“We Are All Adolescents Now”

The Problematics of Categorizing Young Adult Fiction as a Genre

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Pro Gradu Thesis
August 2017

Tampereen yliopisto
Viestintätieteiden tiedekunta
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriopinnot

RISKU, JOHANNA: ”We Are All Adolescents Now”: The Problematics of Categorizing Young Adult Fiction as a Genre

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 75 sivua + lähdeluettelo
Elokuu 2017

Tarkastelen pro gradu –tutkielmassani englanninkielisen nuorisokirjallisuuden nykytilaa ja kehitystä. Tutkielmani tavoitteena on arvioida nuorisokirjallisuuden luokittelua omaksi kirjallisuudenlajikseen ja sen ongelmallisuutta. Nuorisokirjallisuutta käsitellään tänä päivänä omana genrenään niin markkinointi- kuin akateemisissakin yhteyksissä, ja koen tämän olevan ongelmallista ilman tarkempaa tutkimusta nuorisokirjallisuuden nykytilasta.

Tutkimukseni kartoittaa genren määritelmän monipuolisuutta ja nostaa esille genren kirjallisen ja markkinointiin yhdistetyn merkityksen sekavuutta etenkin nuorisokirjallisuuden määrittelyn kontekstissa. Analyysini tueksi tutkin nuorisokirjallisuuden teemoja ja tekstuaalisia tekijöitä kolmen esimerkkiromaanin kautta. Estelle Maskamen *Did I Mention I Love You?* (2015), John Greenin *Looking for Alaska* (2005) ja Suzanne Collinsin *The Hunger Games* (2008) havainnollistavat tutkielmassani englanninkielisen nuorisokirjallisuuden tilaa 2000-luvulla, johon tutkimukseni keskittyy.

Nuorisokirjallisuuden määritelmiin kuuluvat yleisimmin edellytykset nuoresta päähenkilöstä, joka toimii myös tarinan fokalisoijana, sekä ennakko-oletuksesta, että nuorisoromaanin lukija on itse samassa ikäluokassa tämän protagonistin kanssa. Näitä tekijöitä arvioin tutkielmassani narratiivisten vaikutusten tutkimisen avulla, pohtien miten eri tavoilla esimerkkiromaanini lähestyvät samoja teemoja. Pyrin myös osoittamaan miten samanlaista kertojaa, päähenkilöä minä-kertojana, hyödyntävät narratiivit kuitenkin tuottavat erilaisia narratiivisia tilanteita, ja tämän myötä lisäksi rakentavat erilaisia lukijakonstruktioita.

Nuorisokirjallisuutta lähestytään tutkielmassani myös crossover-kirjallisuuden käsitteen kautta, jonka mukaan todelliset lukijat ylittävät heille kohdennetun kirjallisuudenalan rajoja. Tämän seurauksena nuorisokirjallisuus erityisesti nuorille suunnattuna kirjallisuutena on kyseenalaistettava, sillä nuorisoromaanien lukijakunta on tänä päivänä valtava ja heterogeeninen, kattaen lukijoita lapsista aikuisiin.

Tutkielmani valossa käy ilmi, että nuorisokirjallisuuden määritteleminen perinteisten kirjallisten genren ominaispiirteiden perusteella on vajavainen tapa luokitella tämän päivän nuorisokirjallisuuden kenttää. 2000-luvun kontekstissa on otettava huomioon myös tekstin ulkoisia tekijöitä, kuten kirjallisuuden todelliset lukijat, markkinoinnin suuntaaminen eri ikäryhmille, ja nuorisokirjallisuuden alan jatkuva kehitys ja kasvu.

Avainsanat: nuorisokirjallisuus, kirjallisuuden lajit, lajitutkimus, genre

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1. Introduction

Stories told through the eyes of adolescent protagonists and aimed at attracting young adult readers have become a vast field of literary and multimedia production. In the twenty-first century, we have seen an upsurge of novels being converted into films, television series and even on-stage theatrical productions, and the representation of young adults in contemporary storytelling is complex and multifaceted. As John Green, a best-selling author of several novels characterized as young adult (YA) fiction, states:

> The great strength of our children's and YA genres is that we're broad – we publish thousands of books a year, whereas Hollywood makes a few dozen movies aimed at kids and teens. Coe Booth, M. T. Anderson, Stephenie Meyer, Sarah Dessen, and Ellen Hopkins share the shelf. We've got poetry and sci-fi and romance and so-called literary fiction; we've got standalones and series and graphic novels and every subgenre imaginable. ("Does YA Mean Anything Anymore?" 22)

The novels published and marketed as YA literature do not follow a strict pattern, but rather are diverse in their stories and characters. It is precisely this diversity that ignited the writing of this thesis. The aim of the present study is to consider the ways in which the field of YA is categorized in its current state, and to assess the problematics involved in and caused by treating this vast field of literature as a genre. The thesis will analyze the heterogeneous nature of young adult works, as well as consider the effects of assigning works of fiction to a specific category due to the intended age of their readership.

The distinction between children's literature and young adult literature, as well as that of YA and adult literature, is inevitably a line drawn in sand if the age of the respective readers is the only definitive element. As will be discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, separating adolescence from childhood and adulthood is a relatively modern phenomenon. In the case of the aforementioned, now classic, novels, not all writing about adolescents is intentionally written for young adult readers (as was especially the case with such early works allocated to the category), and can attract an audience that crosses the blurred lines separating youths from adults. The issue of age as a defining factor in

genre categorization also brings into question the impacts of deviation from the intended demographic: hypothetically, is a YA novel still a YA novel if the adolescent reader rejects it? What if a YA novel attracts a readership entirely consisting of adults? This line of thinking brings about the idea of YA fiction as *crossover* literature: literature read by children or adolescents as well as adults, irrespective of the works' intended reader.

In conducting my research, I will illustrate my argument through the analysis of three novels, commonly regarded as YA novels and all written in the twenty-first century: Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005) and *Did I Mention I Love You?* (2015) by Estelle Maskame. These three novels represent the category of YA well as it stands today, since they are all marketed for and narrated by adolescents, and all appear on various lists and compilations of YA literature[1]. Each of these works have their own kinds of takes on themes of coming-of-age and identity formation typical of teenage experience, but they are narrated through differing storylines, in different worlds and focalized through protagonists who share little similarities besides their age. Even though the protagonists of these works are all adolescents, and the novels are narrated through their points of view, there are significant differences. The characters live in different kinds of surroundings (a dystopian future, a boarding school mostly separated from the outside world, and contemporary Los Angeles), and the teenagers in them face very different struggles (fighting oppressive government, making sense of your own existence, and falling in love with someone you are not supposed to fall in love with, respectively). These issues will be dealt with and analyzed in chapter 4.

In literary study, there have been many approaches to the definition of *genre*. No definite categorization for the term has been agreed upon, and it escapes exact definitions to this day. Genre serves as a word used for functional purposes in libraries and bookstores to designate sections containing similar books, as well as a marketing tool to reach intended demographics. Genre is also

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[1] See for example Goodreads.com category "Young Adult" https://www.goodreads.com/genres/young-adult

a field of academic study – and controversy. The academic and commercial uses of the term do not necessarily have the same implications, but in my view the different uses of genre as a concept tend to coincide and collide regardless.

Difficulties in approaching genre begin with the span of the term's scope: genre can be either a notably broad category of works, such as the novel, or a further specified sub-set such as alternate-universe dystopian fiction. Whether we call these categories genres or sub-genres, it creates confusion to the definitions of genre and to the attempt of outlining the specificity of generic constants allocated to given genres. Alastair Fowler argues that it is "neither possible nor even desirable to arrive at a very high degree of precision in using generic terms. The overlapping and mutability of genres means that an 'imprecise' terminology is more efficient" (130). This may well be the case, but nevertheless the concept of genre is by no means insignificant or outdated, and has a function deeply embedded in the processes of writing, reading and studying literature, as will be discussed further in chapters 2 and 3. As such, applying the notion of genre to literature labelled as YA fiction requires a closer look at what genre is and what it does. Thus the second chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the consideration of the issues surrounding generic categorizations and definitions of genre.

The third chapter will take a look at YA fiction, outlining its progress from the category's emergence to the present day. YA fiction as a distinct category is a relatively new phenomenon, dating back to the mid-1900s. Opinions vary about which work to consider the first young adult novel, from Maureen Daly's 1942 novel *Seventeenth Summer* (Cart, ch. 1) to slightly later works such as J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding in 1954 (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 87). Chris Crowe considers works published after 1967 and with the intention of being read by adolescents as YA literature (121), thus excluding retroactively applying the term to works that do not feature an intention of adolescent readerships.

My study aims to analyze the category of young adult fiction in its contemporary state, and as such my perspective is founded within the framework of literature published in the twenty-

first century. My focus is inherently Anglo-centric, due to the dominance of Anglophone YA literature in the field, and the premise set by my example novels. I consider it highly problematic to treat YA fiction as a genre without further critical inspection, and consideration of the coalesced state of its literary and market-driven definitions. The current state of the category is worthy of closer study since the body of works categorized as YA seems to be constantly growing and widening in scope, thus inevitably reforming the field and challenging perspectives of it.

2. What is Genre and What Does It Do?

Literary criticism has had several approaches to the notion of genre, and the ways in which texts should be categorized as belonging to them. As Simon J. Evnine quite appropriately states, genre is a term "about which there is no agreement at all over either its analysis or definition, on the one hand, or the range of things to which it applies, on the other hand" (1). The word genre itself is defined as *kind*, *sort* or *style*; or in a more specialized sense, as a "particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose"[2].

For the publishing industry, which also makes ample use of the term, the definition of genre along the lines of a 'particular category of literary works' is not as problematic as relying on the same definition in the field of literary study. For the purposes of conjoining a literary work and a reader who will enjoy reading it, categorizing works into genre groups – no matter how blurry their definitions – can be an effective tool. As for literary criticism and research, this definition is of course not enough. The matter of defining genres has been further problematized by scholars, arriving at no decisive conclusions, but nevertheless suggesting alternate ways of approaching the term's definition.

2.1 Genre Theory: What is Genre?

John Frow suggests that over its long history, Western genre theory has taken one of two pathways:

> . . . on the one hand, it has contented itself with a listing of the empirically existing genres, without concern for the grounds on which they are differentiated; on the other, it has attempted to develop a systematic account of genre on the basis of a misreading of the Socratic triad [the division of literary genres into epic, lyric and dramatic]. (58)

Without going into detail about Frow's views on the misreading of the Socratic triad, these two approaches to genre form the basis for considering genres as either empirically observable taxonomies or as theoretically structured systems. The beginnings of genre theory in the time of Plato and

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[2] From the online Oxford English Dictionary, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77629?redirectedFrom=genre#eid.

Aristotle is based on a context of writing and reading literature that has gone through a significant transformation. Even though dividing literary genres according to the triad has become a somewhat inadequate way of discussing genres, it serves as the starting point of genre classifications, and has laid the groundwork for subsequent theories about literary categories. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that literary theory has a blind spot in its dealings with the novel, precisely because of this distinctive impact of Aristotelian theory:

> The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear. . . . Right up to the present day, in fact, theory dealing with these already completed genres can add almost nothing to Aristotle's formulations. Aristotle's poetics, although occasionally so deeply embedded as to be almost invisible, remains the stable foundation for the theory of genres. Everything works as long as there is no mention of the novel. But the existence of novelized genres already leads theory into a blind alley. (8)[3]

For Bakhtin, the influence of the triad in the theory of genres has led to accounts on the novel that are merely descriptive or summative of all novelistic variants (ibid.). Genre theory is by no means conclusive, and attempting to arrive at relevant conclusions about the current state of genres is affected by the fact that literature is not a permanently set entity, but literary discourse is in constant flux.

