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**Finding the Bildungsroman in Contemporary Dystopian Fiction:  
A Comparison Between *Great Expectations*, *Jane Eyre* & 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century Young Adult Fiction**

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## Introduction

Learning is a never ending process. At times it can be painful yet necessary for the individual growth of human beings as it will hopefully result in a better and richer understanding of our world and in the choices that we make. The Bildungsroman, also known as a “coming-of-age” story, is one of the most popular forms of storytelling as it invites the reader to follow the journey of the main character’s psychological and moral growth from youth to adulthood. By providing a deep insight into the life of the protagonist, it helps the reader to connect emotionally and identify with the different stages of development of the main character. Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) is one of the most classic examples of the Bildungsroman, as the reader follows the emotional maturity of the protagonist Pip Pirrip, through hardship, unrequited love and pain. Likewise, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) is a typical example of the female Bildungsroman, which tells the journey of Jane, a penniless orphan who grows into an independent woman as the story progresses.

Contemporary dystopian fiction for young is a genre of teenage literature, in which a young protagonist, who lives in an imaginary and dilapidated world, questions the social and political injustices of his or her society. One of the most popular novels in this genre is Suzanne Collins’ trilogy *The Hunger Games*, which consists of *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010). Another series that has been widely successful is the *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth, *Divergent* being published in 2011 as the first book of the series, followed by *Insurgent* (2012) and *Allegiant* (2013). The sudden rise of young adult dystopian literature has received both criticism and praise, as it is often being questioned by adult commentators whether the content is too dark for teenagers and if this genre can be considered as good literature. However, the overwhelming attraction of these books for teenagers indicates that adolescents feel a strong connection to this particular storyline, probably because it deals with their journey of finding their adult identity.

Although the stories may seem very different, it can be argued that young adult dystopia has evolved from the Bildungsroman, since both genres use similar characteristic elements and structures for their plots. Hence, the aim of this essay is to investigate how contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults incorporates elements of the Bildungsroman and how it differs from a conventional Bildungsroman. This will be illustrated by comparing the Bildungsroman and dystopian fiction for young adults, primarily by using Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* as main examples of the Bildungsroman while *The*

*Hunger Games* trilogy by Collins and the *Divergent* series by Roth will represent the genre of young adult dystopian fiction. This essay will use Jerome Buckley's guidelines of a Bildungsroman as presented in his *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, henceforth referred to as *Season of Youth*, in order to determine if and how the novels of these two genres correlate to each other.

## **The rise of the Bildungsroman**

The Bildungsroman (plural Bildungsromane) developed in Germany in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and translates as a "novel of education" or "novel of formation" while in English, the phrase "coming-of-age" has over time become comparable to *Bildung* (Castle 7; Redfield 191). Connected to *Bild* and *Bildnis*, the term *Bildung* can mean "picture" or "portrait" as well as "shaping" or "formation" (Buckley 13). It is believed that the German philologist Karl Morgenstern introduced the term Bildungsroman during his university lectures in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795) and the term became known to English and American literary critics when Thomas Carlyle translated Goethe's work into English in 1824 (Burt 106; Jeffers 49). It was, however, not until almost a century later when the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey defined the term when analyzing *Das Erlebnes und die Dichtung (Poetry and Experience)* in 1913, that it started to be used in literature studies (Jeffers 49). There are several different forms of Bildungsromane; Entwicklungsroman or "novel of development," Erziehungsroman or "novel of education," and Künstlerroman or "novel about the artist" however, in England the distinction between these categories has often been considered less important (Buckley 13; Burt 105-106).

According to Jerome Buckley, whose study of the Bildungsroman is used by many critics as their "theoretical starting point" (Wojcik-Andrews 2), the principle characteristics of the genre include a child who grows up in the country, suffers constraints on his intellectual and imaginative development and due to disputes with his family, decides to leave home and head for a large city where his "real education" begins (Buckley 17). During the course of the story the protagonist also has to experience "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting", that combined with the other events that he undergoes throughout the novel will make him not only reconsider his actions and mature as a person, but also provide him with a better understanding of the world (Buckley 17). Charles Dickens' *David*

*Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are examples of English Bildungsromane (Burt 106). Further on, Buckley claims that the 19<sup>th</sup> century English Bildungsroman should contain several characteristic components. Firstly, the Bildungsroman is an autobiographical novel but not an autobiography. Nevertheless, it may have autobiographical elements, as the author's real life is combined with fiction, which provides the reader with a very authentic feeling when reading the novel (Buckley 23-25). Secondly, the protagonist has often lost his father and is most likely an orphan as in Dickens' *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations* (Buckley 19). It is because of being an orphan that the hero experiences a difficult development and therefore sets out on the quest of finding his own identity. Thirdly, Buckley argues that education is a crucial part of the main character's journey from being a child to reaching adulthood (17). The desire for new opportunities urges the protagonist to leave his home for a metropolis. In English novels this usually equals London while the metropolitan area is Paris in French novels (Redfield 191). Buckley explains that the metropolis plays a "double role" in the life of the protagonist, because it serves both as "the agent for liberation and a source of corruption" (20). When the protagonist has gained the desired maturity and wisdom, he may go back to his old family home in order to demonstrate his success (Buckley 17-18).

