and saying orderly chants like I AM THE CIRCLE AND THE CIRCLE IS ME, whatever that's sposed to mean, and it's like he's molding a little army into shape, like he's preparing himself for something, like he's forging some kind of Noise weapon. (27)

The forceful use of human order and control in the Noise introduces a different, more technological and scientific model to the circle of life. While Ben recognizes the cycle in the natural world and the power of that circle, Mayor Prentiss, by contrast, attempts to harness the Noise in an attempt to dominate and control the very nature of the planet, forcefully establishing humans as a part of the new natural fabric of New World.

6.3 Aaron

In order for Todd to move from young adulthood into manhood, according to Prentisstown social doctrine, he must kill a man, or as the preacher Aaron puts it "eat from the tree of knowledge," and enter into an enlightened state (228). Aaron is alluding to the biblical fall of man, but instead of female transgression through eating the forbidden fruit, the male upon "eating," in Prentisstown, achieves ascension. It is particularly Aaron's role as "God's very own mouthpiece" that is important to *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and Todd's struggling identity formation, because it is Aaron's task to enforce the Prentisstown dogma both physically and psychologically (451). The religious parallel, and the perversion of religious theology, in a dystopia is not without precedent, as in 1984 the government of Big Brother "actively works to appropriate the energies traditionally associated with religious belief and to use those energies for its own purposes, giving the Party itself a quasi-religious air" (Booker 71). The Big Brother government, which in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* takes the persona of the Mayor, "demands a strict religiouslike devotion from its faithful members" relying on psychological tortures to keep members within its fold and "work[ing] in secret, giving their victims no chance to become martyrs" (Booker 72-3). Aaron, similar to the elite Inner Party of 1984, uses surveillance, uses the Noise to control language and dissemination of knowledge, history, and dogma. Aaron controls the community through dominating possible discourse, in his words: "Language, young Todd...binds us like prisoners on a chain. Haven't you learned anything from yer church, boy?" He repeats his common pronouncement: "If one of us falls, we all fall" (7). Again

Aaron references the fall of man, but the "fall" for Prentissstown is actually an awakening to the nature of the dystopia of Prentissstown.

In order to become a member of, and therefore perpetuate, the Prentissstown dystopia Todd must first hate, for "Hate is the key. Hate is the driver. Hate is the fire that purifies the soldier. The soldier must *hate*" (450). In order to fulfill Aaron's own "destiny" he must first instill as much hate as he can in Todd, making hope for change and for a different life an impossibility to Todd and the social order. While Todd is brought up by the community's dogma to believe that it is in his and any Prentissstown man's nature to hate, he has been brought up by Ben, who contradicts this with his message of hope. It is Ben, whose Noise is different from that of the other men of Prentissstown, who was punished for trying to teach Todd to read, and who gives Todd both the knife and the book before helping him escape Prentissstown. Ben and Cillian, have been keeping secret their intention to help Todd flee Prentissstown for thirteen years, as Ben says, "'We promised [your mother] we would keep you safe... We promised her and then we had to put it outta our minds so there was nothing in our Noise, nothing that would let anyone know what we were gonna do'" (50). The resistance of Ben and Cillian, though subtle in the text, is worth mentioning because by choosing *not* to fight the Mayor and Aaron they choose to give Todd the hope for a better life. However, they also chose *not* to defend the innocent men and women killed by Mayor Prentiss and his men of Prentissstown and so become complicit, labeled forever as Prentissstown men. In a critique of the power of stereotyping and Ben and Cillian are therefore punished for their resistance of the hate of Prentissstown, while

their inaction indicts them for the crimes of Prentisstown, their intentions liberate them.

Ben explains:

"So we waited," Ben says. "In a town-sized prison. Full of the ugliest Noise you ever heard before men started denying their own pasts, before the Mayor came up with his grand plans. And so we waited for the day you were old enough to get away on yer own, innocent as we could keep you." He rubs a hand over his head. "But the Mayor was waiting, too."

"For me?" I ask, tho I know it's true.

"For the last boy to become a man," Ben says. "When boys became men, they were told the truth. Or a version of it, anyway. And then they were made complicit themselves."

I remember his Noise from back on the farm, about my birthday, about how a boy becomes a man...

"That don't make no sense," I say.

"You were the last," Ben says. "If he could make every single boy in Prentisstown a man by his own meaning, then [the Mayor's] God, ain't he? He's created all of us and is in complete control."

"If one of us falls," I say.

"We all fall," Ben finishes. (396-7)

Whereas 1984's Winston is a part of the vicious dystopian cycle, a caretaker that feeds the future of the system, Ben and Cillian have stayed in Prentisstown in order to deliver Todd from it, in order to give Todd what he needs to overcome Aaron and the Mayor. They teach him to have compassion for living things by giving him Manchee, and they teach him the power of Noise by teaching him to use it to control himself. Aaron and the men of Prentisstown keep the truth from Todd for the exact opposite reason. In Orwellian fashion, secrets are kept and thoughts are policed so that Todd will be unable to become a martyr, or a beacon of hope, but rather will succumb to the vicious cycle and perpetuate the dystopia by becoming complicit in it. In this way Todd is the young adult hope at the beginning of the novel, but he is ironically the hope for the dystopia of Prentisstown. If he fulfills this destiny, he will enable Prentisstown to spread and take over New World.

Aaron is the first to discover Viola. He dubs her "the sign," believing that her sacrifice will only strengthen his hold on the men of Prentisstown (78). As such, he does not cause her physical harm, though he does seem excited by her presence. Viola says of those first few days after her crash landing: "He would shout and he would scream and then he'd *leave*. And I'd try to run away... I *kept* trying so he wouldn't find me, but I was going in circles and wherever I hid, there he'd be, I don't know how" (137). The suggestion is that Aaron is slowly corralling Viola toward Prentisstown, but also that he intends for Viola to be discovered, and perhaps even discovered by Todd, for as Todd enters the swamp in the first chapter, Aaron attacks him and then allows him to continue into the swamp toward Viola's silence. Aaron becomes the physical manifestation of the Prentisstown dogma in his physical attack on Todd, beating him while he preaches. To counteract Aaron and give Todd a chance at escaping the fate of the rest of Prentisstown, Ben and Cillian send Todd away, saying, "Just go to the swamp. You'll know what to do from there" (51). Ben gives Todd the book (his mother's journal), a map, and the knife:

"Take it with you to the swamp. You may need it."

"I never fought a Spackle before, Ben."

He still holds out the knife and so I take it.

There's another *BANG* from the farm. Ben looks back towards it, then back to me. "Go. Follow the river down to the swamp and out. Run as fast as you can and you'd better damn well not turn back, Todd Hewitt." (54-5)

Todd believes that if he destroys whatever is creating the silence in the swamp (he suspects it is a Spackle), then he will be permitted back into Prentisstown so that he can turn thirteen and become a man in 28 days. At this early point in the narrative, Todd's Prentisstown indoctrination is nearly absolute as, even though he isn't knowledgeable of the manhood ritual, it is evident he is immediately willing to kill in order to stay within the

community that he knows. Having been brought up to believe that the Spackle are horrible, unnatural creatures, he thinks that killing one will be a simple task: "I'll go to the swamp and kill the Spackle if I can and then I'll come back and help Cillian and Ben" (57). Yet, when he realizes that the source of the silence is a girl, his world immediately begins to come undone, as he says, "the unbelievable sadness that comes and comes as I look at it looking back at me. Knowledge is dangerous and men lie and the world keeps changing, whether I want it to or not. / Cuz it ain't a Spackle. / 'It's a girl,' I say./ It's a girl" (64). Instantly Todd connects Viola to knowledge and to men's lies, and he is struck by the awesome sublime power that silence can have in this world filled with Noise.