The position of the triadic division of genres has been challenged, but attempts to define genres and categorize works according to generic conventions do have a strong bearing in this classic division. The triad of epic, lyric and dramatic modes of literary expression is based on a normative account of categorizing works into genres, and acts on the premise that there is a hierarchy according to which texts can be categorized. For Gérard Genette, the triad has been given a weightier stance in genre theory than he considers justifiable: in his view, all literary genres have subgenres, and "in that respect the archigenres of the romantic triad are distinguished by no natural privilege" (213). Whether we give the triadic genres a privileged stance or not, the idea that all genres encompass a number of

[3] Bakhtin's work was first published in 1975, and written even earlier in the twentieth century; but I consider his views relevant to mention here because his ideas of the novel form have had such a significant impact on theory, and are much aligned with the forthcoming analysis of young adult fiction.

different "species", as Genette calls them, is a valuable one. I agree with Genette in that no genre should be elevated above other genres due to a "natural ordering", but it does not follow from that notion that genres do not exist. For me, placing genres in a hierarchical order is problematic since no such order can be pertained without the level of personal tastes and notions of what is good or valuable literature. However, generic categorizations do function on the premise that there are some qualifications that need to be realized in a work for it to be an exemplar of a given genre. This is relevant to note in the context of the aim of this thesis, especially since in the present situation regarding YA fiction, the totality of YA is often considered as a "lesser genre" than the "real literature" that is adult-oriented. This will be discussed more in chapter 3.

Tzvetan Todorov posits that genres have come from other genres, and that a new genre is "always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination" (197). As such, genres are classes that have come into being in a historical process, and exist in an essential context of literary production. For Todorov, the question of the origins of genre is however not that simple, and he posits that genres are inherently tied to discourse: as such the question of what constitutes a genre is not simply historical, but systematic in nature (ibid.). Thus in Todorov's thinking, genres are "entities that can be described from two different viewpoints, that of empirical observation and that of abstract analysis" (198). This definition of genres rules out the possibility of considering a genre as a class simply due to similarities in texts that can be empirically observed: if genre can be described in terms of abstract analysis, it requires that there are elements of genre that can exist "outside" realizations in actual texts.

Fowler, in analyzing literature as a genre, states that every genre has "multiple distinguishing traits, which however are not all shared by each exemplar. If literature is a genre, the idea of defining it is misconceived. . . . the character of genres is that they change. Only variations or modifications of convention have literary significance" (18). This notion of a constant evolving of conventions and to that effect, genres, implies an impossibility of arriving at any set of definitive

characteristics of genre, and would seem to suggest that any study attempting to define generic constants is insofar pointless. Nevertheless, I do consider this idea of constantly evolving conventions worthy of mention here, because genre theory has evolved and adapted alongside literary production. The idea that change and constant evolving best characterize genres has an impact on the considerations of YA fiction as a genre as well: allowing that genres are not "finished" and governed by set rules can better serve and encompass the development and heterogeneous nature of YA fiction. Arriving at a definition of genre that is relevant and applicable to the aim of this thesis also has to allow for the variations of convention to which Fowler refers. As will be discussed in chapter 3, the problematics of applying generic categorization to young adult fiction is intrinsically related to the multiplicity of distinguishing generic traits and their realizations.

Most, if not all, literary theorists who have contributed to the analysis of literary genres seem to agree on one key factor: genres are more than shared subject matter of actual literary works. There are content-based similarities between works of a specific genre that can be considered a part of the classification of those works into the same genre category, but those similarities alone are not enough to comprise a literary genre. I am prone to agree to some extent with Frow's central argument about genres and their function:

> . . . far from being merely 'stylistic' devices, genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or philosophy or science, or in painting, or in everyday talk. The semiotic frames within which genres are embedded implicate and specify layered ontological domains – implicit realities which genres form as a pre-given reference, together with the effects of authority and plausibility which are specific to the genre. Genre, like formal structures generally, works at a level of semiosis – that is, of meaning-making – which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit 'content' of a text. (19)

Genres function on a level of constructing meaning, they exert power in setting boundaries and restraints for literary expression, but they are also a part of the process of extracting meaning: that is, genres both enable and restrict meaning (Frow 10). Considering genres as formal structures disregards similarities in subject matter between works as indicators of genre, which in turn can be seen as the most significant factor on which the publishing industry relies genre categorizations. The category of

YA fiction is intrinsically affected by the publishing industry's influence, as this thesis aims to illustrate, and thus cannot be categorized without an assessment of the industry's effects on genre categorizations. In the next chapter I will continue on to reflect on the power of the publishing industry, and the complex nature of genre categorizations in the literary world of today.

2.2 The Power of Genres and the Influence of the Publishing Industry

In the opening paragraph to "The Origin of Genres", Todorov asserts that analyzing genres might be losing its significance in the current times, and that to "persist in paying attention to genres may seem to be a vain if not anachronistic pastime today" (194). Considering that the history of genre theory from Plato and Aristotle to the twenty-first century spans millennia of literary production, it is no wonder that the classes we call genres have changed over time. Todorov suggests that genre as such has not sunk into oblivion, but rather the genres of old – that is, genres such as the novel and poetry – have been replaced by others (195).

Perhaps today it has become somewhat irrelevant to judge texts based on either being pure or impure forms of poetry, for example, but genres as literary categories do exist in new and evolved forms, and in my view, can even exert power within the context of writing and publishing new works. It can be difficult to distinguish the relationship between a genre and a text belonging to it; does the text precede the genre or is it the opposite? The power of genres lies in the possibility that genres can precede texts in ways that allow them to mold the texts written within their confines. Todorov states that it is because "genres exist as an institution that they function as 'horizons of expectation' for readers and as 'models of writing' for authors" (199). As a model of writing, genre can thus guide the writer's work and dictate some aspects of the end result: and as a horizon of expectation, genre can exert power in the reading process, inviting a reader to extract meanings pertaining to the conventions of the genre.

This connection between genres, and the context of the reading and writing of literary texts, is inherent in the production of texts as well as genres; especially in the current situation where the publishing industry uses generic categorizations to reach target audiences and gain sales profits. Evnine posits that genres are traditions tied to the context of production, publishing and reading processes:

> Genres are traditions that are organized, in a certain way, around the production of artworks. . . . authors produce works in the knowledge, and under the influence, of works previously produced as parts of the tradition; the works are read by readers in the ways developed by previously produced works; the publishing houses publish such works, the conventions invite the authors, who may produce new works in the light of interactions with fans, and so on. (5–6)

This interconnectedness of reader, writer and genre problematizes theoretical approaches to genre, if genre is considered as being inevitably a part of this process: that is, if genre is not separable from the production and reading processes, it demands more weight to be placed on an empirical approach to genre. As a tradition, genre cannot be separated from the actual texts produced as exemplars of that genre, because a tradition (or institution, as similarly presented by Todorov earlier) forms in a historical process fundamentally connected with the context of production.

The production of new literature is today inherently tied together with the business of book publishing: especially the publishing of new fiction relies on the industry that considers the work a product, and acts accordingly. The publishing industry exerts its own kind of power over the production of new works: publishers are the gatekeepers of what eventually is published. Publishers decide which works to print, market and distribute, and even though anyone could potentially publish anything on the internet these days, the power still held by publishing houses is significant. As will be discussed further on in this thesis, YA fiction is a distinctively market-based phenomenon in its contemporary state: definitions of the YA category often include the aspect of literature being written and *marketed for* adolescents (see chapter 3). As such, YA fiction is an example of the influence and power exerted by the publishing industry, since the marketplace and its requirements are not easily separable from the literature produced within the category. This adds difficulty to the analysis of

literary genres, since theory does not much appreciate having to embrace market forces and their effects. However, for the aims and purposes of this thesis, this aspect of the publishing industry's involvement in defining the YA 'genre' is essential, and in my opinion should not be overlooked: I believe disregarding the matter would provide an overly simplified and distorted view of the YA category.

The troubles of defining what genre is and should be considered as is not the aim of the present study: however, in order to successfully analyze the problematics of categorizing YA fiction as a genre, a definition of what is considered as a genre in the context of this thesis is necessary. Concluding from the discussion on genres and the different theorizations about generic constraints, definitions and characteristics, the notion of genre will be considered henceforth as *a literary category that exists in a historically formed context, the works of which share thematic as well as formal elements*. Thus my working definition of genre relies on three central aspects: shared elements of texts, that are thematic as well as formal, and an inherent context.

By historically formed context I point here to the character of genres having been established in a process, and as such also having been subject to changes – which in my thinking allows for the continuing constant development and change that characterizes genres (which was also briefly discussed in connection with Fowler in the previous chapter). Furthermore, significant to my definition here is the compounding of thematic and formal elements: regarding a genre *as a genre* solely based on either element would allow for quite vast categorizations. Only relying on formal aspects would make it difficult to specify further than say, the novel form, and similarly judging on thematics alone would for example categorize all stories featuring a romance narrative as equal exemplifiers of the same genre. Those kinds of categorizations would, for instance, define all of my example novels, which will be analyzed further in chapter 4, as romances – a definition that would disregard much of what the novels are truly representatives of, as I will attempt to illustrate.

A curiosity in the emergence of YA fiction is that it can be considered as having developed for and from the needs of its target readers, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. That is not to say that the emergence, and developments, of YA fiction catering to the interests of a specific reading public is key in defining its stance as a literary genre (or not) – but it is essential to keep in mind. Considering genres as having a history, sharing a context and being a part of a systematic taxonomy of literary production, calls for a detailed look into the development of YA as well as its defining characteristics in order to negotiate the problematics involved in treating YA as a genre. The next chapter will provide an account of the history and development of YA as a category, as well as present a view of the category as it stands today.

3. Problematic Definitions: What Is Young Adult Fiction?

Categorizing YA fiction as a distinct entity separate from children's literature and that written primarily for adults relies intrinsically on the definitions of *adolescent*, *young adult*, and *teenager*. When does childhood end and adolescence begin? These are inherently arbitrary concepts, as are, accordingly, the labels allotted to works of fiction aimed at adolescent readers. Trites, for example, considers the "Young Adult novel" as a novel specifically marketed for adolescents, and as such a subcategory of *adolescent literature*, which she calls the "broader genre" (xi). It is also a challenge for scholars to agree on what criteria to consider in separating between YA and preadolescent literature, and how to categorize works that proceed to draw in significantly crossover readerships (Coats 322). In addition to the difficulty of defining the terminology of the target audience of YA fiction, the name of the category itself has been subjected to confusion. Whether we call it YA literature, adolescent literature, juvenile fiction, or teen fiction can potentially convey slightly different meanings and create confusion to the research conducted on the subject (Hayn and Nolen 7–8).

For the purposes of this thesis these differences in terminology will not be dealt with in much detail here, since arriving at an exhaustive conclusion on the matter is not necessary for the arguments currently presented, and would require an unnecessary deviation from the matter at hand. However, it is essential that the choice of term used here to refer to the implied category is clear. The term *young adult fiction* serves the purposes of this thesis accurately, since in my research 'young adult' has been the most common term used across the field of study, as well as the publishing and marketing industries. Thus 'YA fiction'[4] is considered here to be a so-called umbrella term, that implies all fiction published with the *intention* of being read by and marketed for adolescent readers.

[4] I acknowledge that there are also non-fictional works that otherwise fulfil characteristics of YA literature, but this thesis solely focuses on fiction, and thus I will employ the term YA *fiction* instead of *literature*.

3.1 Emergence and Contemporary State of Young Adult Fiction

The starting point of YA fiction as an independent, distinct category, is attributed by different scholars to alternative points in time. Nevertheless, most research into the field agrees that YA fiction followed the twentieth-century distinction of adolescents (and, indeed, with the emergence of the word *adolescent*) from children and adults (Trites; Kett; Cart). Furthermore, teenagers became an attractive target market segment for book publishing in the middle of the twentieth century because of their increasing economic resources; and by the end of the 1960s, YA fiction had become recognized as a distinct category (Trites 9). Today, with the publication of several serial novels commonly regarded as YA fiction, YA has become a multimedia phenomenon: book series like *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Divergent*, *The Princess Diaries* and many more have been adapted to film, and it seems as though YA is only now reaching its golden age. YA literature has also begun to attract an increasing amount of critical attention fairly recently (Daniels 78).