Reaching maturity is found to be a difficult process in a Bildungsroman and one which is accomplished over a long period of time. During the course of his journey, the protagonist struggles to find a balance between his needs and desires whilst also determining his rightful place in society, a struggle or conflict which is finally resolved when he becomes a mature adult. A Bildungsroman should discuss "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy" (Buckley 18). Buckley points out that although these are the principal elements of a Bildungsroman, all novels that are considered to belong to this genre do not necessarily follow this exact pattern. However, no novel overlooks more than two or three of these characteristic elements (Buckley 18).

It is the hero himself who almost always has to deal with the central conflict that lies within him, and throughout the story the protagonist experiences "privileged moments of insight, epiphanies, spots of time", as he recognizes his errors and understands that his behavior and actions have to change (Buckley 22-23). This realization does not, however, always mean that the hero will be able to solve his problems and the Bildungsroman can therefore end in various ways (Buckley 23). Most commonly, coming-of-age stories such as *Great Expectations*, end with an uncertainty as the final choice of the hero can leave the

reader wondering. Others end with the death of the main character, while only a handful of the Bildungsromane, such as Dickens' *David Copperfield* end happily (Buckley 23). Buckley presents a possible explanation why finding closure in a Bildungsroman can be difficult, as he argues that since this genre is strongly autobiographical, often written by young authors who are at the beginning of their careers, the author's own life experiences and uncertainties about his possible success in the future may affect how the hero of the novel and the ending is depicted (23-24).

Many critics, such as Roberta Seelinger Trites (12), Ian Wojcik-Andrews (3-4), Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston (5), have pointed out that Buckley throughout *Season of Youth* presents a very male centered definition of the Bildungsroman. Not only is the heroine's journey towards finding her identity missing, since Buckley always refers to the individual as "he" (17-23), but female writers in general are only discussed in two chapters by the author. Considering the social norms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the purpose of a woman was to marry, have children and take care of the household, some critics argue that the female Bildungsroman does not exist due to the social restrictions that simply did not allow women to mature psychologically like the male hero of the Bildungsroman (Burt 106; Trites 12). However, research shows that female Bildungsromane have in fact been written by women writers since 1771 and that they have both "similarities but also significant differences" with the male Bildungsroman (Wojcik-Andrews 5). During the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s the number of female Bildungsromane increased and became more noticed by feminist critics (Morrison and Kingston 9, 11). Novels such as Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) by George Eliot are considered typical female Bildungsromane because they portray the female youth and the aspiring heroine's journey, but as Burt points out, this maturation process was not possible "beyond the boundaries of hearth and home" (106).

## **Young adult literature**

Literature for young adults, often abbreviated as YA, was marketed to adolescents in America during the economic changes of World War II and was defined in the late 1960s as a literary genre (Trites 9). The definitions are many when describing YA literature, but the quest for becoming an adult while finding the answer to the always burning question of "Who am I and what am I going to do about it?" can be applied to most YA fiction (Hill 6-7). According to

the American Library Association, literature for adolescents can be divided into three categories: “Books Written Specifically for Adolescents”, “Books Written for General Trade Market Which Have Adolescent Heroes and Heroines” and “General Books of Interest to Young Adults” (Trites 7). Although YA fiction is intended for readers who are 12-18 years old, the explosion of this genre during the last decade has caused an expansion amongst its readers, who are now “as young as 10 and as old as 35” (Hill 3). In fact, 55 percent of the YA buyers are 18 years or older (Hill 5). The growing popularity of YA literature is due to several factors: the baby boom generation, the enormous success of the *Harry Potter* series as well as the *Twilight Saga* and the fact that the leading bookstores started to create separate YA sections specifically for YA literature, rather than gathering it with children’s literature (Hill 3).

YA literature often receives a lot of criticism and is frequently treated as “an illegitimate child” by adults perhaps because it is believed that the novels of this genre promote poor morals (Hill 1). Although novels such as *Seventeenth Summer* (1942), *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *The Outsiders* (1967) have been praised as contributors of the “wellspring of YA literature” (Trites 9), it was not until the 1990s when adults started to pay more attention to YA fiction that their attitude towards YA fiction began to change (Henthorne 26). The genre can be argued to have developed historically from the Bildungsroman however, Trites argues that the level of maturity that the protagonist reaches in the end of the novel determines whether it is a Bildungsroman, where the protagonist becomes an adult, or if adulthood is not reached, an Entwicklungsroman (10, 18). According to Trites, YA fiction is different from books for younger children in the sense that children’s literature strives to make the child feel more secure in his or her environment by the support of family and home, while in adolescent novels the protagonist must learn how to “negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within they must function” (3). Another difference that distinguishes YA literature from children’s literature as well as adult fiction is the voice and the view of the protagonist (Hill 7). To be classified as a YA literature, the novel “must have a teen protagonist speaking from an adolescent point of view” (Hill 7).