Following a brief and brutal altercation with Aaron, in which Aaron is knocked unconscious and Viola has run away, Todd decides not to use knife to kill Aaron, thinking: "[A] knife ain't just a thing, is it? It's a choice, it's something you *do*. A knife says yes or no, cut or not, die or don't. A knife takes a decision out of your hand and puts it in the world and it never goes back again" (84). Todd is constantly tempted by hate and brought to the precipice of using the knife but, unlike the other men of Prentisstown, he is "special" – he is "the boy who can't kill" (451). Todd has within him a rare compassion and respect for life. Yet the knife remains, throughout the narrative, the representation of hope for the corrupt dystopia, for if Todd uses it against a man then he will have become complicit, he will have fulfilled his role as hope for the dystopia. Todd is unable to kill Aaron when he rescues Viola, which precipitates the pursuit of Todd and Viola across New World. Todd's action in saving Viola and his inaction in killing Aaron not only mirrors Ben and Cillian's own

historical action, but highlights the potential for hope at the core of Todd's character. He is willing to risk his own life for the lives of others, and so there is more than hate within him.

6.4 Manchee

Manchee and Aaron both represent identities against which Todd struggles: Aaron, as the physical representation of Prentisstown that haunts Todd, and Manchee is a part of nature but also the physical manifestation of Todd's innocent childhood. Manchee is Todd's companion, with whom Todd can think freely. Yet he is also a symbol of youth and innocence as yet uncorrupted by Prentisstown. Garrard, in his chapter entitled "Animals," discusses the ways that humans can be compared and likened to animals. He states that "the boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and, moreover, irrelevant, since we share with animals a capacity for suffering that only 'the hand of tyranny' could ignore" (136-7). Manchee is very literally the child of nature in the Romantic tradition of the natural and innocent child, while Aaron is the hand of tyranny who believes that animals and nature are "unclean" and unworthy of moral consideration (116).

Manchee and Todd are linked by several things: their mutual need to protect and care for one another, the suffering inflicted upon them by the men of Prentisstown, particularly the tyrannical Aaron, and their innocence and state as children, or "Pups" (202). Todd is constantly reminding the reader about his state as a child, a boy, and calls into question his masculinity (by Prentisstown standards), reaffirming how many days he has left until he becomes a man. Manchee, on the other hand, always reaffirms that Todd is the boy who cares. In the rest of New World, beyond Prentisstown, the idea of masculinity varies from town to town, but in Prentisstown it is clear, and Todd is still considered a boy

who is constantly called a "Pup" (150). Upon catching Todd, Viola, and Manchee blowing up the bridge in their escape from the swamp, Hildy threatens them with a gun:

"He saved my life."
I saved her life.
Says Viola.
Funny how that works.
"Did he now?" says the rifle. "And how do you know he don't aim to just be a-saving it for himself?"
The girl, Viola, looks at me, her forehead creased. It's my turn to shrug.
"But no." The rifle's voice changes. "No, huh-uh, no, I'm not a-seeing that in ye, am I, boy? Cuz yer just a boy pup still, ain't ye?"
I swallow. "I'll be a man in 29 days."
"Not something to be proud of, pup. Not where *yer* from." (142-3)

The "pup" identity is one that Todd initially resists. Just as he resented being the only boy in Prentisstown, he resists identification with childlike innocence. This quote implies more than just childlike innocence as it also points out that Todd does not fully understand the history of New World, but also that he is not yet complicit in the crimes of Prentisstown. At this point, Todd believes that he must become a man in order to become a member of his community and make his existence worthwhile, but the constant reaffirmation of his child state and his lack of knowledge frustrates his struggle for identity. The designation "pup" is consistently applied to him, Viola, and the other youth and so it becomes accepted dialogue that overtly links youth to nature, and specifically Todd to Manchee.

Nature has a powerful voice throughout *The Chaos Walking* trilogy. In the first title of the series, this voice is established through Manchee, who claims the first words actually spoken in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Much of Manchee's dialogue consists of questions or simple words and declarations, as the novel begins with "Need a poo, Todd" (1). This simple and humorous statement is repeatedly littered throughout the book, and attributes

Manchee, and therefore nature, with a child-like innocence. While Manchee's character offers some innocent lightheartedness to an otherwise violent and frightening adventure, his bond with Todd allows Todd's growing subjectivity and independence to clearly develop and emerge as he begins to uncover the truth about Prentisstown. Even on this very first page, after these spoken words from Manchee, the text is overtaken by a thought or rant from Todd:

Ben's sent me to pick him some swamp apples and he's made me take Manchee with me, even tho we all know Cillian only bought him to stay on Mayor Prentiss's good side and so suddenly here's this brand new dog as a present for my birthday last year when I never said I *wanted* any dog, that what I *said* I wanted was for Cillian to finally fix the fissionbike so I wouldn't have to walk every forsaken place in this stupid town, but oh, no, happy birthday, Todd, here's a brand new puppy, Todd, and even tho you don't want him, even tho you never asked for him, guess who has to feed him and train him and wash him and take him for walks and listen to him jabber now he's got old enough for the talking germ to set his mouth moving? Guess who? "Poo," Manchee barks quietly to himself. "Poo, poo, poo." (1)

This passage is rich for linguistic analysis, most importantly to note that the power relationship between human and nature has been reversed. Where in reality nature cannot speak, on *New World* and on the first page of this text, it is nature that speaks with a voice while the human is audibly silent. Interesting too is that Manchee and the other creatures of the swamp have no other thoughts than the ones that they voice, while most men's *Noise* reveals the discrepancy between what they think and what they say. This passage makes use of Manchee's audible voice to distinguish Todd, and Todd's opinions and subjectivity, as the central story, and actual *text*, of the text.

As Todd comes to understand the world beyond Prentisstown, a tension develops between the innocence of childhood and two alternate potential identities – either a

connection with the circle of life within all things represented by Manchee or ignorance and illiteracy of nature as found in the other Prentisstown men. Each time Todd is pressed to use the knife by a Prentisstown man, he steps dangerously close to fulfilling the ritual that will doom him to complicity with Prentisstown dogma and belief. Manchee, who is both the voice of nature but also represents the innocence of childhood, intercedes and protects Todd physically. By halting Todd from using the knife to kill, Manchee allows Todd more time to learn what the consequences of ultimately using the knife will mean, but also frustrates Todd's longing to grow out of childhood. Todd has difficulty distinguishing between a respect for life and the circle of all things, and the innocence of childhood.