The starting point of any kind of artistic production is difficult to point out, and depending on the criteria used to qualify a work as a representative of a specific category of similar kinds of works, that point in time or specific “first instalment” can as such vary significantly. In the case of YA fiction, the beginnings of the category are often traced back to the middle of the twentieth century (Cart; Falconer). Works such as *The Catcher in the Rye* are often depicted as the starting point of contemporary YA fiction (for example see Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen), despite the fact that simultaneously most definitions of the category involve the idea of fiction that is *written for* adolescent readers – a characteristic which *The Catcher* in its original publication did not have. Thus the history of young adult fiction is to this day relatively short, and quite controversial.

Before YA fiction gained recognition as an autonomous category, fiction was already published intentionally for separate readerships of children and adults; children’s literature had developed into its own separate category from adult literature (concerning the history of children’s

literature, see for example Rudd "The Development of Children's Literature"). However, as Falconer posits, before the "invention of a distinct market for children's literature in the mid-eighteenth century, adult texts regularly crossed to child readerships" (*The Crossover Novel* 11). Similarly, the distinction between children's literature and young adult literature, and likewise that between YA and adult literature has developed in the context of all kinds of literary production, reading processes and "crossing over". Daniels (78) observes that YA fiction is still sometimes erroneously regarded as part of or similar to children's literature by some critics, and indeed, criticism on children's and adolescent literature seems to be quite often intertwined. A fairly recent collection of essays on children's and young adult fiction edited by Michael Cadden, for instance, is entitled *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature* (2011) and makes no clear distinction between the two.

A significant body of research into YA fiction concentrates on the aspect of education (for example see Hayn et. al.'s study on YA research "Young Adult Literature Research in the 21st Century"): how to educate children to become literate adolescents, how to engage them in the act of reading, and what to encourage them to read. For teachers of literature, it is self-evidently important to categorize works of fiction by their suitability for educational purposes, but for the rest of us – be it researchers, readers or writers of fiction – the categorization of works under YA literature might be sometimes even derogatory. Coats calls for a shift in critical conversation about YA literature towards YA becoming regarded as "destination literature", instead of its current state of being treated as a gateway to "capital L literature" (317). If YA fiction is considered in effect to be somehow lesser of "real" fiction, or the reading of YA works as a liminal state between reading children's fiction and capital L literature, then categorizing a work as YA can certainly be derogatory towards the work itself.

Considering YA as lesser than literary fiction aimed for adults possibly stems from a notion of "genre fiction" in itself being less worthy. Evnine suggests that the designation of something "as 'genre fiction' is usually pejorative; it suggests the work in question is formulaic, trite, intended

for undiscerning readers, and not the product of real authorial craft" (14). Thus categorizing YA fiction as a genre in this sense assumes negative connotations. Garcia states that the definitions of "young adult (YA) literature tend to revolve, unsurprisingly, around the name itself. These are *genre books* that–at first–tended to be written about and for adolescents" (5, my emphasis). Treating YA works as genre books in this sense assumes the idea that there are conventions of the genre that are repeatedly applied to new works, thus not recognizing the possible multiplicity of actual YA narratives out there.

YA fiction, due to the fact that it is mostly considered to be consumed by underage readers subject to parental supervision, is often faced with heavy criticism. Chris Crowe points out that the reasons why YA books are considered "bad" usually stem from the premise that YA novels are not as worthy as the classics (note that Crowe does not analyze further what a 'classic' essentially is, but rather uses the term as a juxtaposition to literature of poor quality), or, alternatively, that they are corruptive (146). Crowe discusses two differing ways that YA books are considered corrupting the young: either the writing is not challenging enough to develop teenagers' reading skills, or the subject matter of more challenging novels is too dark and bleak for young minds not yet equipped to process those kinds of stories (146–8). These kinds of arguments suggest that YA fiction in its entirety is unnecessary, and that there are somehow better, more appropriate forms of literature to offer to young readers. Critics of YA fiction can indeed be blamed of having a somewhat myopic view of the field: YA novels vary in their level of sophistication and subject matter significantly – just as literature written for adults does (Crowe 146). Thus if YA fiction is considered as a distinct category (or more specifically as a genre) without further analysis of what that distinction entails for the body of works assigned to it, then the variety of different kinds of novels, be they deemed good or bad by any reader, becomes simply a blurry mass of lesser literature.

The contemporary state of YA fiction is inherently tied to the significant influence of the publishing and marketing forces surrounding the publication of new works. Crowe notes that "The

label, whether it happens to be 'YA' or something else, exists mostly for marketing. Publishers and librarians want to get books for teenagers into the hands of teenagers, so some sort of label is necessary" (146), and Trites goes on to argue that "YA novels are certainly a marketplace phenomenon of the twentieth century. Adults create these books as a cultural site in which adolescents can be depicted engaging with the fluid, market-driven forces that characterize the power relationships that define adolescence. After all, publishers rather than teenagers bestow the designation 'YA' on these books" (7–8). Hence for Trites, the power relations that are central to a teenage experience realize themselves also in the novels about teenagers, but these structures of power are constructed and imagined through an adult consciousness when books for adolescents are written and published by adults.

The industry that has been built around the production of novels is central to the definitions and characterizations of any given genre, since genre affects the ways of marketing and advertising a new novel, a product. Whether we take this somewhat cynical stance of genre being "what the publisher says it is" or not, there are still other kinds of characteristics of YA fiction that can be viewed as substantiation for considering YA as a separate entity from other forms of fiction. It is these characteristics that I will continue to explore further in the following chapters.

3.2 Characteristics of Young Adult Fiction

As we have seen in the earlier discussion of the complicated categorization of YA works, there are numerous accounts about what qualifies as YA fiction. For example, two interesting, and differing, views on the subject can be found published side-by-side in the same volume of critical essays, *Young Adult Literature: Background and Criticism* (Lenz and Mahood, 1980). Isabelle Holland posits that for her, adolescent literature is "whatever any adolescent happens to be reading at any time" (33), whereas Sylvia Engdahl presents an account relying on the influence of the publishing industry by stating that "A novel suitable for adolescents is 'teenage' if it is issued by the children's book

department of a publishing house, and 'adult' if it is issued by the adult department" (41). Problems arise of course when we consider these further: if YA fiction is considered to be whatever any given teenager happens to read, then the definition would be essentially useless, since the category would not exist outside the actual reading process. Similarly, if YA is considered as the actual books published by a children's book department, a question arises about how that department then chooses the works they publish as YA, thus requiring a more thorough analysis. Hence neither one of these categorizations can be considered as comprehensive, but these are nevertheless attempts toward a definition that should not be overlooked. Such categorizations that do not require any specific, shared *textual* elements to be present in the works assigned the label young adult, adolescent or teenage literature overlook entirely the level of textual generic conventions. However, as has been established, it is difficult to separate the readers and publishers of YA fiction from the qualifiers of the category as well, and as such an attempt at an all-encompassing definition would need to take all of these elements into consideration.

Characterizations of what YA fiction is commonly include two aspects of textual elements: narration and theme. YA novels are most commonly regarded as featuring an adolescent protagonist (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 90), who can also function as a first-person narrator. Gillis (53) points out that one of the "most common narrative points of view in young adult fiction is the limited, third-person omniscient – 'over the shoulder' of one protagonist" (but interestingly her own study concerns multiple voice narration in YA novels). Focalization of narration through an adolescent consciousness is also the qualifier suggested by author David Belbin, who concludes that if a novel is "narrated through a young adult consciousness – even if the narrator is sophisticated, or unreliable – then it's a Young Adult novel" (141). The idea seems simple enough: if a novel features an adolescent protagonist through whom the narrative is then focalized, the novel in question can be categorized as YA fiction. However, an interesting point to make here, to further complicate things

if nothing else, is the idea presented by Robyn McCallum that polyphonic[5], that is, multivoiced, narration is an "inherent feature of narrative fiction" (24). This entails that all narratives, including first-person narration, can be considered as having multiple voices, a represented discourse of a speaker and a representing discourse of narratorial context (29–30). McCallum (30) states that contemporary adolescent fiction features three main strategies of polyphony: using multiple character focalization or narrators, implicit and explicit intertextuality and a multistranded narrative (that is, a narrative that features two or more interconnected narrative strands to narrate the events).

The indication that this has on the notion of a typical form of narration for YA fiction, and that such a narration is definitive in characterizing the category, is worthy of attention here. If narratives are considered as inherently multivoiced, it complicates the definition of a YA novel as a narrative focalized through an adolescent consciousness. Multivoicedness can occur either overtly in the case of multiple narrators, or in novels such as Emma Cline's *The Girls* (2016) or Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992) where a single narrator recites the events of the story in present time as well as reflecting back to their past. If the adolescent protagonist is present in the focalization of a novel as part of a multivoiced narration, why does that not then result in the novel being categorized as YA? Neither Cline's nor Tartt's works have been considered as YA novels, even though the events of their respective narratives can be considered as focalized through young minds.

The thematic elements of YA fiction are consistently linked to the liminal nature of the adolescent state of being: coming-of-age stories and rites of passage are frequently portrayed in YA novels (VanderStaay 49), as well as negotiations about one's developing identity (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 89). Falconer describes (crossover) YA fiction as featuring themes that deal with "edges" of being: between childhood and adulthood, life and death, humanity and inhumanity, as well as "volatile gender identities" (95). Adolescence in itself is a liminal state of being, the stage of life between childhood and adulthood, and as such it is no wonder that literature written with young adults

[5] McCallum's study is based on an interpretation of Bakhtin's (1981) theory and use of terminology.

in mind seeks to explore similar themes. The question still remains, are these liminal states of being, the edges of life that Falconer describes, actually not present in the adult experience as well? Why should the exploration and negotiation of one's identity be solely considered as a characteristic of adolescence? Are there not adult novels that explore questions of identity, realizing one's mortality or negotiating gender? These issues are inherently human, not simply adolescent.

Another recurring theme in YA fiction, as suggested by Trites, is the relationship between individual and institutions. For Trites, institutions form the base from which people grow and mature into adults: the institutions that educate us, like family and school, as well as judicial systems and legal regulations that exert another kind of power over us, are essential in the process of growing up and realizing one's institutional place and power. She considers these institutions as an inherent element in YA fiction: "When we investigate how social institutions function in adolescent literature, we can gain insight into the ways that adolescent literature itself serves as a discourse of institutional socialization" (22). For Trites, the relationship between individual and institutions is thus pivotal, and in her view, "Virtually every adolescent novel assesses some aspect of the interaction between the individual adolescent and the institutions that shape her or him" (23). In adolescent literature, identity politics function to form another kind of institution:

> . . . race, gender, and class create another type of defining institution in adolescent literature: identity politics. These concepts serve as institutions because the behaviors of large numbers of people are regulated in terms of identity politics. And whether people self-select the characteristics associated with a group or whether those characteristics are imposed on them by the perception of others, their sense of affiliation with a group serves in some way as a limiting factor. (47)

Race, gender and class all function as significant factors of identity formation processes, processes that are considered as characteristic of YA narratives. In my view, in addition to race, gender and class, there are other kinds of social constructs that function to create identity politics in YA novels. Identifying as specifically a teenager, for instance, as opposed to an adult or child. Or, as will be further analyzed in chapter 4.1.1, the way in which Miles Halter, the protagonist of *Looking for*

Alaska, builds his identity based on the characteristics of the community at his new school, identifying as a Culver Creek student.