Teenage literature consists of many different subgenres, contemporary YA dystopias being one of the most popular ones amongst adolescents at the moment since its explosion in the 2000s (Basu, Broad and Hintz 2). Dystopian fiction is a mixture of “utopian/dystopian literature, science fiction and children’s literature”, but elements of the Bildungsroman as well as the romance and adventure story can also be found in this genre, which makes it appealing to a large number of readers (Basu, Broad and Hintz 6).

Dystopian fiction, unlike utopian fiction which portrays a positive and ideal society, is set in an imaginary world which is “considerably worse than the reader’s own” (Basu, Broad and Hintz 2-3). Usually the societies of dystopias aspire to be perfect, to be utopias in other words, but as the story progresses the reader realizes that these intentions have gone “tragically” wrong (Hintz and Ostry 3). Some take place in fantasy worlds while others illustrate a fairly realistic representation of our present time, but regardless of its setting it intends to warn the reader about the future that is yet to come (Levy n.pag.). Because these societies often are geographically isolated “from the rest of the world”, the characters are either unfamiliar with the world beyond their society or they believe the outside world can be harmful, hence why brainwashing is usually found to be an important component of this genre (Nikolajeva 74-75, 81). When the protagonist realizes these flaws or injustices, he or she “may attempt to change their society, escape from it or conform it” (Nikolajeva 86).

Teenagers often experience that they are put down by adults, but in dystopian fiction these roles are reversed, as it is typically the adolescents who save not only the adults but the entire world from “destruction” (Hintz and Ostry 10). The narration is usually first person with many dialogues and may also include diary entries (Basu, Broad and Hintz 1). One of the central themes of YA dystopias is the fear of the world being hit by “environmental destruction” (Basu, Broad and Hintz 3). Ethnicity, class and gender play another prominent role in the teenage dystopia as it determines the power structures of these worlds (Nikolajeva 79). Conformity is an important feature since the people of the dystopian societies are often forced to live very restricted lives, their governments having decided where to live, what to eat and wear and how to feel and act, which tends to be exaggerated in order to achieve a dramatic impact on the reader (Basu, Broad and Hintz 3).

YA dystopian novels are very didactic and seek to educate the reader about the “issues faced by humanity” while at the same time offering an enjoyable escapism from the reader’s own reality (Basu, Broad and Hintz 5-6). Not only do they teach their readers about the real world that teenagers soon will enter as adults, but YA dystopian fiction also encourages the readers to learn more about themselves and how to grow to become mature adults. In this sense, a teenage dystopian novel is similar to a Bildungsroman as they both use “political strife, environmental disaster, or other forms of turmoil as the catalyst for achieving adulthood” (Basu, Broad and Hintz 7).



## **The elements of a Bildungsroman in *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre***

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* is considered to be on the top of most people's list of the "canonical English Bildung" (Redfield 191). Although Buckley argues that the Bildungsroman centers on a male protagonist (17-23), it is also possible to apply many of the characteristics that the author presents in *Season of Youth* to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, which Buckley does not mention in his book. Both novels are set in England and portray the emotional maturation of the protagonists Jane Eyre and Philip "Pip" Pirrip from infancy to adulthood. Both main characters are orphans; Jane lives with her coldhearted aunt Mrs. Reed and her three children, while Pip is brought up by his stern sister Mrs. Joe and kind brother-in-law Joe. The two protagonists narrate their stories in first person past tense as matured adults, retelling and looking back at their journeys so far in their lives.

Both Jane and Pip leave their respective homes because of a central conflict that, as Buckley states, "lies with the hero himself" (22). Jane leaves her family to go to Lowood School because of disputes with her aunt, while Pip believes that leaving Kent will make him gain the upper class life he is longing for. Pip's journey is presented in three different stages in the novel. It begins in a provincial town where Pip spends his childhood. During this period of Pip's life he meets Estella, who makes him question his life and way of living, as she points out that Pip is a "common laboring boy" with "coarse hands" and "thick boots" (Dickens 59), making Pip feeling inferior to her. This causes Pip to long for a better life where he can become a gentleman (Dickens 125) and eventually win the heart of Estella and live happily ever after. With the help from a mysterious benefactor Pip's dream comes true and he moves to London, thus following Buckley's requirement of going to a metropolis, where the second stage of his journey begins. Here Pip's education to become a gentleman begins, but he slowly changes from a sensitive and caring child into a shallow and seemingly cold-hearted snob who is blinded by the fantasies of his great expectations. Pip soon starts to treat the people he loves badly, a behavior which he later regrets when he begins to realize how poorly he has acted. In the third and final stage, Pip grows up and matures. He has lost all his money, but he demonstrates that he has learned from his mistakes and now values what is really important in life. In the end, Pip not only learns what it means to be a true gentleman but also that money does not equal happiness. According to Buckley's principles, the protagonist finally returns to his original home where it all begun to demonstrate his gained knowledge. While Pip returns to Kent in the end of *Great Expectations*, Jane on the other

hand visits her childhood home much earlier in the novel, but according to Jane her true home is Thornfield with Mr. Rochester (Brontë 277) which she also revisits towards the end of *Jane Eyre*.