Todd is eventually forced into using the knife on several occasions. In Farbranch, he uses the knife in self-defense against Matthew Lyle, an escapee from Prentisstown who has been accepted into the Farbranch community. For Lyle, a true man of Prentisstown, Todd represents the trauma and history associated with Prentisstown. Todd has been indoctrinated with the Prentisstown version of history and is unwilling to accept a different path which Lyle shows him as the truth. Using the tool of Prentisstown, the knife, he tries to defend his life and innocence. However, Lyle gains the upper hand and Manchee comes to his rescue, losing a portion of his tail in the process. Todd is again forced to use the knife when Mr. Davy Prentiss Jr., the Mayor's son, confronts him and threatens Viola's life. Davy recognizes Manchee's waning power, asking "What happened to its tail?" before he brutally kicks Manchee out of the fight (256). Davy references Todd's innocence regarding sex and women and likens women to dogs, saying "Dogs is dogs and women turn out to be dogs, too" (256). This is an important passage because women, who represent progress and

technology on New World, as will be discussed in the Viola section, are linked here with nature in a derogatory sense. The disdain that Prentisstown has for women, technology, and nature is reinforced, as they are viewed as "unclean," an ideology that Todd realizes he does not share (116). Todd is forced to once again question all that being a Prentisstown man entails but when he gets the chance to kill Davy with the knife, he berates himself, thinking, "Right at the moment when the power is mine to command and do with as I please – I hesitate – *Again* –" (259). Todd is angry with himself for relinquishing his opportunity to become a man. Davy says, "'you *ain't* a man, are ya?'/... 'And you never will be,'" expressing that they both believe that Todd's hesitation is a childish weakness (262). Viola offers an alternative to Todd's choice of either retreating into the innocence of childhood or growing into an ignorant Prentisstown man. She changes the story, arguing that Davy Prentiss is the "boy," saying "'I know this kind of boy'/... 'He's a liar'" (226). Todd still refuses to accept Viola's revision of the New World narrative, saying that "I'm from *here* and that's how it works here," missing an opportunity for a turning point in the novel (266). By continuing to oscillate between childhood and manhood, both Manchee and the knife become opposing burdens that Todd must carry as he runs away from the shadow of Prentisstown. His inability to accept the truth is causing history to repeat itself as he silences Viola, the voice of reason, and allows the voice of Nature to slowly be silenced as Manchee's physical form worsens.

Prentisstown's potential to triumph over Todd is at its peak when Viola and Todd encounter the Spackle. The Spackle's Noise is described in terms of surrealist paintings as "just pictures, skewed up strange with all the wrong colours... It's got feelings, washing up

in a buzz," and Todd is surprised at "how easy he is to read, even tho it's all picture" (272). Todd marvels at how easy and simple the Spackle's Noise is to comprehend as compared to the men of Prentissstown, the Spackle Noise has no deceit in it as he is one with nature. However, Manchee is unconscious and silenced, and Viola's logic is unable to reach Todd before he plunges the knife into the Spackle, whom he has been brought up to hate. Upon Todd's murder of the Spackle, Prentissstown has succeeded in planting rage and hate in Todd, as he explains, "'You don't know!'... 'You don't know anything! They started the war. They killed my ma! All of it, everything that's happened, is their fault!'" (275). However, immediately after this statement, Todd is physically ill, and recognizes that "I'm a killer-/ (Oh, please no) I'm a killer" (277). Todd has repeated history and killed the Spackle. After choosing to use the knife, he understands that it was the wrong choice. Todd's decision to, for a brief moment, embrace the knife and the ideology of Prentissstown, haunts him throughout the rest of the series as he must witness time again his murder of the Spackle in the Noise of the other Spackle who dub him "The Knife"⁶.

Todd must also live with the knowledge that killing the Spackle nearly cost him Viola's friendship as becoming a killer and, therefore, a Prentissstown man, makes him undesirable to her. She is also immediately kidnapped by Aaron who reappears and, in order to cultivate more hate within Todd, says, "I have no further use for you, boy" (280).

Todd, despairing and hating himself, is wounded and unconscious after Aaron's attack. He is truly without hope until Manchee brings him back to life with the familiar bark, "'Todd?'/ 'Todd?'" (284). Manchee's reaffirmation of Todd's identity restores Todd to

⁶ Quote from the Spackle named, The Return, or 1017. It is his first passage as narrator in *Monsters of Men* p. 83.

himself and all that he has done. Despite despairing that Viola will not want to be near him again, he believes that Aaron will kill Viola, and, therefore, picks up the knife believing, "There ain't no choice" and heads towards the army, where he believes Aaron has taken Viola (292). Manchee stops him, however, and begins to lead him in the opposite direction:

"Viola," he barks, turning round in a circle and then facing that way again.

"You can smell her?" I ask, my chest rising.

He barks a bark of yes.

"You can *smell* her?"

"This way, Todd!"

"Not back to the road?" I say. "Not back to the army?"

"Todd!" he barks, feeling the rise in my Noise and getting excited himself.

"Yer sure?" I say. "You gotta be sure, Manchee. You gotta be."

"This way!" and off he runs, thru the bushes and off on a track parallel to the river, away from the army.

And towards Haven.

Who knows why and who cares cuz in the moment I'm running after him as best as my injuries will let me, in the moment I see him bounding away and ahead, I think to myself, *Good dog, good bloody dog.* (295)

Todd begins to truly see Manchee as intrinsically valuable. Not only does he begin to trust Manchee, but he realizes he is essential to Todd's survival and Viola's rescue (337).

Manchee uses his sense of smell and his communication with the Noise of the planet to lead Todd towards Aaron and his captive. Todd is at this point severely wounded, starving, and sick, and begins to see hallucinations of Aaron: "I wonder if he knew," I say, to Manchee, to myself, to no one... 'I wonder if he killed me slow.' / 'Course I did,' Aaron says, leaning out from behind a tree... And he's gone. / Manchee's got his head cocked at me. 'Todd?'" (319). Todd struggles with having become the knife, the weapon that Prentissstown requires, and this puts Todd's life in danger as he refuses to kill anything and anyone, even for his own survival. Manchee, however, still recognizes Todd as his Todd, and despite having become a

killer there is a chance for Todd to retake his identity from Prentisstown. Manchee's constant reaffirmation keeps Todd moving ever forward. Without Manchee's support, Todd would not have survived the hunt for Aaron, either physically or psychologically.

The metaphor for Manchee representing Todd's childhood escalates when Todd, still delirious and weak from sickness, must devise a plan to rescue Viola from Aaron. In chapter 30, entitled "A Boy Called Todd," the child Todd literally manifests in a hallucination. The hallucinated Todd has "a brown shirt like mine, no scars on his head, a book in one hand, and a knife in the other" (330). In one hand the hallucination holds the history and truth of Prentisstown in the book, and in the other he holds the knife, representing ignorance and surrender to the dystopia of Prentisstown. The boy hallucination engages in tactical planning with Todd:

"What are we gonna do?" the boy asks again, standing a little way away, book still in one hand, knife in the other.

I put my palms into my eyes and rub hard, trying to think straight, trying to concentrate, trying not to listen—

"What if this is the sacrifice?" says the boy.

I look up. "What sacrifice?"

"The sacrifice you saw in his Noise," he says. *"The sacrifice of—"*

"Why would he do it here?" I say. "Why would he come all this way and stop in the middle of a stupid forest and do it here?"

The boy's expression doesn't change. *"Maybe he has to,"* he says, *"before she dies."*

I step forward and have to catch my balance. "Dies of what?" I say, my voice snappy, my head aching and buzzy again.

"Fear," says the boy, taking a step backwards. *"Disappointment."*

I turn away. "I ain't listening to this."

"Listening, Todd?" Manchee barks. "Viola, Todd. This way."

I lean back again against the tree. I've got to think. I've got to ruddy *think*.

"We can't approach," I say, my voice thick. "He'll hear us coming."

"He'll kill her if he hears us," says the boy.

"Ain't talking to you." I cough up more gunk, which makes my head spin, which makes me cough more. "Talking to my dog," I finally choke out.

"Manchee," Manchee says, licking my hand.

"And I can't kill him," I say.
"You can't kill him," says the boy.
"Even if I want to."
"Even if he deserves it."
"And so there has to be another way." (331-2)

This passage shows the tension within Todd as he struggles with himself for his own subjectivity – he is torn between what he has always known and what he now knows to be the truth. At the mention of the sacrifice in Aaron's Noise, Todd does not refute the knowledge but instead contends with a logical question – why here? Todd begins to ignore his old self – the hallucinatory Todd that came from Prentisstown – and becomes a new, individual Todd.