As has become evident, the elements shared by works of fiction categorized popularly as young adult literature are textual, like narration, as well as extra-textual, such as their intended readership. There is difficulty, then, in defining the elements that should be taken into consideration when categorizing works under labels such as children's, adult or young adult fiction. The remainder of this chapter will provide a more detailed analysis of the element of intended readers, and the problematics involved in assigning genre definitions based on those intentions.

3.3 Writing for Young Adults: Does the Demographic Precede the Text?

Young adult fiction is a category under debate possibly due to its complicated status as a form of literature resembling a multitude of different genres, but also simultaneously having some characteristics of its own. The literature currently marketed for young adult readers is also significantly under the influence of the customs and prerequisites placed by the publishing industry, and it is difficult, and possibly even futile, to try and separate the book publishing industry from the works themselves. Thus the demographic of YA fiction is a significant factor in assigning works to the category, and in some cases (possibly even in most cases) also a major contributor in the writing process.

Rachel Falconer points to two key features of YA fiction that are to some extent consistent within the works of the category:

> In all the generic and stylistic variety that constitutes young adult fiction, there are at least one, or possibly two, relatively constant features: the central protagonist, who may also be the text's first-person narrator, is between 11 and 19 years of age, and the text's addressee, or implied reader, is assumed to be of similar age. ("Young Adult Fiction", 90)

When these attributes are present in a literary work, it is easy to see the attractiveness of the categorization into YA literature: we have come to expect that adolescent readers want to read about

adolescent protagonists' lives and adversities. The problem here is the definition of the term *implied reader*. Wolfgang Iser describes the term as a process in which there are two participants:

> This term [implied reader] incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process–which will vary historically from one age to another–and not to a typology of possible readers. (*The Implied Reader*, xii)

Following Iser's characterization here, the implied reader of a text is not the possibility of an actual reader who eventually reads the work, but an abstract idea of a reader that is encoded into the text *and* decoded by an actual reader. The reader construct that Falconer describes above should thus be actually termed *intended reader*: that element of authorial intention that takes place during the production of any given text, and as such is also the intended and targeted audience of publishing and marketing efforts. The difference between implied reader and intended reader is essentially that implied reader is a textual element, whereas intended reader is inherently extra-textual. The implied reader is coded into the text proper and realized only in the context of the reading process, and as such is subject to innumerable variations in time; the intended reader, on the other hand, refers to actual readers targeted in the different stages of producing a literary work.

In my view, most, if not all, of the definitions and characterizations commonly used to define the category of YA fiction do not actually rely on the *implied* reader of a text (even if that exact term is used), but rather its *intended* reader. If the term implied reader is confused with and employed to refer to the extra-textual intended reader – as it seems to be in popular characterizations of YA fiction as literature written for and about adolescents[6] – then in reality the definition of YA fiction relies on very different characteristics. The intended reader can be constructed without the participation of an actual reader, and as such the actual readers can deviate significantly from the intended reader. The implied reader, however, can potentially take an infinite number of actualizations, since it cannot be separated from the reading process and every actual reader

[6] This kind of definition is by far the most common allocated to YA literature (see for example Garcia)

participates in its construction. If YA fiction is considered as having an adolescent *implied* reader, the age of its actual readers is then much less significant: if we contend that YA fiction is fiction that has an *intended* readership of young adults, that characterization inherently relies on the age of the actual readers. Maintaining that YA fiction constructs an implied reader of a specific age does not in fact entail that the *actual reader* be of a certain age.

Wayne Booth describes how rhetoric, addressing the reader either explicitly or implicitly, has from the times of Aristotle been considered as less "poetic", a less accomplished way of narration (93). He traces ways that fiction makes use of rhetoric and argues that the idea of treating the reader as a completely secondary and separate entity from literary production is not in fact possible:

> When we read without critical preconceptions, we ordinarily take this dimension of literature [literature acknowledging the reader's existence] for granted; we are not in the least shocked when we discover that the author has, in fact, worked to make his subject available to us. We think of the writer as someone who addresses us, who wants to be read, and who does what he can to make himself readable. This common-sense attitude has been complicated by modern experience, particularly by the multiplying and fragmenting of 'publics'. . . . But even the most uncompromising avant-garde writers can never maintain for long the pose of not wanting to be read. (105)

Hence Booth suggests that the reading process is an inevitable part of a literary work. Even if a writer maintains a stance of not serving the reader, if all choices in the writing process are made in the name of what the "economy" of the work itself requires, there is always an inherent goal to write a work that is read by actual readers. How does this line of thinking then affect the construction of intended or implied readers? If the implied reader is encoded into a text in the writing process and decoded by actual readers, the notion that any given work is on some level written with an actual reader in mind would then suggest that the construction of an implied reader is also affected by the *intended* reader. Even if the writer in question does not acknowledge such influence, this is difficult to avoid. The boundary between implied and intended reader is not as clear-cut as my characterization above suggests, as the lines are blurred by the actuality of literary production.

Iser discusses a phenomenological approach to texts as acting on two different levels, the *artistic* and the *aesthetic*: the artistic level is what the writer creates, the text itself, whereas the level of aesthetics functions on the premise that the reader's reading process is another, somewhat separate, actualization of the text ("The Reading Process" 279). From this it follows, then, that a literary work is not simply the text itself, nor its realization in the reader's mind, but it exists somewhere between these two levels. The text and its actual reading partake in a "dynamic process", affecting and altering each other to form the end product of this interaction (281). Following this contention, reading a literary work is thus not a process of deconstructing a single meaning the author encrypted into the text proper, but rather a process of extracting meaning that only comes into being *within* the process of reading. The artistic and aesthetic levels of meaning cannot be separated from each other, as the text cannot be separated from its actual reader:

> The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (Iser, "The Reading Process" 284)

As applied to works of YA fiction, the intended reader might differ quite significantly from the actual reader, and the interactive process between reader and text can (and inevitably will) produce differing realizations of the literary work. It then follows that if YA fiction is categorized as a genre due to the intended reader of any given text, then that categorization does not seem to hold much merit in defining the end product and its generic attributes. Similarly, the implied reader of a YA work may well be an adolescent, but that implied reader can potentially be decoded from the text by readers of all ages. The categorization of YA fiction *as* YA fiction solely based on either construct of readers, be it intended or implied readers, might be definitive enough if it is contended that YA fiction is not in effect a literary genre. However, in defining genre attributes, either one of these reader constructs do not seem to me to be authoritative and unambiguous enough.

The problematics of deciphering the intended and implied reader of YA works becomes even more complex when we take into consideration the fact that even when YA fiction is intended for adolescents, the actuality of any given readership can consist of readers of all ages. Indeed even the range suggested earlier by Falconer of 11–19-year-olds as protagonists and implied readers of YA is rather wide. Presumably, the context of reading, and thus the interpretation of a text, by a 19-year-old varies significantly from that of an 11-year-old. Readers of all ages can cross the boundaries of their intended reading material: adults reading children's literature has never been uncommon, and as Zohar Shavit states, "Every book for children is first read by adults" (84) when adults act as gatekeepers and censors of reading material for children. The readers of the "first" YA novels, as discussed earlier on, were not intended to be adolescents specifically, and the sheer sales volume of the *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) series alone indicates a reading public of adults as well as children and young adults. This common phenomenon of crossing over is typical of the current situation of YA audiences, and I will address the problem and its effects in categorizing YA in the following chapter.

3.4 Blurring the Boundaries between Adulthood and Adolescence: Young Adult Fiction as Crossover Literature

Research into the dualism of audiences that read literary works has analyzed the different ways in which a novel can be read and understood by children and adults, all the while both kinds of readers can enjoy reading the same texts (see for example Beckett, *Transcending Boundaries*). These kinds of works of literature can be termed as *crossover literature*, where the potential readership of a given text can transcend the borders between childhood and adulthood, and the same work, regardless of its intended readership, can be equally relevant to children and adults alike. [7] These works can be seen to speak to a dual readership of children and adults, equally, by means of dual address (as the term is used by Wall in *The Narrator's Voice*). This dual address infers that the way the text speaks to a child

[7] Beckett ascribes the term "crosswriting child and adult" to U.C. Knoeflmacher (1999, xi–xii)

reader differs from that of addressing an adult, and the text thus partakes in alternative processes of making meaning when engaged in interaction with readers of different ages.

Cross-reading has been present for much longer than the distinct idea of crossover novels has been in use. Sandra L. Beckett (*Crossover Fiction*) discusses both adult-to-child and child-to-adult crossovers, of which the former has been a popular phenomenon from the publication of novels such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and many more. These novels were (and still are) commonly read by children and adolescents, despite having been written with adult readers in mind, and cross-reading has been present, even if unintentionally, for decades of fictional writing. Falconer traces the lineage of the crossover phenomenon back to British Romanticism (*The Crossover Novel*, 12). She goes on to suggest that crossover literature has evolved to its current state in the twenty-first century to become a vast field of literature: "The first thing that distinguishes the present millennial situation from this historical context, however, is the sheer volume and diversity of children's fiction crossing from child to adult audiences" (14).

The significant success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series among adult readers as well as children exemplifies this trend exceptionally well, and the crossover phenomenon has gained ground in realist fiction alongside its "natural habitat" in fantasy fiction. The twenty-first century has also evidenced new kinds of blurring of boundaries between childhood and adulthood:

> Being on the 'edge' of adulthood in the twenty-first century is a more daunting experience than previously because ageing can flow in both directions: the 'edge' is now double-sided. And this process can unfold not only in either direction but also at varying speeds. Not only are there children zooming to adulthood at an accelerated rate ('tweenagers') but there are also adults tumbling back into childhood (kiddults). . . . That we need new words for these virtual-age categories suggests that the precarious slipping and sliding between once distinctly marked stages of life has become a recognized social phenomenon in the new millennium. (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 92)

As the stages of life have become increasingly difficult to separate and distinguish, the idea of writing literature for a specific age group is simultaneously challenged. These stages of life of course have

not always been distinctly marked: adolescence was not recognized as a distinct stage of life until after World War II, before which children were seen as morphing into adults "virtually overnight as a result of their entering the full-time workforce, often as early as age ten" (Cart 3–4). The phenomenon of childhood, adolescence and adulthood blending into each other is thus not a new, twenty-first century characteristic: the life stages have been defined differently due to the fluctuations in economic, industrial and cultural environments. The current situation, giving rise to the blended personae Falconer describes, is as such inherently tied to the contemporary societal climate. YA fiction being characterized as fiction written for and about adolescents, then, relies on a notion that there is such a stage of life as adolescence, that is somehow separate from childhood and adulthood. Adolescence, however, is an inherently arbitrary concept and subject to change. As society and culture evolve, so does our understanding of the different stages in life.

These "new" stages of being are intertwined with aspects of twenty-first century existence in general: in times of personal struggle and uncertainty, as the age of major technological breakthroughs, financial anxiety and fear of environmental crises, the lines between adulthood and childhood have become thinner and harder to define. As Falconer posits in her article, in connection with a discussion of science fiction aimed at young adult readers, people of every age "may well find it a struggle to come to terms with new thresholds of being in the twenty-first century, where the concept of individual identity is increasingly called into question. In relation to the biogenetic, nanotech future that lies not too far ahead, we are all adolescents now" ("Young Adult Fiction" 98). As for YA fiction today, this uncertainty about the future and the effects of rapid technological development has been present in many recent dystopian novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* (2011) and *The Maze Runner* (2009), which have subsequently been adapted into film and attracted audiences that are a contemporary example of the crossover phenomenon.