Pip's desire to leave his simple life of a blacksmith's apprentice in Kent to become a gentleman takes him to London and back. Jane on the other hand moves from place to place until she finally finds peace. Merritt Moseley breaks down Jane's journey towards maturation into five stages: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House and Ferndean (89). Although Jane thus moves around more than Pip, she never visits a metropolis, which according to Moseley is due to the fact that women during Victorian England could not move to a large city to "seek, or find, a career" (87). Yet it should be pointed out that Jane's many moves in this novel are not typical for a female protagonist of her time. Nor is her forceful personality (Moseley 86-87). After spending the first part of her painful childhood at Gateshead, Jane is at the request of Mrs. Reed sent to Lowood where, although she is initially poorly treated, she is provided with the education necessary to become a governess (Zlotnick 42). At Lowood Jane also learns to control her emotions by the help of her friend Helen Burns and the woman who she looks up to, Miss Temple (Zlotnick 42). Even so, Jane still yearns for freedom (Brontë 99). In the third stage at Thornfield, Jane, who is now a governess, falls in love for the first time with her employer Mr. Rochester and almost gets married. Next, in the fourth stage at Moor House Jane meets her second and debasing "love interest" and realizes that she still loves Mr. Rochester. Finally in the fifth stage, Jane's journey is complete. She is an independent woman and emotionally mature when she arrives at Ferndean Manor where she reunites with Mr. Rochester whom she also marries. Throughout the novel Jane is guided by two feelings: her longing for freedom and her need to be loved, things that Moseley points out are difficult to achieve, which is also partly what the novel is trying to illustrate (88-89). By gradually being challenged in different ways during these five stages on her journey towards adulthood, Jane is finally able to discover her identity along with finding her rightful place in society.

Both *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre* have a strong sense of autobiography, which is one of the distinctive features of a Bildungsroman (Buckley 24-25). *Jane Eyre* was originally published as an autobiography, but it is important to note that while these autobiographical elements can be related to Brontë's life, it is not the author's biography but the heroine Jane's. Likewise, *Great Expectations* is written in autobiographical form, but in Dickens' case *David Copperfield* is supposedly closer to the author's life than *Great Expectations* (Buckley 44).

Buckley's claim that the hero must have "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" (17), is perhaps not as prominent in *Great Expectations* as it is in *Jane Eyre*. It is clear that Estella is the "debasing" love interest of Pip, but she also seems to be the only girl that Pip is truly interested in throughout the novel. Biddy is presented as the suitable partner for Pip but early on in the story he rejects the idea of a possible future with her (Dickens 123). Pip does however change his mind about Biddy towards the end of the novel and is planning on proposing to her, only to find that she has married Joe instead (Dickens 467, 472). For Jane on the other hand, this criterion is maybe more clearly illustrated, as she has to choose between on the one hand the coldhearted St. John Rivers and on the other hand the passionate Mr. Rochester, whom she cannot marry until his wife from his first marriage dies.

The ending of *Great Expectations* is typical of a Bildungsroman, as it does not provide a clear answer regarding what happens to Pip, leaving the readers free to interpret the final chapter according to their understanding. However, Dickens originally wrote a darker and less romantic ending. In the original version Pip finds out that Estella has remarried a doctor after Drummle's death and one day on a walk in London with Joe and Biddy's son he encounters Estella briefly and notices by her behavior that "that the suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be" (Dickens 481-482). It was Dickens' friend, the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton who advised the author to change the final chapter in order to provide the reader with a happier resolution which is also the official ending (Dickens 503). Dickens' original ending is by some considered too dark, whereas others find it to be truer to the spirit of the novel. The story of *Jane Eyre* on the other hand ends blissfully with Jane marrying Mr. Rochester and living happily ever after in the style of a Cinderella story. Mosley however argues that *Jane Eyre's* ending should not be regarded as a happy one solely because Jane gets married, but it should rather be seen as "the heroine's journey to proceed, through a series of important personal growth stages, to a satisfying working philosophy and personal integrity" (93).