For the last time, Manchee saves Todd from himself. Todd does not have the strength to enter into a direct confrontation, that job is for Manchee. Indeed, it is hinted that Todd knew that the plan to rescue Viola might cost Manchee's life as when the hallucination boy says, "*He'll kill Manchee*," Todd does not respond directly but instead says, "I am Todd Hewitt... And I am leaving you here" (337-8). Manchee's death is the silencing of nature's voice in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, though it also represents nature as a visible victim of the Big Brother figures who control history and language, and who create and perpetuate the dystopia. The ritual silencing and sacrificing of nature, represented by Manchee, is no longer invisible to Todd as he moves on in the story to uncover the truth and discover what hope can be found as a young adult.

6.5 Viola

Leaving behind Manchee and his childhood, Todd embarks on the last leg of the journey with Viola. Viola Eade is the female co-protagonist of the novel and has, arguably,

the biggest impact on Todd's identity as, unlike Todd, she has a heroic journey to fulfill. After the crash landing of her scout ship it is up to Viola, the only survivor, to contact the arriving colonists from Earth and report to them what she has discovered on New World. Whereas Todd vacillates between childhood and adulthood as he flees the Prentisstown army, Viola identifies herself as a 13 year-old girl, a young adult who must save her people. Although Todd does not register that the silence in the swamp is a person, even without specific identification of her presence as human, Viola's appearance within the perimeter of Prentisstown throws into question everything that Todd knows about his world. It is Viola's function to contrast Todd. In the novel she is the silence in his Noise and the order to his chaos. She is logical and literate, and as an outsider to Prentisstown and New World, she has the capacity to question the structure of Prentisstown and to help Todd grow into a young adult capable of resistance and hope.

At first Viola's silence is astounding to Todd, and it is described in a way that resembles the sublime beauty of the Earth wilderness:

I can't *hear* it, that's the whole point, but when I run towards it the emptiness of it is touching my chest and the stillness of it pulls at me and there's so much quiet in it, no, not quiet, *silence*, so much unbelievable silence that I start to feel really torn up, like I'm about to lose the most valuable thing ever, like there it is, a death, and I'm running and my eyes are watering and my chest is just crushing and there's no one to see but I still mind and my eyes start crying, they start crying, they start *effing crying...* (16)

Silence is a sublime experience, an "'astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror'" (Burke 1990, in Garrard 53). The sublime experience of nature is an Old World experience, according to Garrard, which "required a degree of terror to imbue the requisite spiritual or even

political be-wilderment, it would always be vulnerable to technological and cultural change," (Garrard 66). However, it is difficult to ignore that Todd's first experience of silence, and therefore of Viola, is indeed surreal. Ness again reverses gendered terminology as Viola and her silence are not only beautiful, a concept that is "loved for its smallness, softness, delicacy," but sublime, or "admired for its vastness and overwhelming power" (64). Later in the novel, both Todd and Viola share a sublime experience of nature together:

The herd surrounds us and takes up everything, leaving just the sky and us. It cuts around us like a current, sometimes noticing us but more usually noticing only itself and the song of **Here**, which in the midst of it is so loud it's like it's taken over the running of yer body for a while, providing the energy to make yer heart beat and yer lungs breathe.

After a while, I find myself forgetting all about Wilf and the – the other things I could think about...

Viola's laying down next to me and Manchee's little doggie brain is overwhelmed by it all and he's just watching the herd go by with his tongue hanging out and for a while, for a little while, as Wilf drives us over the plain, this is all there is in the world.

This is all there is.

I look over at Viola and she looks back at me and just smiles and shakes her head and wipes away the wet from her eyes.

Here.

Here.

We're **Here** and nowhere else.

Cuz there's nowhere else but **Here**. (244)

Their experience of nature on New World is overwhelming, rendering them both terrified and calm. They cry and feel as though they a part of the herd of "things" – part of their "song" (240). Arguably, Viola and Todd never know a peaceful moment after this herd. It is a surreal experience that draws them together as they both share the experience of deafening loudness at the same time. As Todd and Viola voyage together through New World, they come to understand each other, and, though it is not easy, they genuinely begin

to trust and depend on one another. Todd, in an echo of the epigraph quotation from *Middlemarch*, says:

It's a two way thing, this is. However clear she can hear my Noise, well, out here alone, away from the chatter of others, of the Noise of a settlement, there's her silence, loud as a roar, pulling me like the greatest sadness ever, like I want to take it and press myself into it and just disappear forever down into nothing. (223)

To Todd, Viola's silence is the natural antidote to his Noise and to the constant Noise of men. In this passage there is an interesting reversal at play. While the *Middlemarch* passage laments the disconnect between nature and human, this passage laments the disconnect between man and silence, which in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, represents women. Women on New World are silent, just as the nature of Earth is silent. The surreal, and sublime, impact of Viola's silence on Todd is a direct correlation to the surreal beauty, the sublimity, of the wilderness on Earth. Ness links both women and Earth together as victimized in the violent past of both Earth and Prentisstown, but also as necessities, intrinsically valuable and essential, to the survival of man, and human, as a species.

In the way that 1984's Julia was a partner with whom Winston could have new experiences, free thoughts, and the strength to resist his government, so too does Viola's very presence threaten the veracity of life as Todd knows it. Viola brings with her technology like none Todd has ever seen. He is surprised and delighted with objects like the firestarter, dehydrated food, night vision goggles, and the advanced med-kits and bandages. Even her spaceship is a shock to him until he realizes that Viola and her people must be the next wave of settlers. Viola is driven by her responsibility to seek out modes of communicating across long distances in order to contact the incoming colonists – the

future inhabitants of New World. However, her task will be nearly impossible as this discussion with the Farbranch inhabitants reveals:

Viola nods. "We were supposed to report back. Let them know what we found."

Viola's voice is so quiet and her face so looking and hopeful, so open and wide and ready for disappointment that I feel that familiar tug of sadness again, pulling all Noise into it like grief, like being lost. I put a hand on the back of a settee to steady myself.

"Ah, girl pup," Hildy says, her voice getting suspiciously gentle again. "I'm guessing ye tried to contact us folks down here on New World when ye were a-scouting the planet?"

"Yeah," Viola says. "No one answered."

Hildy and Francia exchange nods. "Yer a-forgetting we were church settlers," Francia says, "getting away from worldly things to set up our own little utopia, so we let that kinda machinery go to rack and ruin as we got on with the business of surviving."

Viola's eyes get a little wider. "You have no way of communicating with anyone?"

"We don't have communicators for other *settlements*," Francia says, "much less the beyond."

"We're farmers, pup," Hildy says. "Simple farmers, looking for a simpler way of life. That was the whole point we were a-trying for in flying all this ridiculous way to get here. Setting down the things that caused such strife for people of old." She taps her fingers on a table-top. "Didn't quite work out that way, tho." (188)

This passage reveals the many ways that Viola represents communications. Viola has a mission of her own that is revealed to Todd for the first time in this passage, along with the revelation that more settlers will be arriving unannounced on New World, and it is clear that they will *not* be giving up their technology. However, it is also apparent that they too will entertain utopian ideals similar to those of the first settlers, which will inevitably lead to their disappointment. Viola has a unique position of power as what she reports to these new settlers could change the course of the planet's future; she is the only one who can actually communicate with the new settlers and therefore she has control over the

progress and future of New World. Furthermore, this passage reveals that Todd is learning to 'read' and communicate with Viola. For the beginning of the book Todd is constantly thinking (in his Noise) that Viola is full of "nothing" or "emptiness" (123). However, in this conversation, Todd is struck by her expressions, the tone of her voice, and the way that *she* communicates.