The effect of the publishing industry and its coinciding with other aspects of the entertainment business has also had a significant role in appropriating youth culture to mainstream

culture, in what Garcia dubs the "Harry Potter effect" (ch. 1). Garcia references a market research report conducted in 2012 by Bowker Market Research ("Understanding the Children's Book Consumer in the Digital Age"), ultimately arguing that YA novels are in fact consumed mostly by adult readers. Not just twenty-somethings who have recently crossed the elusive threshold into adulthood, but the largest group purchasing YA titles is in fact people between ages 30 and 44. (16–17) For Garcia, this is an effect of the *Harry Potter* series' success among readers of all ages, which paved the way for YA fiction to become acceptable reading material for adults as well as teenagers.

For publishers, who are driven by the basic principles of capitalism, it makes sense to publish the kinds of products that there is demand for; and, as market research has shown, the demand for YA stories has increased among adult readers in recent years to the point that raises a question of the future of YA fiction (Garcia 17). Will the subject matter, form, or other characteristics of YA fiction undergo some changes due to the increased adult readership? What will it entail for YA fiction if it is appropriated into mainstream adult culture? The answers to these remain to be seen in the future, but in the analysis of contemporary YA fiction, I consider it necessary to take this aspect into consideration. If YA fiction is currently undergoing a process of appropriation into mainstream culture, and the works of the category are neglecting or overlooking the "original" intended readership of adolescents in the favor of gaining the attention of an adult audience, that entails a significant alteration to the definitions of YA fiction based on the notion of either intended or implied reader.

If YA fiction in its contemporary form is viewed from this perspective, the justification for YA novels engaging in bleak and dark stories, for example, can be attributed to the attempt to attract a wider audience, and as such it should not be considered as a phenomenon based on the current youth culture. The level of crossover potential in YA novels can be seen as being increasingly significant in light of this current trend of widening YA audiences, and cannot be overlooked in characterizing the contemporary state of the category.

For the purposes of this thesis, the contention that YA fiction is, in effect, crossover literature, is pivotal. As discussed earlier, YA novels can be, and in increasing numbers are, read by audiences with great variety, and individual readers of a given work can enjoy a YA work equally, despite not necessarily being close in age to the intended reader. Furthermore, if the intended reader of YA fiction is seen as being in flux due to the process of appropriating YA into adult culture, even the intended reader becomes an instance of crossing over. As for the level of stories, for a young reader, *The Hunger Games* might simply be an entertaining story of a girl beating the odds and becoming a hero in a fictional world that the reader does not necessarily equate with their own life: whereas for an adult, the novel might represent a fictional account of the dangers of limiting free speech and allowing totalitarianism in government. What the reader extracts from a novel in the reading process mixes with and is influenced by that individual reader's context of reading, as discussed in connection with Iser's phenomenological theory in the previous chapter, and thus the interpretations of the same story by different readers can differ greatly.

Due to the conflicted nature of adolescence, existing in a liminal state between childhood and adulthood, YA novels that portray adolescent protagonists and their experiences also exist in this blurry margin between adult and child. This seems to be a fertile ground for creating narratives that address issues of wide variety, and attract readers of all kinds. If YA fiction is considered to be by definition crossover literature, enticing readers on a vast scale of ages, then the prerequisite of being a YA work as inherently having an *adolescent implied reader* again comes under scrutiny. If a work of fiction is considered as crossover, as having the capability to equally attract readers of different ages, and for those readers to be able to consider the novel as meaningful to them on some level, then the implied reader of such a novel can be affected by this dualism as well. Even if a novel has an adolescent intended reader that has affected the way the implied reader has been encoded into the work, the actual readers play their part in the extraction of meaning within their individual reading processes. As Beckett states in *Crossover Fiction*, crossover authors "validate

children's literature as ‘real’ literature by creating an ambivalent implied reader who certainly cannot be separated into a child ‘pseudo addressee’ and an adult ‘genuine addressee’”[8] (4). Similarly, YA fiction can then be regarded as addressing a dual audience of adolescents and adults, and thus constructing its own kind of an ambivalent implied reader.

The ambivalent implied reader that Beckett refers to above is what I would consider the implied reader of any work of YA fiction. Even if the intended reader of a YA work is an adolescent, the crossover potential embedded in the state of being itself that that implies makes it impossible for the implied reader of such a work to be strictly defined by age. I will pursue to further illustrate the realization of this kind of an ambivalent implied reader, among other problematic features of YA fiction, through the analysis of actual YA novels in the following chapter.

[8] Referring to Zohar Shavit’s terminology in *The Poetics of Children’s Literature*, 1987

4. Analysis of Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

In contemporary young adult fiction, as has been established, there are certain elements that have become somewhat pervasive throughout the field, to the point where many have arrived at the conclusion that the category can be considered as a genre due to these shared characteristics. Among these most significant factors of YA works are first-person narration by adolescent protagonists, themes of coming of age and identity formation, and construction of a teenage intended (or even implied) reader. These three aspects will be examined through the analysis of a chosen set of contemporary YA novels, and I will pursue to further demonstrate the arguments presented so far regarding the indecisive categorization bestowed upon the term YA fiction.

The three novels that will be discussed and analyzed in more detail in this chapter, *The Hunger Games*, *Looking for Alaska* and *Did I Mention I Love You?* all feature these prominently YA elements. As such, I consider these novels to be illustrative examples of the contemporary field of YA fiction: precisely because these novels do share defining characteristics of YA, as regarded by many, they are fruitful for the analysis of the *differences* to be found within the broad borders of the field. In the following analysis, I will attempt to show that despite sharing these expected characteristics, they also function to exemplify the problematic nature of considering YA fiction as a genre.

4.1 Themes: Negotiating One’s Identity and Coming of Age

The stage of life between childhood and adulthood, adolescence, is often characterized as a time of turmoil in a person’s life. Establishing one’s identity and coming to terms with the transition into adulthood are not small matters for a young person to handle, and the themes of coming of age and identity formation are prominent in YA fiction, reflecting the reality of the adolescent existence.

This chapter will assess the thematic elements of YA fiction from three perspectives: first, I will consider the ways in which the liminality of the adolescent existence presents itself in YA novels, and then continue to analyze two aspects of identity negotiations – morality and the individual's relation to institutions – and their effects on identity development. The issues presented here surrounding the development of a sense of morality and establishing one's place as an individual within institutions and in relation to them, are chosen here as exemplifiers of the three analyzed protagonists' identity negotiations due to their centrality in the respective stories. These are not the only aspects of identity formation processes to be found in YA fiction, but they offer enlightening insights into the identity processes at work in these specific novels.

4.1.1 Developing Identities: Inhabiting a Liminal Space

The liminal nature of adolescence, being not quite a child anymore but simultaneously not yet an adult either, is reflected in the protagonists of many YA novels. Teenagers struggle with their responsibilities within their home sphere as well as in society, negotiate their identities in relation to their peers, and separate themselves from their parents, seeking a new kind of independence. In *Looking for Alaska*, Miles Halter begins his first year at a new school at age 16, making new friends who lead him on a path to mischief, underage drinking and smoking, whilst he seeks a "Great Perhaps"; *Did I Mention I Love You?* depicts a teenage Eden Munro struggling with her own body image as well as coming to terms with her parents' divorce and her estranged father; and in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen is robbed of her adolescence, having to assume the responsibility of provider in her family following her father's death, not willing to admit to the fact that she secretly wishes she could simply let her mother take care of her.

Identity and the ways in which it is negotiated in adolescence has been approached from varying perspectives, and social scientists have presented differing theories about the processes that form identities. Theories vary in the level to which they consider societal influence pivotal in identity

development, as well as how stable identities are considered to be (see for example Kroger's examination of five different developmental models). The formation and development of one's own identity can be regarded as one of the central themes of YA fiction, however, since adolescence is largely defined by such processes, no matter if their outcomes are agreed upon by scholars or not.

These negotiations of identity in YA fiction take place in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, or what Falconer calls "edges of being" ("Young Adult Fiction" 95); similar edges of being include the liminal state between life and death, or morality and immorality. Falconer posits that at the edge of life and death, adolescent protagonists are often "represented on the brink of dying, or crossing the threshold and magically returning alive" (95) as do the protagonists of many YA novels, for example Sabriel Abhorsen in Garth Nix's *Sabriel* (1995) and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007). Another kind of navigating on the brink of life and death is depicted in *The Hunger Games*, when children and teenagers are forced to kill each other or be killed themselves, allowing negotiations about morality. *Looking for Alaska* features teenagers having to come to terms with the death of a dear friend, and in another significantly popular novel by YA author John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), 16-year-old Hazel Lancaster lives with the knowledge that she will eventually die of her terminal cancer, having to accept her own mortality. For me it seems evident that these edges of being are the grounds from which the negotiations of identity stem from in YA works: in YA fiction, the premise of navigating life as a teenager is often combined with other such liminal states, giving rise to the development of identities.

Negotiating identity in *Looking for Alaska* and *Did I Mention I Love You?* centers around their respective protagonists', Miles and Eden's, struggles to fit in and conform to new social circumstances. Both protagonists act as first-person narrators of their respective stories (the effects of which will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 4.2), face the challenge of deciphering what their new friends expect of them, and they change their behavior accordingly to merge into their new lives and social circles. Miles begins his first school year at Culver Creek Preparatory School, a boarding

school far away from his family home, and is delighted to have been allowed a blank page in life: "I'd never been born again with the baptism and weeping and all that, but it couldn't feel much better than being born again as a guy with no known past" (15). He makes friends with his new roommate, Chip "the Colonel" Martin, and enigmatic Alaska Young, who are nothing like what Miles had been used to at his old school. He is pulled in to their whirlwind lives, and it does not take long for Miles to start narrating himself as part of a communal and comprehensive "we" (62).

Miles wishes he could alter his own identity to fit in with the new people he has surrounded himself with: "I wanted to be one of those people who have streaks to maintain, who scorch the ground with their intensity. But for now, at least I knew such people, and they needed me, just like comets need tails" (63). The kids at Culver Creek value loyalty above all, and the most important lesson Miles has to learn about his new friends is that if you confess your classmates' wrongdoings to the teachers, no matter what they have done, you are effectively shunned. He adopts the mindset quickly, and is even hesitant towards Alaska, a girl he develops deep feelings for, when he finds out that she told on two rule-breaking students the previous year: when she is upset and looks for comfort in Miles, he says he "felt bad for her, but she'd done it to herself. She didn't *have* to rat" (117, original emphasis). And so Miles quickly adopts the mentality of his new social sphere, to the point where he even considers the girl he says he loves in a negative light for betraying people Miles has never even met.

When Miles is himself caught smoking with his friends for the first time, they take the fall for him at the subsequent disciplinary hearing (the Jury, as they call it). Miles learns that admission into the society at his new school demands unwavering loyalty:

> I finally understood that day at the Jury: Alaska wanted to show us that we could trust her. Survival at Culver Creek meant loyalty and she had ignored that. But then she'd shown me the way. She and the Colonel had taken the fall for me to show me how it was done, so I would know what to do when the time came. (92)

Hence for Miles, the way he negotiates his identity in relation to his peers is conscious: he narrates the events and his thoughts in a way that makes it evident that he is aware of what is expected of him,

and he wants to conform and become someone who is accepted as part of the group. The identity politics (as termed by Trites, presented previously in chapter 3.2) at work in Miles's initiation into the Culver Creek community revolves around the unique, and to some extent institutionalized, community culture of Culver Creek students.

These norms allow Miles to feel part of the group, but they also limit the way in which he is allowed to act as a member of the community: as Trites posits, identity politics and identification with a specific group also serve to limit individuals (47). Belonging to a group also means *not* belonging to another, and Miles Halter does not have much choice at Culver Creek, since his eventual group of friends is only really juxtaposed with one other distinctive group of students, the Weekday Warriors. Miles cannot choose to identify with the Weekday Warriors, because they are students who only board at the school during the week and who are "rich kids who live in Birmingham and go home to their parents' air-conditioned mansions every weekend" as the Colonel describes them (20). Hence Miles is not left with much choice, since he is a regular boarder, and by definition not eligible into the Weekday Warriors' group. After declaring to the Colonel that he was in fact "regular shit" at his former school and not "hot shit" like the cool kids, he is given a kind of baptism, so to speak: the Colonel gives him a new nickname, Pudge, which will be the name he is referred to as henceforth in his new social sphere (21). And so Pudge is initiated into his new group of friends, simultaneously barring him from others.