As Buckley mentions, every Bildungsroman does not have to include all the elements that are presented in *Season of Youth* (18), but it is clear that even though the genre at least according to Buckley is mainly about the hero's journey rather than the heroine's, Jane and Pip despite some differences in their paths, both become mature adults towards the end of the novels in a manner that follows Buckley's requirements of what a Bildungsroman should contain. While some critics have raised awareness that Buckley in general refers to the protagonist as a man and thus neglecting both female protagonists and female writers of

Bildungsromane, it should be noted that many things have changed since the publication of *Season of Youth* in 1974, including the way we view women and the literature available. Jane Eyre is indeed not the typical woman of the Victorian era, as women could not live and express themselves as freely as men. Thus Buckley is not entirely wrong to claim that the journey of the Bildungsroman cannot as easily be applied to women, at least not to the 19<sup>th</sup> century woman, because of the norms of this particular era.

### ***The Hunger Games series vs. the Divergent series***

*The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the rising popularity of YA dystopias. Not only have the books “sold millions of copies” worldwide and been praised by respected magazines such as the *New York Times*, but nowadays students from middle school to colleges in the U.S read the series as a part of their curriculum (Henthorne 26). The *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth has often been referred to as “the next Hunger Games”, and even though they at a first glance seem very similar story-wise, with two strong 16-year-old heroines who have to save their respective dystopian worlds, the two series are more different than one might think (*Divergent Thinking* 1). Leah Wilson explains that *The Hunger Games* aims to tell “a story about rebellion and social change as much as it does about its protagonist’s effort to subvert other’s use of her” (*Divergent Thinking* 1). The *Divergent* series on the other hand focuses on “a different kind of freedom”, where people can live without feeling the pressure of being judged by either society or their fellow human beings regarding how they should live their lives (*Divergent Thinking* 1).

Both series consist of three books each, narrated respectively by Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice “Tris” Prior in the present tense, except for *Allegiant*, the final book in the *Divergent* series which is told from two points of view, Tris and Tobias “Four” Eaton. When Roth made the announcement that *Allegiant* was going to have two narratives rather than one, the book was not yet published. The author explained that she at first intended to let Tris finish the series from her own perspective, but changed her mind as she felt that the story needed to be narrated from two different perspectives (“FAQ s : Two Point of Views” n.pag.). But since Tris dies in the end of the series and the story continues after her death in the voice of Tobias, this could also be a possible explanation why Roth has chosen two narratives for *Allegiant*.

Collins' and Roth's trilogies are both set in dystopian futures in America, *Divergent* taking place in Chicago, which has been divided into five fractions, while in Collins' world, North America consist of twelve districts that together represent the country of Panem, with an additional thirteenth district being revealed in *Mockingjay*. Although both societies are very isolated, the people in *Divergent* are to some extent free to make their own choices, at least when it comes to deciding which fraction they want to join when they turn sixteen, thereby creating their own future. Citizens of *The Hunger Games* on the other hand cannot choose which district they want to belong to. While most people of Panem are aware of the injustices of their society, in *Divergent* the inhabitants believe that their world is constructed in fractions in order to function the best way possible for their own safety and well-being (Green-Barteet 34). Nevertheless, in neither worlds are the people fully able to choose how to live their lives. Throughout both series, attempts are being made to control the population with the help of "technological advances" that people either do not know about or cannot affect (Green-Barteet 34, 48). Tris lives in a world where she does not have to worry about not having food on the table, a roof on her head, or about her parents' safety, because society takes care of these problems. Her biggest concern, at least in the beginning of the series, seems to be the issue of finding her place and fitting in with her new fraction. In this sense, Tris is brought up in a much safer environment than Katniss who, not only is living in the poorest district of Panem where food cannot be taken for granted, but also has taken on the role as the provider of her family, since her father died when she was 11 years old (Green-Barteet 43).

Many readers are drawn to the romantic elements of these series. However, Christine Seifert points out that although romance is an important component of YA dystopias, it does not make these books "romance novels" (56). Neither Katniss' nor Tris' relationships are the central part of their stories. While Katniss is stuck in a love triangle throughout Collins' trilogy, having to choose between Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark, Tris falls in love with Tobias in *Divergent* and is not tempted by any other men during the rest of the series. It is also evident that neither Katniss nor Tris are what we would consider typical for their age or gender (Green-Barteet 43). As a member of the Abnegation fraction, Tris is taught to not spend any time contemplating on her physical appearance. She does not look at herself in the mirror and she wears simple grey clothes that hide her figure, which is the opposite of most teenagers' behavior today. Likewise, Katniss is portrayed as someone who is not particularly interested in boys, and because of her previous experiences in life, her behavior can often be regarded as more masculine than feminine (Green-Barteet 37, 43).