As well as symbolizing nature and communication, Viola is also the symbol for knowledge and learning throughout *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, as she is educated, literate (often correcting Todd's speech and Noise), and has the capacity to interrogate, and this forces Todd to interrogate, the history of Prentisstown as he knows it. She immediately recognizes that Aaron is a false preacher, unlike the one she knew on her spaceship, "That's not what the preacher we had on the ship was like. Pastor Marc. He was kind and friendly and made everything seem like it was going to be okay" (244-5). She casts doubt through asking questions, demanding to know, "Why would any reasonable church want to be cut off from itself?" and "Why do you become a man here at thirteen?" (228). She casts doubt on the dissemination of religion and begins to question the other truths and stories of Prentisstown. Upon discovering that women are in fact immune to the Noise germ and that "Prentisstown's got a sad history" (155). Viola begins to question everything that Todd knows. Despite hearing time and again about Prentisstown's sad history, repeatedly discovering that Prentisstown has taught him lies, and realizing that he has been being deceived and tricked by Aaron and Mayor Prentiss, Todd is nonetheless unwilling to accept, or "read" the truth. "Reading" in Ness' text is not simply being literate enough to read and decode print text, but the ability able to distill truth in men's Noise and as an extension of

that, being able to decipher meaning in women's silence. Viola, throughout the text is constantly learning how to "read" in New World giving her valuable insight into the plotting of Prentisstown and way that the rest of New World works. Viola is able to engage with and question the mass media – the Noise – of the planet and, having come from a place of no Noise she can also read people's expressions, tones and emotions. Viola is so expert that she can even mimic the accents and audible differences between peoples, which she demonstrates when they encounter Wilf for the first time. Todd is stunned at Viola's aptitude for mimicry, and Viola explains that mimicking someone else is "just lying, Todd" and then asks, "Don't you have lying here?" (242). While Todd concedes that there is lying on New World, his inner monologue reveals that "Everyone knows yer lying but everyone else is lying, too, so how can it matter?" (242). For Todd it is extremely difficult to decipher what is true from what is false because he has lived so long within the confines of the Noise of Prentisstown, furthermore he has little experience with audible voice or reading people's expressions and tone. Where Viola has become multi-literate and does not believe everything that she "reads," Todd's literacy takes much longer to develop as he struggles to decipher between truth and lie.

Furthermore, Viola learns how to read the narrative of the "story," when the conflict between what is true and what is false is amplified by Todd's hesitation to kill Davy Prentiss. Viola says: "You're not a killer Todd," to which he reacts with anger, "Don't SAY THAT!!" because for Todd being a killer is what makes a man a man (264). Todd says, "yer not reading the story right. We're only having to run cuz I couldn't –" (265). Todd is still blind to machinations and misdirection of Prentisstown. He believes that they have to run

from the Mayor because he was unable to kill Viola back in Prentisstown. However, Viola understands the true story,

"I think I'm finally *understanding* the story, Todd," she says. "Why are they coming after you so fiercely? Why is a whole army chasing you across towns and rivers and plains and the whole stupid planet?" She points to Mr Prentiss Jr. "I heard what he said. Don't you wonder why they want you so badly?" The pit in me is just getting blacker and darker. "Cuz I'm the one who don't fit."

"Exactly!"

My eyes go wide. "Why is that good news? I have an army who wants to kill me cuz I'm not a killer."

"Wrong," she says. "You have an army who wants to *make* you a killer

... If they can snuff out that part of you that's good, the part of you that won't kill, then they win, don't you see? If they can do it to you, they can do it to anyone. And they win. They *win!*"

She's near me now and she reaches out her hand and puts it on my arm, the one still holding the knife.

"We beat them," she says, "*you* beat them by not becoming what they want."

I clench my teeth. "He killed Ben and Cillian."

She shakes her head. "No, he *said* he did. And you believed him." (265-6)

Viola demonstrates her multi-literacy in this passage, she has learned how to see through the Noise of the people of New World to read the history of Prentisstown. She points out that Davy lied, using Todd's naivety against him, demonstrating for Todd, once again, that not everything people say or think is true. Yet although Todd finally begins to understand that Viola is correct in her "reading" of the story and can see the logic in her reasoning, when he is confronted with the Spackle he cannot contain himself and kills the alien in cold blood (276). Viola demonstrates again her ability to read the Noise, only this time she is reading the voice of planet itself through the Spackle, , "'He was *terrified!*' Viola cries, her voice breaking. "Even I could see how scared he was'" (276). She continues in her rage to point out again that Todd has been illiterate to the Noise of Prentisstown and New World when she says, "How many times have you found out that what you've been told isn't

true?" she says..."How many times?" (276). Todd finally realizes his mistake and recognizes, too late, that using the knife to kill brings him to the level of the Prentissstown men. Even worse than his own dawning hatred for his action is Viola's reaction to his murder of the alien. "I don't hear nothing from Viola but her silence," Todd says, and her frightened silence and his awful emptiness prompts him to justify his actions, but "Viola's face is a terrible thing...grieving and scared and horrified, all at me, all at me" (273-4). To Todd, Viola's fear of him is more difficult to cope with than the physical ramifications of taking a life. Todd realizes that he cannot survive if Viola hates him, and so she becomes his motivation for any further use of the knife.

At the beginning of the text, Todd and Viola resist Aaron and the Mayor out of fear, but as a reaction to their chase, Viola chooses to assist Todd in his resistance of the Mayor by helping him become literate. Todd reaches a non-traditional type of literacy, a hybrid kind of literacy that allows him to discern truths and lies in the Noise as he learns how to "read" people, including himself. He recognizes that it is foolish to ignore the knowledge and history in his mother's journal, which he avoids until the end of the narrative, and which is the third talisman he brings with him on his journey after Manchee and the knife. Viola reads from the journal, in her best impression of a Prentissstown accent, a tale that reveals the truth about the Spackle and about how power hungry Aaron was, even ten years ago. It also reveals how much love and hope Todd's mother had for him, and for all of New World: "[T]here's so much wonder to be had, so much just waiting for you, Todd, that I almost can't stand that it's not happening for you *right now*, that yer going to have to wait to see all that's possible, all the things you might do" (416). The moment that Viola reads

from Todd's mother's journal, Todd recognizes that he is able to "read" her. He can see her pain over the loss of her own parents: "She hurts. I know all this. I *know* it's true. Cuz I can read her. I can read her Noise even tho she ain't got none. I know who she is. I know Viola Eade" (Ness 420). Just as he used his own name, Todd uses Viola's name as a source of power, as a designation of individuality and identity. Just as he is Todd Hewitt, she is Viola Eade and together they will fight, as the hopeful young adults, against the spread of the dystopia of Prentisstown.