For Eden Munro, the development of her identity is similarly tied to new friends and social circumstances as is the case with Miles Halter, and *Did I Mention I Love You?* is essentially a text-book example of archetypical YA novels when it comes to themes. As Holland suggests, "books that touch the sensitive areas of adolescent life – sex, authority, schools, drugs, relationship to parents, relationship to adult society – are the staples of a young adult library" (36). Eden, for example, struggles with her relationship with her estranged father, her new friend group who nonchalantly break the rules and even laws at every turn, her stepbrother's drug abuse, and having sex for the first

time. These issues are dealt with alongside the overt narrative of Eden's quest to fit in and adjust her identity in new social circumstances.

Eden talks about herself in a very negative light in the beginning of the novel: when she navigates the crowds of a party with one of her new friends, Meghan, Eden narrates how Meghan pauses to talk to people "but thankfully none of them ask her why there's a loser by her side" (90). When the girls are getting ready to go to a party, trying on clothes, it is made clear that the words of others, and evidently especially those of her peers, have a heavy impact on Eden's sense of self:

> "Actually, this one might be too tight on you," she [Tiffani] murmurs as her eyes run up and down my body, and I can feel myself shrinking beneath her scrutiny. Did she just imply I'm chubby? I'd like to believe it wasn't intentional, that she didn't mean it in such a way, but it still hurts. I try my hardest to let it bypass my mind, but it's already too late. It repeats itself over and over again, endlessly and agonizingly, even while Tiffani is piling new dresses into my arms and bubbling with more of that same forced enthusiasm. I try to breathe in. I try to deceive myself into believing that she's wrong. (78)

Eden's identity, or perhaps more accurately, the identity she had constructed in her previous social circumstances, is apparently hanging on the balance of what other people think of her. Her fear of being considered a "loser" or "chubby" implies that her negotiations of identity take place in interactions with others, focusing on matters outside of herself, such as other people's opinions of her. Theorists have for long considered adolescence as a time when peer pressure, and attempts to define oneself through one's peers is at its peak (see for example Erikson's classic theory on identity development). Eden's fright towards being cast as an outsider, or not being accepted as an equal member of the social group she aspires to, seems to adhere to this tendency of defining oneself through others.

Later on in the novel, it is unraveled that Eden's security in her sense of self has taken a significant beating before her move to her father's house: she explains to Tyler how when her parents got divorced, she coped with the anxiety it gave her through eating, and subsequently gained some weight. This caused her supposed best friends to remark on her weight in negative ways, which in turn had its effects in lowering her self-esteem. (369–371) She even goes so far as to state that

these former friends caused the "downward spiral" of her mental health (370). And so after the reader is brought in on this information about Eden's past, the interpretation of her journey towards a new, and better, sense of self is put into context. For Eden, negotiating her identity in terms of who she is in relation to her friends and the social sphere surrounding her, is a process of also letting go of an identity, or at least some aspects of it. This narrative of a progressing identity illustrates an account of the postmodern idea of fragmented identity: postmodernists consider identity as not a set goal to be reached, but rather as having multiple realizations in different contexts (Kroger 6). Having to negotiate another identity for herself in a new situation, Eden is actively attempting to disengage some features of her previous identity that included most prominently her low self-esteem. This process arguably has no ending, if we consider identity as something that takes various realizations in changing surroundings and contexts, but that is an aspect which, evidently, Eden herself is not aware of.

The liminality of adolescence that was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, has its realization also in another kind of negotiation of self that Eden and Miles illustrate: these teenagers inhabit a space in life where they do not identify themselves as children, but are not equipped to be adults yet either. Miles, going on his adventure to seek his Great Perhaps, simultaneously also seeks independence from his parents. When he learns that his decision to not come home for Thanksgiving had not left his parents in a state of sadness and longing but rather they had planned to take a trip without him, he feels sad and abandoned: "It was stupid to feel as upset as I did. *I* ditched *them*, but it felt the other way around. Still, I felt unmistakably homesick" (98, original emphasis). His parents being independent from him, contrastingly, does still make Miles uncomfortable. Quite similarly, Eden struggles to maintain a relationship with her father when she is angry at him for leaving her and her mother a few years earlier, incredulous at his attempts to maintain a position of authority towards her:

> For the six weeks I've been here he hasn't made the slightest effort to fix things with me, to apologize for walking out on both Mom and me without an explanation, for

> leaving and waiting three years to see me again. And he wants to come into my life now? He wants to try and act like my parent now? (479)

But even though Eden pursues to maintain this anger towards her father, not wanting to accept him as a parental figure anymore and feeling righteous in her disdain for him, when she finds out that he was not in fact the solicitor of their reconciliation, she feels hurt (481). Realizing that it was her father's new wife, Ella, who instigated his inviting Eden to their house for her summer vacation, leaves Eden even angrier at him than she was before, allowing the interpretation that she did actually still wish that her father would regret his actions and want to make amends.

Neither one of these adolescent protagonists discussed here overtly admit to not wanting to be completely independent from their parents. A similar kind of contrast is also present in Katniss Everdeen's relationship with her mother, who Katniss is bearing a grudge against for falling apart and neglecting to look after her children after her husband's death. Only in her sleep, when she is narrating the events taking place in her unconscious mind, does Katniss admit to longing for her mother's care and affection:

> I'm vaguely aware that my head aches. Possibly I have the flu and this is why I'm allowed to stay in bed, even though I can tell I've been asleep a long time. My mother's hand strokes my cheek and I don't push it away as I would in wakefulness, never wanting her to know how much I crave that gentle touch. How much I miss her even though I still don't trust her. Then there's a voice, the wrong voice, not my mother's, and I'm scared. (353)

Similarly to the other protagonists discussed earlier, Katniss maintains a façade of being independent of her mother and fully self-sufficient. Under the surface, however, all of these adolescents give their reader a peek at the reality of their situation, of not yet being and not even apparently wanting to be completely separated from their parents, and possibly therefore from their former childhood selves.

In YA novels the adolescent characters on a quest towards a realization of an identity seem to be hardly ever aware of these processes, and of the possibility that a stable sense of self, a completely formed identity, is not necessarily even possible or desirable. The implications of this analysis of identity negotiations in adolescence, and especially the liminality of being engaged in a

process of development are quite simple: even though not stating so in overt ways, these YA protagonists (Miles, Eden and Katniss) seem to engage in some forms of identity negotiations regardless of the differences in their realizations. The common idea of YA being characterized by issues of identity is not without cause in the case of these novels, on the basis that there are clearly similarities to be found in their narratives, regardless of their differences on the level of story or in the character of the protagonists themselves.

Recognizing that developing identities are manifest in the narratives of Green, Maskame and Collins's novels, I consider it necessary to dig deeper in the following chapters. Maintaining that identity and different processes of its construction and negotiation are to be found in all of these novels, I will next pursue to consider some differences in their representations and realizations of these issues, and present ideas of how these differences might be considered to challenge the possibility of YA's standing as a genre in its own right.

4.1.2 Negotiating Morality and Ethics

For the adolescent protagonists in the three novels so far discussed here, the construction of identity includes negotiating many aspects of their personalities, as well as establishing a sense of morality: realizing and establishing their own senses of what is right or wrong, good or bad, is central to the developmental processes engaged in by these protagonists. YA fiction has always involved the questioning of existential issues, which involve the concern for 'Am I good or evil?' (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 88). The representations of morality and ethical negotiations engaged in by Eden, Miles and Katniss in their respective narratives offer differing kinds of interpretations about the subject of identity negotiations in YA novels, and their struggles involve a strong sense of weighing their moral and ethical stances.

Erik Erikson's classic and highly influential theory about identity development relies on both the notion of social context, as well as physiological changes occurring in different ages of

development in forming individual and communal identities. He discusses the adolescent existence as featuring a quest for *fidelity*:

> . . . fidelity is that virtue and quality of adolescent ego strength which belongs to man's evolutionary heritage, but which—like all the basic virtues—can arise only in the interplay of a life stage with the individuals and the social forces of a true community. (235)

In Erikson's terminology, fidelity refers to something or someone to be true and faithful to, and which guides the development of ethics. He goes on to state that loyalty and committing to a notion of legality go hand in hand, for "legal commitment is an unsafe burden unless shouldered with a sense of sovereign choice and experienced as loyalty" (236), and so these developments in identity are necessarily attached to communities, people of idol or hero status, and historical developments.

For Eden Munro, understanding the difference between right and wrong is needed when she falls in love with her new stepbrother, Tyler, and has to face the consequences of their situation. Eden constantly reminds her reader that she considers falling for her stepbrother as wrong and immoral. After they have shared their first kiss, someone refers to Eden as Tyler's sister, and she reacts strongly to the word: "I almost throw up. The word makes me feel nothing but disgust at myself, disgrace at the incestuous act I've just committed. I'm pretty sure it's either illegal or immoral" (247). Eden and Tyler are not genetically related, her father and his mother have gotten married fairly recently, and they have not even known each other for longer than a couple of weeks at this point, and so the word "incestuous" is of course rather a stretch. Nevertheless, Eden's mind categorizes the feelings she has as completely wrong and immoral, not recognizing the possibility that there might be a moral "grey area", but only functioning on a black-and-white scale of right and wrong.

Tyler's view on the morality issue of their attraction is distinctly different from Eden's, and when Tyler admits he is attracted to Eden, he questions the moral stance she has adopted:

> "Stop," I say. I take a step back from him, shaking my head and holding up a hand. "You're my stepbrother. You can't say that." "Who makes these bullshit rules, huh?" He viciously laughs, turning to look out the window before fixing his eyes back on me. "Three weeks ago I didn't even know who you were. I don't see you as a sister, okay? You're just some girl I've met. How the hell is it fair to label us as siblings?" (271)

Even though Eden knows that Tyler does not share her views of their immorality, she is not persuaded otherwise. For her, the weight of fearing other people's reactions to their affair is too heavy: "The whole thing is wrong. I'm attracted to my stepbrother, for starters, and the thought of anyone finding out is too much to bear. We'd be judged and frowned upon, *banished from society*" (350, my emphasis). What society is she referring to? The realization that people monitor each other's actions, and judge each other for deviating from the norms established, is something that we all learn eventually, but for Eden, it seems that her sense of morality relies solely on the possibility of not being accepted by others. Whether she here refers to their shared group of friends, their family, or the overall society around them, Eden places a significant weight on the opinions of others and how their situation would look like from the outside. The fidelity, to use Erikson's term, that Eden here negotiates is in the end fixed on the idea of a community, a society that has the power to banish her due to her supposed transgressions: and from this fidelity, Eden develops her sense of morality and asserts her own stance towards where to draw the line between right or wrong.