Katniss, in contrast to Tris who has lived a very simple but comfortable life her first fifteen years in Abnegation, is independent and skillful, can handle a bow and arrow and hunt for her own food. Tris is physically weak in the beginning of *Divergent* because her life as a selfless Abnegation member requires minimum self-defense and training. However, when Tris decides to change fraction and join the brave people of Dauntless, she, by intensive training becomes stronger and stronger whilst also learning how to use weapons and in the end turns into a soldier. Tris, unlike Katniss who becomes a symbol of hope and rebellion for her people, never consciously takes on the role of being a rebel (Green-Barteet 46). Although both series are considered very dark for their targeted audience by parents and adult critics (Basu, Broad and Hintz 2), teenagers around the world have fallen in love with Katniss and Tris, as they identify with them and together explore the struggles of being an adolescent and becoming an adult.

### **The Bildungsroman vs. YA dystopian fiction**

Buckley argues that a Bildungsroman should discuss “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy” (18). One of the main differences between YA dystopian literature and the conventional Bildungsroman is the fact that that YA literature covers a much shorter life span of the protagonist than the Bildungsroman. Whilst the Bildungsroman covers the protagonist’s journey from childhood to adulthood, YA literature deals with teenagers only. In *The Hunger Games* series and *Divergent* trilogy, the story begins when the protagonists are already sixteen years old but are still being considered innocent adolescents. Their maturation process is also significantly shorter, as they are still teenagers when their journeys are over. Both Katniss and Tris seem to be around seventeen, only a year older when both series are ended, but by focusing on their development to become more mature versions of themselves, both trilogies have the same outcome as the Bildungsroman. It can therefore be argued that these trilogies, as Trites explains, should be considered as one of the subcategories of the Bildungsroman, the Entwicklungsroman, since adulthood (at least in the traditional sense of becoming 18) is not reached by the end of the novel (10, 18). Both *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre* consist of one book divided into three volumes, whilst Katniss’ and Tris’ journeys, although only covering approximately a year of their respective lives, are presented in three books each. *Great Expectations* was however at first published as “weekly

installments” from 1860-1861 in *All the Year Round* and it was not until July 1861 that it was presented as a novel, consisting of three volumes with illustrations (Dickens xxii). While Jane and Pip narrate their respective journeys in the past tense, looking back at their lives as adults, Katniss and Tris tell their stories in the present tense. Although Katniss’ and Tris’ respective journeys are over at seventeen, both Collins and Roth end their series with an epilogue. In *Allegiant* the epilogue takes place two and a half years after Tris’ death which is narrated by Tobias, whilst in *Mockingjay* Katniss’ life is presented many years later when she is married to Peeta and has two children while still struggling with the damages that the Games caused her in her younger years.

Like Pip, Katniss leaves her “provincial town”, which in this case is equivalent to District 12, to go to the metropolis in Panem that is represented by the Capitol. Tris also leaves her family home when she decides to become Dauntless, but for her, leaving Chicago is not a possibility until *Allegiant* where she discovers that there is a world beyond the five fractions. Katniss leaves her home because she volunteers to take her younger sister’s place in the Games whilst Tris like Jane rebels against her family by joining Dauntless rather than remaining in Abnegation which would be the “correct” choice according to the norms of her society (Green-Barteet 44). Miranda A. Green-Barteet explains that Katniss and Tris resemble Jane in the sense that they are born and brought up in “oppressive societies which do not value strong, independent, opinionated young women” (33-34). They are used to living their lives according to the rules of their societies, which is why they as time goes decide to rebel against these injustices, which create sense of “alienation” (Green-Barteet 34-35). Then their departures signify Buckley’s requirement of “conflict of generations”, and by leaving their respective homes, Katniss and Tris begin their journey of “self-education”.

Since the governments in Katniss’ and Tris’ respective worlds more or less decide what occupation they will have, they do not go on a “search for vocation and working philosophy” like for example Jane, who decides to become a governess. Pip in his turn does not have a job at all, since his benefactor provides him with money, unlike Jane who has to earn her living. Katniss and Tris do not have what we would consider traditional professions, their “vocations” are rather to fight the oppressive governments and bring justice to their respective societies. Both Katniss and Tris do go back to visit their family homes like Jane and Pip, but unlike Pip, they cannot return to what they once called their homes at the end of their journeys because wars have destroyed these homes.

According to Buckley, the protagonist has to be an orphan or at least fatherless, which both Jane and Pip are. This element can also be applied to Katniss who lost her father at the

age of eleven in a mining accident and now lives with her mother and younger sister. Katniss also experiences another family loss when her younger sister Primrose dies in *Mockingjay*. Tris, on the other hand, lives with both of her parents in the beginning of *Divergent*, but she becomes an orphan by the end of the first novel. Tris ends up losing her mother in battle after being rescued by her, only to see her father also sacrificing his life so that she can survive a few chapters later.