In the final act of the novel, *Part VI*, his mother's words infuse Viola and Todd with hope as they near Haven. As Todd and Viola approach the town, Todd meditates on the function of hope:

I see Viola looking back at me as we run and there's brightness on her face and she keeps urging me on with tilts of her head and smiles and I think how hope may be the thing that pulls you forward, may be the thing that keeps you going, but that it's dangerous, too, that it's painful and risky, that it's making a dare to the world and when has the world ever let us win a dare? (423)

Todd recognizes the power that hope can have on people, although he also identifies the dangers of arrant hope and the heavy weight that it can have when resting on the shoulders of two young people. As they run towards Haven, where they hope to find a civilization to combat the Prentisstown army, and communications technology to contact the incoming settlers, Aaron chases Todd and Viola for the last time. They attempt to escape by jumping through a waterfall, hoping that the water will hide them – but Todd realises that Aaron, and if not Aaron then another Prentisstown man, will continue to chase them forever, so, instead of running like children he decides to make a stand saying, "I'm gonna greet him like a man," and then he calls out for Aaron (444). Aaron's intent was to infuse Todd with

so much anger toward him that Todd wouldn't be able to stop himself from killing. However, ultimately, it is not Todd who uses the knife to kill Aaron, but Viola. In one quick action Viola kills, not only Aaron, but the entire hegemony of Prentisstown. If in order to be considered a grown man one must murder another man, then by Prentisstown standards, Viola has become a man, and beyond that, she has become the young adult symbol of hope against the dystopia. By taking Todd's birthright and murdering Aaron, Viola saves Todd from becoming a Prentisstown man and allows him to *choose* what kind of man he wants to be. In choosing to use the knife herself, she gives Todd the freedom of choice and therefore hope for a better future, for Todd and Viola together on New World.

6.6 Conclusion

Throughout the entirety of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd struggles with his identity. With the constant Noise of Prentisstown feeding him misinformation and the fabricated history of New World he struggles to overcome his hate and, instead, embrace hope. The perverted masculine identity of Prentisstown necessarily requires a hatred of technology, nature, and women, but Prentisstown is doomed to slowly deteriorate and die due to its refusal to grow and embrace balance. Technology is dually represented in both women who bear the responsibility for technology and signify progress and growth, and in the Noise, which can be peacefully accepted, resisted to the detriment of the individual or controlled as a weapon. Through his adventures with Manchee and Viola, Todd learns a sort of "media" literacy as he begins to "read" the constant information, both visual and audible. Todd comes to realize that the Noise and technology can be a natural extension for humankind, but that there needs to be balance. In recognizing that technology, specifically

communications that used to help build communities, is natural to the progress of humanity, he also discovers that men (and women) are a part of the natural world, connected to it via the Noise but also living in a sublime symbiotic relationship with it. However, while balance is necessary for there to be any hope, Todd's trials in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* show that taking the initial step towards "literacy" is only the first of many steps, with acceptance of the truth and the necessary reorientation of thought being a difficult second step. However, it is embracing and establishing this reorientation of thought that is the challenge. Just as New World is not a welcoming new Earth utopia for the initial settlers, the aptly named "Haven" is also the trap of arrant utopianism for Todd and Viola. The protagonists reach their final destination only to discover that Prentisstown has taken over and effectively brought the story full circle. Ness' text proves that change is a slow, but essential process. While Todd has finally redefined what it means to be "Todd Hewitt"-- a man and by extension a human on New World -- he, with the help of Viola, must now enact a reorientation of thought throughout New World -- a heavy burden for two young people to bear alone, making *The Knife of Never Letting Go* perhaps the least hopeful of the texts presented in this thesis.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research project examines, through the lens of environmental literary criticism, three contemporary young adult dystopian novels: *Life as We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. The challenge of bringing ecocriticism to these texts is manifold as the study of children's texts through ecocriticism is only emerging.. As well, regardless of the theoretical lens, the study of texts written specifically for 'young adults' struggles for independence from the umbrella of texts intended for "children." Ecocriticism incorporates a multi-faceted theoretical framework that merges the science of ecology with literary analysis. Studying a text from an ecological stance is difficult to maintain when analyzing young adult literature, which purports to entertain and sometimes challenge its readers, and not necessarily teach a moral lesson or replicate the natural world beyond the level necessary to achieve the sense of a realistic setting. For these reasons, I incorporate the theories and classic tropes of the utopian and dystopian genre into my ecocritical framework. I adhere to the perspective that, notwithstanding the real existence of the *extratextual* world, nature and technology are social constructs created through language and cultural artefacts of our time that inform our cultural identities and attitudes.

As I conducted my literary analysis it became clear that nature and technology often serve oppositional roles but are intrinsically connected to one another. As Buell says: "No genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking 'environment' better than science fiction does" (*Future* 58). The tropes of life surrounding literary constructions of a

future Earth and a coming apocalypse necessarily incorporate both environmental and technological representation. For this reason, I confine my research to the realm of literary criticism, undertaking a close reading of the novels with a focus on the literary representations of the environment within the dystopia for young adults, in an investigation of the dystopian ecology.

7.2 Summary of Findings

In this section, I return to my original research questions to examine how the findings discussed in the previous three chapters relate to each other, and more broadly to the areas of inquiry, namely, in a selection of young adult dystopian novels, what is the role of the dystopia in the representation of the environment and technology and in the protagonists' transition from child to young adult. The following sub-sections are grouped by research question since the previous three chapters focused on a single text. This way, each question is answered more fully through an intertextual comparison.

1. What is the representation of the natural environment in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?

The representation in the primary texts, at least in the beginning, is grounded in that of the dystopian totalitarian government. The dystopian regime has control over language, the dissemination of knowledge, and historical memory. It is the task of the young adult protagonist to uncover historical memory, in much the same way as Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring*, in order to uncover the truth about the damage humanity has inflicted on the environment. In the three primary texts, the regime portrays the environment as antagonistic, a space to be avoided and even feared. In *Life as We Knew It*, Miranda makes

no mention of the outdoors until the Moon Crush, after which she is shocked to find that the weather and wildlife are affected. Miranda's commentary on the natural world, in her memoir, often alludes to her lack of connection with the historical representation of the natural environment. She is firmly rooted in her Western contemporary reality. Miranda is a member of the infantilized American community, an identity that has been passed on to her by her parents, and which perpetuates reliance on the regime and its institutions. She is representative of the complacent twenty-first century Western individualism, believing that the dystopian regime has the knowledge and capacity to overcome the natural disaster of the Moon Crush. Miranda does not distinguish herself through thought or action as a young adult dystopian hero but rather becomes a member of the adult world, passing on the hope for a reorientation of thought to the next generation.

President Snow restricts contact with the outdoors, keeping the citizens of Panem penned inside their districts with electrical fences. As with *Life as We Knew It*, the regime has perpetuated a disjuncture between humans and the natural world. However, Katniss's father has taught her nature's intrinsic value and inherent dangers and she, therefore, is aware of how to survive in the natural world without relying on the regime for assistance. Peeta is representative of the ideal Panem citizen and, like Miranda, he relies entirely on the regime. The Capitol perpetuates fear of the environment by associating nature with danger in its use of the natural setting for the Hunger Games. The setting, intended to make Katniss, and the other tributes, feel alienated and insecure is thwarted by her direct experience prior to the Games of the natural world in her exploration of the woods. As the Hunger Games are mandatory viewing across the population, and manipulate nature as the

background for the slaughter of children, this helps to condition the citizens of Panem to view nature as fearsome and negative. Katniss, however, takes on the responsibility for rebellion against the regime. By demonstrating her abilities to survive under harsh conditions and yet live nonconfrontationally in the natural world, she unwittingly becomes the symbol of rebellion against the regime and its false representation of nature. Through her engagement with the natural world, instead of becoming a victim of the regime's Hunger Games, she emerges as the hope for all of Panem.