A significantly different kind of account of negotiating one's ethics is presented in *The Hunger Games*. The Games themselves are a form of punishment loosely disguised as entertainment, an annual event in the fictional state of Panem, where to remind the people of their past, failed rebellion against the oppressive government, twenty-four children (referred to as 'tributes') are forced to fight each other to the death in a televised "show". The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, is sent to compete in these games, and she is forced to consider whether she can kill another human:

> "Katniss, it's just hunting. You're the best hunter I know," says Gale. "It's not just hunting. They're armed. They think," I say. "So do you. And you've had more practice. Real practice," he says. "You know how to kill." "Not people," I say. "How different can it be, really?" says Gale grimly. The awful thing is that if I can forget they're people, it will be no different at all. (48)

Considering what differentiates humans from animals, and how does killing animals differ from killing humans, is not an ethical choice most people have to face this explicitly at a young age, faced with a reality of having to choose to either kill or be killed. But taking another human's life is one of

the most severely punishable crimes in today's actual world, and in considering whether she would be able to kill other children in the Games, even though practically forced to do so, Katniss effectively has to negotiate an aspect of her own identity. Having to face the circumstances where Katniss is headed, having no other choice but to kill or be killed, she is forced to ask herself: Am I capable of taking another human's life? If so, what does that imply about me as a person? Katniss's narrative stance towards the idea of killing in the previous extract, depicting how the "*awful* thing is" that she might be able to kill, if she can maneuver around the realization that she is in fact killing other people, is inherently negative. This negative connotation she gives to the possibility of herself thinking in a specific way gives the reader a sense that she does not like having to admit that she might be capable of such a thing. Simultaneously, it also makes it visible that Katniss is aware of this capability embedded in her, and perhaps regardless of disliking this trait in herself, does not actively attempt to shun it from her personality.

In the arena where the Games are played out, after acquiring a bow and arrows from a dead tribute, the stance Katniss has towards killing other humans seems to take a significant shift:

> The weapons give me an entirely new perspective on the Games. I know I have tough opponents left to face. But I am no longer merely prey that runs and hides or takes desperate measures. If Cato broke through the trees right now, I wouldn't flee, I'd shoot. I find I'm actually anticipating the moment with pleasure. (239)

Being "merely prey" gave Katniss a different stance toward herself and her position in the Games in relation to the other tributes: she had no means of defending herself, and so by necessity she identified herself as weak and powerless in contrast to her opponents. But after the acquisition of weapons, she feels empowered enough to realize the aspect of her personality that she first presented in a negative light: the ability to kill. Shifting from apparent dislike towards her trait of killing to "anticipating the moment with pleasure" finally allows Katniss to realize an aspect of her true self: she is not against killing others in order to stay alive. This is a realization of Katniss's ethics in a quite palpable way: she does not hide behind a façade of having been forced to kill others, but reveals to herself as well as her reader that this is who she is, and that she does not shy away from that.

Not long afterwards, Katniss has her first real kill while attempting to protect Rue, a younger tribute from another district who reminds Katniss of her little sister. Rue is speared through by another tribute, a boy from District 1, and Katniss rushes instinctively to her aid and kills the boy tribute from District 1 by shooting an arrow straight through his neck (282). In the aftermath of the deaths of Rue and the boy from District 1, Katniss realizes she has only now intentionally taken someone's life. The boy from District 1 is dead directly by her hand, and only afterwards does Katniss realize she does not even know his name: "I killed a boy whose name I don't even know. Somewhere his family is weeping for him. His friends call for my blood. Maybe he had a girlfriend who really believed he would come back…" (294) Theorists have taken alternative stances in attributing moral considerations to either cognitive or emotive processes, that is, whether our moral judgements stem from reasoning and understanding perspective, or from our feeling bad or guilty for doing something (Carlo et.al.). For Katniss, it seems here that her realization that there are people who will miss the boy she killed, who will feel robbed of something and wronged by her, is what brings forth the ethical questioning of what she has done and its ramifications.

The differences most significantly present here between the issues of moral judgements in *Did I Mention I Love You?* and *The Hunger Games*, are quite explicit. Eden draws her moral guidelines from her outside community, and those adopted ethical models then affect the ways in which she subsequently acts; whereas for Katniss, ethical considerations have to allow for the aspect of necessity and survival, and are allowed to truly surface only after the choice has already been made to either act or not. Even though the similarity between these narratives is quite obvious – after observing the themes of developing identities and morality – it is clear that the novels present consistently different views on the world. While Eden's story maintains a certain submission to society and the codes of conduct of a shared community, Katniss's existence in an unfamiliar world and a strange setting such as the Hunger Games are, allows her narrative to offer a reader a view of a morality that cannot be as easily black and white as Eden's. The choices Katniss has to make in

regards of her ethics cannot maintain that killing is always wrong, for example, because she exists in a world where even the reader who is previously unfamiliar with this world has to allow for the mitigating circumstances: and even though Katniss kills, she still remains a hero.

Coats considers YA fiction being distinct from preadolescent fiction on the basis of YA featuring a questioning of a moral universe: where good does not always triumph and the wicked do not always get what is coming for them. She bases this criterion on the belief that most contemporary literature functions on the assumption that young people develop their morals through stages that roughly correspond to ages, and that ". . . ambiguity in the moral fabric of represented worlds is detrimental to that development in its earlier stages but quite necessary in developing an ethical framework and a sense of moral agency in the teenage years" (322). The represented worlds of YA fiction thus offer adolescents a space for negotiating their moral judgements, and the multiplicity of real-life ethical considerations are more manifest in YA fiction than in fiction for a younger audience. Based on this kind of categorization, would not the differences in the moral universes of Maskame's and Collins's novels qualify as distinctive in this sense? Even though it has been observed here that they share similarities in the ways in which their protagonists (who are both female and of the same age, no less) develop their identities and negotiate their ethical standpoints, the differences of circumstances in their worlds do result in distinctive dissimilarities of interpretations. Struggling with a forbidden love on the one hand, and fighting to survive under an oppressive government on the other, provide readers with alternative accounts of morality and ethics. Despite the overt similarities in protagonists, themes and narration (which will be dealt with more in chapter 4.2), these novels have distinctively different takes on morality, identity, and the adolescent as a character.

Another kind of account of teenage troubles to conform to ideas of right versus wrong is presented in *Looking for Alaska* via the representation of its protagonist's guilt. The narration of events that transpire after the death of Alaska Young provides an account on a struggle to accept responsibility for one's actions, and Miles's negotiations of his own responsibility and consequential

guilt. Alaska, Miles and the Colonel have been spending their evening together, Alaska and the Colonel have been drinking extensively, and the boys have already fallen asleep when Alaska barges in to wake them, exclaiming that she needs to get out. Alaska is upset and wants to leave campus in the middle of the night, and she is extremely drunk. Miles and the Colonel both agree to distract the teacher living on campus, the Eagle as they call him:

> The Colonel and I, at the same moment, equal in our guilt, said, "OK." We left. We did not say: *Don't drive. You're drunk*. We did not say: *We aren't letting you in that car when you are upset*. We did not say: *We insist on going with you*. We did not say: *This can wait until tomorrow. Anything – everything – can wait*. (160, original emphasis)

Alaska drives off campus in her car, and the next day it is discovered that she had hit a police car, and immediately died on impact. The events are narrated in the past tense, allowing the narrator, Miles, to comment on their subsequent feeling of guilt – the boys realize only after the fact that what they did had direct implications to what happened to Alaska. Being "equal in their guilt", Miles and the Colonel have to then navigate the aftermath of Alaska's death thinking that they had effectively killed her:

> . . . he [the Colonel] grabs on to me and starts sobbing, again saying, "I'm so sorry," over and over again. We have never hugged before, me and the Colonel, and there is nothing much to say, because he ought to be sorry, and I just put my hand on the back of his head and say the only true thing. "I'm sorry too." (171–2)

Miles's realizing his own responsibility and processing the guilt over his actions, along with accepting the loss of a friend are carrying themes in the latter part of the novel: *Looking for Alaska* thus shifts its focus from the protagonist asking "Who am I?" to "What is my responsibility towards others?".

The guilt that the boys are depicted feeling after realizing they could have saved Alaska had they acted differently gives the boys an incentive to attempt to discover in detail how Alaska actually died. The latter part of the novel, after Alaska's death, focuses on handling the mixed emotions of guilt, grief, anger and longing. But even though Miles feels guilty for having done something that he considers directly affected the death of his friend, his guilt does not ignite a process of learning a new moral or ethical paradigm. Rather, it forces Miles to come to terms with uncertainty

over why Alaska died, never knowing for sure whether it was self-inflicted, and if it was, why. The novel ends with Miles's essay, written for a religion class, stating: "So I know she forgives me, just as I forgive her" (262), and the events come to a close even though not all questions have been answered and no set rules for right or wrong actions established.

Even though Eden, Katniss and Miles can all be considered as negotiating some aspects of moral and ethical choices and their ramifications, the events of their narratives as well as the differences in the protagonists' personal assessments of these issues provide differing discussions on identity and morality. As has become evident, it can be argued that all of these novels share some thematical elements that are discussed through the personal growth narratives of their protagonists: but it is challenging to consider these similarities as definitive enough to comprise a genre categorization enveloping each of these novels. The differences in the interpretations they can prompt are lurking right beneath the surface and the illusion of similarity.

4.1.3 Learning One's Place in Society: Individual and Institutions

An interesting aspect of coming-of-age narratives in YA novels is offered by a central character of *The Hunger Games*, Peeta Mellark: prior to entering the arena where he will join Katniss in fighting to the death with other children and teenagers, Peeta struggles with *maintaining* his identity faced with oppressive institutional power. Peeta is an example of a young literary character who not only negotiates his identity, but is consciously defending it:

> "I don't know how to say it exactly. Only… I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not." I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. "Do you mean you won't kill anyone?" I ask. "No, when the time comes, I'm sure I'll kill just like everybody else. I can't go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to… to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games," says Peeta. (171–72)

The power relations between individual and institution are brought to the reader here as a distinctive element of Peeta's identity formation: he is asserting that the Capitol, the government, do not and cannot own and govern him entirely, even while he is effectively powerless against them. His resistance to the institutions that command his existence is palpable. This is an interesting juxtaposition also to Trites's suggestion of how the representations of governmental institutions' relations to individuals function in YA fiction:

> When ideologies in YA novels focus specifically on government, they tend to convey to adolescents that they are better served by accepting than by rejecting the social institutions with which they must live. In that sense, the underlying agenda of many YA novels is to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance. (27)

In *The Hunger Games*, the reader is not indoctrinated into acceptance, but rather challenged to question the rightfulness of power relations between individual and oppressive government. Interestingly, the novel seems to be discussing a different kind of relationship to the power relations between individual and institution than, if we consider Trites's observation above to be accurate, one would expect a YA novel to present (the implications of this type of deviation from expectations will be further discussed in chapter 4.3.2).

Even though Katniss is not as aware of the danger of losing one's self in the Games in the excerpt presented above, she too does initiate a remarkably rebellious stance towards the government of Panem. Towards the end of the Games, rather than either kill Peeta or let him kill her, Katniss devises a plan to avoid this and defy the powers responsible for putting them in this kind of situation. Katniss and Peeta threaten to take their own lives simultaneously, so that the Games would fail to provide a winner altogether, resulting in them both being spared and declared victors (417–9). By challenging the Capitol's power with the only means available, threatening to commit suicide, the oppressed youths regain the tiniest amount of agency still available to them. Katniss does this as a means of survival, and not explicitly to defy the circumstances they have been forced into, but the effects of the rebellious act ignite Katniss's becoming the symbol of the resistance to government in the following books of the trilogy (*Catching Fire*, 2009, and *Mockingjay*, 2010).

Another aspect of Trites's argument about the relation between individual and institutions in the adolescent experience, is the way in which teenage protagonists negotiate power relations, and learn about the social forces governing their lives (3). The older we get, the more we are all expected to act according to shared societal norms and ethical codes of conduct, and learning to suffer the consequences when we make mistakes and break those rules is a part of becoming an adult. These issues are dealt with in *Looking for Alaska*, in which teenagers have their say in administering punishment for their peers when breaking school rules:

> One of the unique things about Culver Creek was the Jury. Every semester, the faculty elected twelve students, three from each class, to serve on the Jury. The Jury meted out punishment for non-expellable offences, for everything from staying out past curfew to smoking. . . . The Eagle [the Dean of Students] served as the Judge, and he had the right to overturn the Jury's verdict (just like in the real American court system), but he almost never did. (71)

Learning the way the court system works is part of being accepted into society: legal systems are part of the rules governing adult life, and the students of Culver Creek are here given a very explicit experience of the different roles functioning within the American courts. Actively participating in the process of doling out punishment for other students allows the students to experience the justice system at work first-hand, and provides the reader of the novel with a clear sense of how and for what the students are being educated.