Since dystopian fiction is set in the future, it would be difficult to argue that it could be mistaken for a real autobiography like Dickens' or Brontë's novels which are set roughly the period when they were published and in actual countries and cities. When asked in an interview if the *Divergent* trilogy was in any way inspired by Roth's own adolescence, the author explained that her struggles and ambitions to try to be perfect as a teenager, and the ultimate realization that being perfect is not possible, inspired her to create a world where people aspire to achieve this ideology but fail (Carpenter n.pag.). V. (sic) Arrow also argues that one can find similarities between the real Chicago and Roth's dystopian version of it, as she draws parallels between the different factions and the "gang culture" of Chicago (49). Collins, on the other hand, came up with the idea for her trilogy one evening when she was "channel surfing" between a reality show where young people were competing against each other and a war coverage where young people were fighting a real war ("A Conversation, Questions and Answers" 1). The author also mentions her fondness for Greek and Roman mythology since her childhood as a great influence when writing *The Hunger Games* and even refers to Katniss as a "futuristic Theseus" ("A Conversation, Questions and Answers" 1). Further on, Collins also explains that her father, who fought in war in Vietnam and was amongst many things a historian and a military expert, taught her how and why a war begins and its consequences, which she has used when discussing subjects such as poverty, oppression and the outcome of war in her novels ("A Conversation, Questions and Answers" 1-2). Even though Collins' series is set in the future, Henthorne, who describes *The Hunger Games* as a dark trilogy for "a dark time" (2), points out that critics have noticed connections between her novels and the United States participation in the War in Iraq (9).

Buckley states that the protagonist of a Bildungsroman should experience "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" (17). In *Great Expectations* Bidley and Estella represent Pip's love interests. For Jane, it is the choice between Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers. In Collins' trilogy, Katniss has to choose between Gale and Peeta. Like both Jane and Pip's love interests, Katniss' good friend Gale and the male District 12 tribute Peeta are presented as two very different male characters. Yet it is considerably



more difficult to distinguish between them and decide who Katniss should choose, since both male characters are presented with attractive features and they both love Katniss, in comparison to the love interests in *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* where it is easier to determine who suits the protagonist and who does not. During the publication of the trilogy there was considerable speculation about who Katniss would finally choose, and readers even created teams throughout the series, “Team Gale” and “Team Peeta” in order to show their support for the love interest they were rooting for (Barnes, 13-14, 17). In the end of *Mockingjay*, when Peeta asks Katniss; “You love me. Real or not real?”, Katniss finally has made her decision regarding who she loves by replying “real” to Peeta’s question (453).

Gale is presented as a handsome and very masculine man, he is “fearless, direct, aggressive, and compelling” and is able to take good care of his family (Henthorne 57-58). Peeta on the other hand, “challenges [the] traditional ideas of gender” by being much softer than Gale. He is not afraid of being emotional, he enjoys making cake decorations and is in need of being rescued by Katniss on several occasions (Henthorne 57-58). Another male character that like Peeta is saved by the heroine can be found in *Jane Eyre*, as Mr. Rochester also, in at least two occasions, is rescued by Jane, when he for instance falls off his horse or when Bertha has set his bed in fire.

Katniss’ relationship with Peeta starts off as what Henthorne refers to a “showmance”, meaning that their relationship evolves during their participation in a reality show (101). Although the “showmance” only is a strategy in order to win the support of the audience and the sponsors, Peeta is, and has been in love with Katniss from a young age, but it takes Katniss much longer to realize that she has developed feelings for Peeta as well (Henthorne 102). Unlike the traditional protagonist of a Bildungsroman, Tris only has one love interest throughout the series. However, although she does not experience one good and one bad love affair which Buckley requires, her relationship with Tobias nevertheless goes through many challenges which are similar to problems Jane, Pip and Katniss face with their love interests.

Even for being YA dystopias, both *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* trilogies have very dark endings. In relation to Buckley’s demands on how a Bildungsroman should end, both series unquestionably follow the rules. Henthorne, however, argues that Katniss’ journey is different from that of the traditional Bildungsroman in the sense that Katniss “changes the world as much as it changes her” because of her large impact on her society (35). Henthorne also claims that the trilogy focuses more on Katniss’ “deformation” rather than “formation” as the protagonist goes from being a strong and independent adolescent to not being able to take care of herself after the war is finally over in *Mockingjay* (35). Katniss does slowly recover in

the end of the third novel, but Henthorne points out that she is no longer the girl she used to be, who had no desire of finding a husband, let alone start a family (35). Katniss' coming-of-age journey is thus reversed by her becoming a weaker version of the girl who was first introduced in *The Hunger Games* (Henthorne 35).