Finally, in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, the natural environment, according to the fascistic teachings of Prentisstown, is unclean; Prentisstown's citizens blame the environment for the hardships they have suffered since settling on New World, as the planet had not fulfilled the reality of the imagined utopia hoped for by the settlers. The world beyond Prentisstown is unknown to Todd and so he has little experience with the nature of New World, and the swamp that he knows is a space where men *never* go. Todd, consequently, associates nature with danger and with a type of Noise that is different from that of men fashioning Nature as a gendered space *not* for men, and it is further othered through the discovery that the indigenous Spackle are intrinsically connected to it through the Noise. Women, however, are unaffected by the Noise and nature is experienced as an entity distinct from its cultural construction and culturally-constructed gender identities. Todd, in order to grow into an individual and achieve selfhood, must separate himself from Prentisstown. Throughout his journey, he discovers that, like nature, he has an individual identity and a voice external to the regime's cultural representation. Whereas Miranda forfeits and rejoins the dystopian community, Todd rejects the Prentisstown identity and

instead, like Katniss who becomes the symbol of hope for Panem, accepts the veracity of his mother's historical memoir, from which he learns truth and the burden of hope. Todd begins to navigate the nature-culture divide.

The dystopian, totalitarian governments in each of the primary texts normalize the representation of nature as an antagonistic nonhuman space. Presented by politicians in the texts as benevolent regimes that protect citizens, the governments contain the populations within the confines of controlled, distinctly human, and therefore, safe, spaces. This is a representation of the dystopian nature-culture divide in these texts, as after a time human separation from nature and forgotten history is made normative. Mirroring contemporary anxieties regarding climate change and the effects of the Western cultural lifestyle on the environment, all three of the primary texts present the natural environment as a neglected, yet living and intrinsically valuable, part of life on Earth. By living apart from the natural environment, the three protagonists – Miranda, Katniss, and Todd – do not have the ability to question the regime. But in coming to experience and know nature, their ideas change somewhat and nature itself becomes the ecological utopia within the dystopian world. However, Miranda, though she briefly recognizes the dystopian regime, is unable to extricate herself from its grasp. There is, therefore, only a little hope that the next generation can first reorient their own way of thinking about the world and then enact change throughout their community.

Nature is presented as pristine, as even in *Life as We Knew It* after the environmental apocalypse, nature is still preferable to the indoor space of Miranda's sunroom. The snowscape from Pfeffer's text, and the forest beyond District 12, are

described as beautiful in an overwhelming way like the herd of "things" in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. Nature is sublime in the sense that it sparks a transcendental response from the protagonists.. In nature, dissonance can be discussed and truths examined and revealed. Nature is a place where the protagonists' unique identities can be formed outside of the dystopia; it is the place where characters can express themselves freely and form relationships . Childhood, in the Romantic tradition, is closely linked to nature, and in these dystopian texts, which require youth to become the agents of change, nature offers a space where hope is accessible to youth. Paradoxically, nature has the potential to destroy humanity, but it is also humanity's only hope for survival.

2. What role does technology play in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?

Dystopian fiction, as a branch of science fiction, necessarily imagines the benefits and consequences of new science and technology. Technology in each of the primary texts is represented to different extents and in different forms, yet in each it comes to represent a means for communication and literacy. Technology is the means through which the dystopian regime disseminates knowledge and historical memory, and therefore, the young adult protagonists must become media-literate in order to interrogate the ecology of the dystopia. Miranda lives in what she perceives to be a utopia of abundance; she is inundated with technology and consumer products. She is indoctrinated with a reliance on technology, which is controlled by the regime. As with the initial settlers' hopes for an ecological utopia on New World *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, *Life as We Knew It* presents only a perceived technological utopia. Technology is so normalized in *Life as We Knew It* that it takes the place of nature entirely, and when disaster strikes and technology is

apparently destroyed or rendered useless, the scaffolds of the American dystopia crumble. The belief in the system, however, does not. Miranda is then absorbed in an effort to regain the lost technological utopia as opposed to coping constructively and creatively with environmental change. In the conclusion, Miranda is brought back to the control of the dystopian regime through technology in the form of dissemination of consumer goods. The implication is that, for Miranda, technology is only a consumable good and not a tool that will help her survive. As in the citizens of the Capitol in *The Hunger Games*, she is drawn to products of technology and not the technology itself as a tool. Consequently, she does not emerge or develop as a hero like Katniss or Todd. She simply accepts that without technology there is no hope of survival, life, community, or a future, unless the regime is capable of restoring and providing it.

Whereas Miranda is unable to discern the intrinsic value of either nature or technology, Katniss learns to mediate both technology and nature in order to survive. The Capitol of *The Hunger Games* uses technology as a means of controlling the population through mass media. Panem's culture revolves around the Hunger Games, which are mandatory consumption for all citizens. Unlike Miranda, Katniss has the advantage of being conscious of the dystopian circumstances in which she lives. She recognizes that the historical narratives that the Capitol propagates is false and therefore begins to teach herself media literacy. Within the space of nature, she becomes able to question the dystopian regime, and she is ultimately capable of mediating both the natural and technological worlds in order to survive. Using nature as a resource and technology as a

means of communication, she successfully overcomes and overthrows the dystopian regime of the Capitol, embodying the symbol of young adult hope in the dystopia.

Viola, from Ness' *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, is very much like Katniss. After crashlanding on New World, in the swamp surrounding Prentisstown, she is immediately accosted by Aaron and his Noise. Though the Noise is a natural attribute of the planet, Aaron and the men of Prentisstown have learned to manipulate it in a similar fashion to how the Capitol controls mass media. Where Katniss learns media literacy in combination with her knowledge of nature to overcome the dystopian regime, Viola must learn Noise (and therefore nature) literacy to supplement her pre-existing knowledge of technology. Viola uses her newfound knowledge of Noise to teach Todd how to "read." Viola forces Todd, in a way that Miranda was *not* forced, to read and acknowledge Prentisstown's authentic history, in order to avoid becoming complicit in the dystopia. Viola's knowledge of technology helps her to survive, but it is her ability to communicate and read both the manipulated Noise of men and the peaceful Noise of nature, which assists in Todd's transformation from anti-hero to hero. By so doing, they share the burden of hope. Whereas in Pfeffer's text there is a clear division between nature and culture, and in Collins' text nature and technology are blended to create a new and hostile environment that Katniss must navigate, the environment of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is multi-layered and complex. Women are simultaneously unaffected by the Noise, and the bearers of communication. This is symbolized by Viola, who brings to the planet new technologies and represents a conduit to the future of New World. Men, are affected by the Noise, which can be harnessed like a technological weapon, as by Mayor Prentiss, and can also be used

like the televisions in Panem or the radio in Howell, Pennsylvania, to spread lies and indoctrination throughout the community. Nature, therefore, has elements of technology within it, and when embraced in balance can help advance a human connection with the natural world. *The Hunger Games* presents an environment where technology has been forced on the natural world as in District 12, or where nature has been simulated and blended with technology as in the Hunger Games – both environments force Katniss to mediate and blend her understanding of nature and technology. *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, on the other hand, acknowledges the intrinsic connection between humans, technology and nature and need *both* nature and technology to survive. The nature-technology conflict and division in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* problematizes the very representations of nature and culture and whether they should be, or indeed *can* be, separated at all, as nature affects culture and culture affects nature.

3. How does the young adult protagonist interact with the natural environment and technology in a selection of young adult dystopian literature?

The precarious state of the environment in the twenty-first century is an undeniable metaphorical presence in each of these texts. Technology is, to some degree, presented in each text as both a cause of, and a solution to, environmental issues. Despite, or perhaps because of, the natural world being presented as an antagonistic space, the young adult protagonists are drawn to it. Each character, Miranda, Katniss, and Todd, expresses that nature is a peaceful place where their thoughts can be free. Nature is a place where their mature identities can take shape outside the control of the dystopian system. The natural world becomes a utopian escape from the dystopian system that exists in urban and

technological settings. The possible rebellion against the dystopian system is fostered in the utopia of nature where history can be questioned and hope can be nurtured – however, it is ambivalently depicted as also a place of escape where their childhoods can be recaptured and the dystopia and necessary action can be ignored. Miranda often misses her chance to truly uncover the flaws of the system within which she lives. She escapes to Miller's Pond where she can be free of her family home and engage in physical activity, nature is also a space where she can develop a relationship with a love interest. Katniss too, although she recognizes Panem's dystopian identity, is initially unwilling to take action against it and flees to the forest for some peace and the companionship of Gale. Todd simply escapes to the swamp surrounding Prentisstown to get away from the constant Noise of men. He, like Miranda, is so conditioned in the ways of the dystopia that even in nature he cannot see that there is any other way of life. Indeed, if not for the inciting incidents, which force Todd and Katniss to protect other innocent characters from the dystopia, it seems unlikely that their rebellion would have actually occurred and more likely that the dystopian cycle would simply have continued.

Prim's name called as the tribute for the Hunger Games and Viola's crash-landing in Prentisstown instigate action unlike the "magical food" from *Life as We Knew It*, which instigates nothing and results, in fact, in lack of action. Since the "magical food" prevents Miranda from turning to nature as a resource and to technology as a tool, and becoming the young adult wielder of hope for a better future, she relies solely on, and places all of her hope in, the dystopian regime. Miranda fails to readjust or alter her thoughts and attitudes about nature and technology. Instead, she becomes an adult and is willing to sacrifice

herself to pass on the burden of hope to the next generation, the generation born post-Moon Crush. Katniss and Todd are both children born post-apocalypse and establishment of the dystopia. Unlike Miranda, they realize that they must reorient the established historic way of thinking about the human and the non-human worlds or else they will not only perish, but allow their loved ones to be destroyed. This mirrors contemporary twenty-first century anxieties about human inaction towards climate change and technological reliance as well as the resulting burden that is placed on the next generation. For Miranda, this task becomes too demanding a burden to carry, but by contrast, Katniss and Todd learn how to interact with both facets of their environments, nature and technology.

7.3 Contribution to Existing Scholarship

The scholarly undertaking of dystopian young adult literature through an ecocritical lens is in its infancy, with such texts as Basu Balaka's *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* (2013). My research fits into this relatively new area of scholarship and adds to the field an ecocritical analysis of *The Hunger Games*, *Life as We Knew It*, and *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, which have not heretofore been the subjects of significant existing research. While there are entire texts devoted to the critical analysis of *The Hunger Games*, a study that blends utopian and dystopian theory with the ecocritical lens has not been attempted. Clare P. Curtis has analyzed *Life as We Knew It* but blended the dystopian lens with that of education and literacy, and studies of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* have focused mainly on representations and interrogations of gender dynamics. This study contributes to the fields of young adult literature, utopian and dystopian literature, and ecocritical scholarship. My intention with this thesis is to explore the fictional

representations of the environment and human relationships to it within the context of the dystopian settings as a part of the fabric of these speculative futures. Therefore, this thesis is useful not only to researchers engaging in ecocritical literary analysis, but is also meant to offer educators and students different ways of considering these young adult dystopian texts and their heroes. I hope to inspire youth to greater environmental consciousness, while also hoping to confront the adult tendency in these texts, and perhaps in reality as well, to ignore the consequences of inaction.

7.4 Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to this study, with one of the most significant being the decision to study each of the books in the context of their entire series. This focus on the first title only of three series has led to findings that may not necessarily be authenticated within the context of the entire series. Another limitation is the multi-faceted theoretical lens. While the combination of ecocriticism with utopian and dystopian theory allows for an interesting interrogation of the representation of the environment by the dystopian regime to the young adult protagonists, and by extension to young readers, a more in-depth focus using either of the two lenses could possibly have offered a deeper and more concentrated analysis. Furthermore, in order to carry out a fully ecocritical analysis, it may have been helpful to study texts focusing on a single geographical region. Analyzing a set of texts by region could encourage a more eco-mimetic reading, leading to a closer metaphorical analysis of a specific real world setting. Without focusing geographically, this thesis can only connect findings to the larger Western culture which these texts are products of, leading to broadly-based findings rather than more narrow, specific ones.

7.5 Implications for Further Research

The critical examination of these three primary texts need not end here. These three novels and the series that they belong to are rich in character, setting, theme, and ideas that are fruitful ground for further criticism. This research focuses on the specific dystopian genre in young adult literature through a multi-focal lens grounded in ecocriticism, and therefore fills a gap in larger areas of scholarly research pertaining to dystopian and utopian studies, ecocriticism, and young adult literature. The lens of ecocriticism in combination with utopian and dystopian theories is dynamic and interesting and could be used to investigate numerous young adult texts and media. It would be useful, for example, in the study of picturebooks such as Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* or perhaps other media, like picturebook applications or cartoon shows for younger audiences.

It would be pertinent to study these texts, and their sequels, in greater detail from different critical lenses, but in particular from a gender theory perspective. As my framework focused on utopian and dystopian theories and the inherent critical discussions surrounding technology within the ecocritical lens in order to maintain the focus I excluded ecofeminism and gender theory. It would be fascinating to study these same three texts, and their sequels, through an ecofeminist and gender theory lens as, while studying these texts, I continuously confronted how nature is gendered (or *un-gendered*) in the texts, and intriguing and troubling representations of gender in parental roles, and in relation to the young adult identity. Furthermore, an exploration of gender in terms of the romantic subplots in dystopian young adult fiction, would be fascinating from a gender theory perspective. Not only would it be interesting to discuss the idea that romance presents a

utopian space within the dystopian system, but on a much broader scale, it would be fascinating to study the relationship of romance to the defining of "young adult literature" as a genre of its own.

It would also be interesting to study these series from an historical perspective; an interesting vein that repeatedly appeared was the importance of historical memory and the dystopian world's inherent suppression of historical memory. This was particularly useful in studying the texts from an ecocritical stance as it helped to link contemporary historical memory with regards to the environment to the culture presented in the texts. More detailed analysis of the representation and dialogue surrounding history in these texts would be intriguing. Moreover, for the scope of my thesis and because of my general lack of knowledge on the subject of theology, I did not address the issue of religion in the dystopia. Religion, however, plays a role that is closely linked to that of the concealed history in these primary texts. The role of religion in Pfeffer's series is expanded upon throughout the sequels, although it is only a minor issue in *Life as We Knew It*. An examination of the perverted form of Christianity presented in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and its companion texts would also serve as an interesting historical and theological study.

7.6 Concluding Thoughts

Contemporary young adult dystopias reflect the classic dystopian literatures of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, borrowing tropes (such as the apocalypse) and presenting totalitarian governments that often try to manipulate their citizens by dictating certain social and political conditions, through laws, education, religion and other institutions. There is, however, a striking difference between contemporary dystopian

works for young adults and the classic dystopias for adults, and that difference is found in the presence of hope. *Life as We Knew It* is in line with the classic adult dystopias in that, as in *1984* and *Brave New World*, it presents characters in a speculative future setting as a warning to their contemporary society that its way of life and thought needs reassessment. These texts end on bleak notes with the dystopia stymieing the chance at hope by reclaiming the hero. By contrast, the texts of *The Hunger Games* and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* replace the classic anti-heroic characters with young protagonists who have the ability to, and often do, overcome the bleak dystopia – but at great cost. Examining these three texts in this thesis demonstrates the different ways that three young adult authors have imagined the future of our planet. While environmental didacticism may not have been a conscious component of the authorial intent, contemporary anxieties about global climate change are certainly evident. It is important for young adults to engage with these young adult dystopian texts, not just as literary reading experiences, but also because they offer an environmental warning with a caveat –hope.

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