It is true that Katniss has changed throughout the series, but Jennifer Lynn Barnes on the other hand argues that Katniss in the end of the series should be seen as someone who has been through horrible experiences (two Games and a war) and lost many loved ones along the way (26). She is a survivor who despite these events is willing to try to live again (Barnes 26). From early on in *The Hunger Games* when Katniss becomes a public figure by being a tribute in the Games, she struggles to find a balance between what is real and not. Although Katniss is encouraged to stay true to herself, she is aware that in order to survive, she has to please the viewers of the Games and later on, also the people of Panem who identify her as a "star-crossed lover", "the girl on fire" and "Katniss the Mockingjay" (Vizzini 81, 92). Katniss therefore feels forced to pretend to be someone she is not in front of the camera, thus constantly trying to figure out her true identity. In Collins' first novel Katniss only strives to survive, both in her home district and in the Games. At this stage she believes that she has no powers beyond taking care of her family, not realizing the impact she has on other people (Green-Barteet 38-39). Throughout the rest of the series, Katniss discovers her powers and in the third book she is finally able to find her voice and her call as the Mockingjay. In the end Katniss does marry Peeta and starts a family in a better world than she grew up in, but as Wilson points out, the ending is "bittersweet" because Katniss has lost so much and there is no guarantee that the improvements of Panem will last (*The Girl Who Was on Fire* 1).

Although killing the protagonist is not the most common way of ending a Bildungsroman (Buckley 23), Tris' death seems a suitable way of ending her journey in *Allegiant*. Roth has received a lot of criticism from her readers for choosing to end the life of her heroine at the end of series however (White n.pag.). The author herself explains that killing Tris in the final novel was always her plan, because "at the end of the first book she [Tris] almost experiences death...and sort of plays around with the idea of self-sacrifice...In the second book the same thing happens...In the third book, she learns what it actually means to sacrifice yourself" (White n.pag.). When Tris makes the decision to change faction she states: "I am selfish. I am brave", thus trying to convince herself that she does not belong in the selfless faction Abnegation (*Divergent* 47). Towards the end of her journey, however, she has realized what it truly means to be brave and moreover what her parents were trying to teach her about selflessness. She has also learned that she is not defined by the labels her

society has given her, and she chooses to end her life as “a sister and lover, a daughter and a friend” rather than allowing her genes or fraction determine what kind of person she is and how she should be living her life (Barnes 42).

## Conclusion

The Bildungsroman is a beloved literary genre that since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century has educated and entertained readers worldwide. In this essay I hope to have shown that YA dystopian fiction, which has exploded in popularity since the 2000s, is partly inspired by the Bildungsroman, with which it shares many characteristic elements. By using Buckley’s highly regarded exploration of the Bildungsroman, it has been possible to distinguish the similarities as well as differences between these two genres. According to *Season of Youth*, the emotional maturation process is mainly about the hero rather than the heroine. However, since Buckley published his theory in 1974, times have changed and this idea nowadays seems passé. By using Buckley’s directives when comparing *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*, I hope to have illustrated that although Jane is a woman, she nevertheless follows Buckley’s list of requirements in a similar manner to Pip. Further on, many of Buckley’s conditions also are applicable to contemporary dystopian literature for teenagers, even when they are dealing with female protagonists.

The most noticeable difference between the two genres is the length of their journeys, that is, how long it takes for the protagonist to reach maturity. While the traditional Bildungsroman covers the protagonist’s early childhood all the way until they become mature adults, YA dystopian literature specifically deals with teenagers. Jane and Pip tell their stories in the past tense by looking back at their lives, starting from their childhood, while Katniss and Tris are sixteen at the beginning of their respective journeys, which are told in present tense with a final epilogue set in the future. Although these dystopian life journeys cover less time, they are still told in trilogies, rather than in one novel. These two YA dystopian-series also differ from the classical Bildungsroman in the sense that Tris is not an orphan when the story begins, though she becomes one in the end of the first book, she only has one love interest and the stories are set in the future, thus making it difficult to argue that they could be mistaken for autobiographies. However, both Roth and Collins have used personal experiences to some extent used when writing their novels. Moreover, because of the way the

dystopian societies are structured, Katniss and Tris are not free in the same way as Jane and Pip to search for a vocation, their mission is instead to save their people.

Most importantly, all four protagonists leave their family homes because of internal conflicts and throughout their journeys struggle with finding their own identities. Pip and Katniss go to their respective metropolises, Jane moves around to many places although she never goes to a big city, whilst Tris stays in Chicago until in the last book, when she discovers that there is a world outside the one she knows. Both trilogies also end in the traditional way of a Bildungsroman, but unlike Jane who gets a happy ending, Roth has chosen to kill her heroine while Katniss seems to be forever haunted by the pain and difficulties of her teenage years, even though she is married and has children.

Due to the fact that YA dystopian fiction is a mixture of several different genres it is understandable that it diverges from the classical Bildungsroman to some extent. However, despite differences in the journeys of the protagonists, the outcome is the same. By comparing two classical Bildungsromane from the mid 1850s and two contemporary dystopian fiction series for young adults, I have tried to show that at core they are all coming-of-age novels with one common purpose; to illustrate that through hardship and trials we can all mature and find our true identity and thus, become better versions of ourselves.

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