These two novels, *The Hunger Games* and *Looking for Alaska*, thus present distinctively different views of the relationship between individual and institutions. The way in which the Jury proceedings prepared the students of Culver Creek Preparatory School for life outside the school's jurisdiction is also indoctrinating the novel's reader into accepting these codes of conduct that society offers when the reader is experiencing the narrative from Miles's point of view. Contrastingly, when reading Peeta's resistance to government, the reader is positioned in a power struggle between individual and government, which is not likely to end in the individual youth's indoctrination into acceptance. While Miles Halter is preparing to become a full-fledged member of his society, Peeta Mellark is actively avoiding having to succumb to the powers governing his. Coming of age assumes

notably different processes in the stories unfolding in these youths' lives, and the actual growing up is not featured in the forefront of these narratives, but rather occurs in the background: coming of age and forming an identity are implied in the narratives, and require the reader's participation to be extracted, interpreted and understood as such.

The themes of coming of age and identity formation are intertwined in the three novels discussed in these chapters with coping with death, oppressive government, mental health issues, child abuse, divorce and peer pressure, among the perhaps more easily approachable aspects of romantic relationships and friendships. The themes governing these novels and the ways in which they negotiate the similar aspects of the adolescent experience do share some characteristics. As has been recognized here, these novels all feature teenagers struggling with their developing selves, and focalizing that development in similar ways to ascertain that the reader assume the position of an adolescent while engaging with the text. Thus in the following chapter I will resume the analysis of these YA novels from the point of view of narration and focalization, and maintain that the similarities found on the level of themes here is not in itself sufficient to erase the problematical features in YA genre categorizations.

4.2 Narration: Adolescent Protagonists as First-Person Narrators

Considering the narration of YA novels as a distinguishing factor in categorizing works under the term 'young adult fiction' is one of the most prominent features of argumentation on the matter. The narrative viewpoint, the focalization, of YA novels is most commonly that of an adolescent, and in many cases that adolescent also functions as the narrator of his or her own story – and I do not intend to contradict this generalization, for I do not consider that to be of much worth to my analysis. Recognizing that there are narratives intended for young readers employing other narrative strategies (see for example Gillis's analysis of multiple narrators in "Multiple Voices, Multiple Genres: Fiction for Young Adults"), my central argument concerning narration in YA novels is that there are

significant differences in the effects of narration, even when the narrative strategy of several narratives is similar on the surface.

In the following chapters I will first consider the effects of YA novels' focalization through an adolescent consciousness, by way of my example works' protagonists, and then continue on to assess the differences caused by diversity in the novels' narrative situations.

4.2.1 Focalizing Narration and the Adolescent Consciousness

In *Looking for Alaska* and *Did I Mention I Love You?*, as well as *The Hunger Games*, the protagonists Miles, Eden and Katniss, respectively, all serve as first-person narrators to their stories. In each of these novels the narrative strategy of focalizing the narration through the consciousness of one central, adolescent character thus supports the argument that this form of narrative is descriptive of the YA category. The narration and focalization in each of these novels are somewhat merged together, making it difficult and, at least for the purposes of my analysis here, possibly even futile to try and distinguish between narrator and focalizer. The protagonists of these novels are all first-person narrators, as well as the ones through whose consciousness the events of the narrative are filtered for the reader, that is, the focalizers. In the following assessment of the narration of these novels, the roles of narrator and focalizer shall thus be somewhat coalesced due to this compounding of positions in the novels themselves.

The similarity in narration apparent in these novels is evident from the opening sentences in each of them: "The week before I left my family in Florida and the rest of my minor life to go to boarding school in Alabama, my mother insisted on throwing me a going-away party" (*Looking for Alaska*, 9); "If movies and books have taught me anything, it's that Los Angeles is the greatest city with the greatest people and the greatest beaches" (*Did I Mention I Love You?* 10); "When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold" (*The Hunger Games*, 3). The reader is immediately aware of the point of view of the respective narrators, and that the events recited are filtered through

the consciousness of the narrators themselves. The events of the narrative are not simply described in terms of "I saw" and "I heard" types of perceptions, but rather it is clear that these narrators also let their readers into their minds, commenting on their own thoughts and feelings. Establishing the narrative point of view from the start, these first-person narrators take their reader through the events of the narratives while simultaneously giving the reader their own commentary on the events of the narrative. They also engage in commenting on emotions and thoughts that take place within their minds, and thus are only shared between the reader and the narrator. The first-person position of narrating what one percepts and experiences is adopted by all the narrators by using first-person singular pronouns "before *I* left", "taught *me* anything" and "*I* wake up". Hence a similarity between these narratives is evident in the positioning of the reader into the point of view of the narrators themselves.

Despite the overt similarity of the narrative techniques of these novels, there is one significant aspect in which they differ: the level of self-reflection engaged in by the narrator. This is most illustratively evident in the ways in which Miles Halter and Eden Munro narrate the thought processes and emotions that they face during the events of their narratives. Miles reflects on his thoughts and emotions in vivid, vocalized ways, describing the loss of a friend as having ". . . lost something important, and I cannot find it, and I need it. It is fear like if someone lost his glasses and went to the glasses store and they told him that the world had run out of glasses and he would just have to do without" (173) and that "It hurt, and that is not a euphemism. It hurt like a beating" (181). Eden, on the other hand, often dismisses her feelings by stating that she does not understand where they come from: "For some reason, there's a sudden wave of anger fusing through my veins and I have no idea why" (106) and "I cannot even begin to fathom my hatred" (479). For the reader, these instances of narration provide significantly different possibilities for interpretations: being told that "I have no idea why" I am angry leaves the reader with the responsibility to interpret the reasons

behind that emotion. Miles's grief, contrarily, is described in such a detailed and descriptive way that the reader need not fill in the blanks of where that emotion stems from.

The way in which Eden's apparent difficulty of understanding her own emotions is portrayed in the novel has the effect of making the narrator seem untrustworthy in narrating her own emotive states. Certainly a 16-year-old is capable of processing her personal feelings and thoughts enough to know what makes her sad or angry. Without dwelling too far into the void of merging together text and author, I must specify here that the author of the novel, Estelle Maskame, wrote the entire trilogy[9] of novels of which *Did I Mention I Love You?* is the first one, by the time she was only 16 years old. This is an important feature to note, since contemporary YA fiction is mostly written by adult authors (Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction" 88). That is not to say that the narration of the novel has frankly anything to do with the author's age, but rather that the character Eden has a strong base in the contemporary adolescent existence due to the circumstances of her creation. [10] Perhaps the narrator engages less in processes of analyzing her emotions because the character simply is that immature, or the author did not consider the novel's purpose to be illustrating how teenagers process their emotions.

Be that as it may, in my reading of Eden's emotional states the narration gives rise to alternative interpretations: either the narrator is immature enough not to be able to process the events taking place in her own mind, or she is unreliable when it comes to her own thought processes, not for some reason being truly honest and unfiltered in her narration. Because the narrator and focalizer of the novel are merged together in such a comprehensive way, it is perhaps impossible to ascertain whether Eden could in fact be considered as an unreliable narrator. The effect, however, that this idea

[9] The entire trilogy was published in a relatively short time period, after being discovered on the online writing platform Wattpad: the second book, *Did I Mention I Need You?* was published in 2015 and the third and final book, *Did I Mention I Miss You?*, in 2016.
[10] Considering the effects of YA being mostly written by adults, see for example Gail Gauthier's assessment of YA literature from the viewpoint of providing readers with a sense of community.

has on the analysis of Eden's story is not to be overlooked: the reader is not offered a similar level of self-reflective emotional processes as for example in Miles Halter's narration in *Looking for Alaska*.

Describing grief as a physical pain that hurts "like a beating" is a tangible way of understanding an emotion: emotions are abstract, and describing abstract, emotional pain in terms of concrete, physical pain requires a significant thought process. Miles has to analyze his pain, and specify what kind of pain it is before arriving to the conclusion that explaining to another person what he feels is best exemplified by a comparison to physical beating. This makes Miles a sophisticated and mature narrator (despite his 16 years of age). Eden's depiction of her emotions as something she cannot even "begin to fathom", on the other hand, is less self-aware – and in my view, it is in fact sometimes easier to accept as a truthful account of an adolescent consciousness. Eden's narration does inevitably incite the question of whether or not she is entirely reliable when referencing her own thoughts and emotions: but if you choose to trust in her narration, to believe her when she tells her reader that she has no idea where her anger comes from, that has very different implications about the adolescent consciousness. Not being equipped to process emotions in a mature way, Eden cannot recite her feelings any clearer to her reader than she can to herself.

Another interesting instance of narration is Miles's recognition of feeling something stereotypically considered as teenage: "This never happened to me in Florida, this oh-so-high-school angst about who likes whom more, and I hated myself for letting it happen now" (122). Conscious of the fact that he is experiencing an emotion that is typically considered as exemplary of a high-school student's emotional rollercoaster, he rejects the idea of identifying with such a stereotyped instance of adolescent existence. Miles hating himself for "letting it happen", for allowing himself to experience emotions that are expected of him, seems to imply that he wishes to reject the label of a teenager or high-school student, or at least some parts of it. But at the end of the novel, in the essay Miles writes for his religion class, he considers the position of 'teenager' in a different light:

> When adults say, "Teenagers think they are invincible," with that sly, stupid smile on their faces, they don't know how right they are. We need never be hopeless, because we

> can never be irreparably broken. We think that we are invincible because we are. We cannot be born and we cannot die. Like all energy, we can only change shapes and sizes and manifestations. They forget that when they get old. They get scared of losing and failing. But that part of us greater than the sum of our parts cannot begin and cannot end, and so it cannot fail. (262)

Being a teenager is here not a condition to be remedied, or a lesser form of existence before growing up to be an adult, but rather something special in itself that adults have forgotten and have come to overlook. A teenager actively rejecting the stereotyped position of a teenager, narrating events taking place in a typically teenager-oriented environment of a high school, is definitely a curiosity: and Miles becomes even more so by the way in which he reflects on the adolescent experience. Despite their shared similarity of being 16, considering Miles and Eden as equally typical YA narrators becomes ever harder if one digs deeper than their age: the effects of their narratives imply varying levels of maturation and sophistication, and even though their narratives are similarly focalized, the effects of that focalization differ quite significantly.

Returning to some of the attempts at defining what YA constitutes of that were discussed earlier in chapter 3.2, the differences in the narration of these novels observed here serves to exemplify the problematics that the YA category envelops. As Rachel Falconer states, it is usually enough that a novel features an adolescent protagonist who might serve as the first-person narrator but does not necessarily have to do so, to be categorized as a YA novel ("Young Adult Fiction", 90). The aspect of adolescent consciousness was presented in the views of author David Belbin, whose definition of YA includes narration through a young adult consciousness (141). Now disregarding all the variation in narration that has been observed here in relation to actual YA novels, the mere fact that they feature central protagonists through whose consciousness the narratives are focalized, and who are of the same age allows them to be considered as YA fiction according to these kinds of definitions. The fact still remains that this similarity is obscure, at best, if YA fiction is to be categorized as a literary genre as is. Another kind of problematizing of the apparent similarity of

narration in actual novels is the aspect of alternative narrative situations, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.2.2 Dissimilarities in Narrative Situations

Mieke Bal considers differences between first-person narratives and narrative situations, identifying that the common distinction between first- and third-person narration is in itself somewhat inadequate. Even first-person narration, in her view, has significant differences: the narrative 'I' can simply narrate, but it can also *perceive* and it can *act*, and when the narrative 'I' acts, that action can be limited to simple testimony of events. (28) These different narrative situations, as Bal terms them, all fall within the denotation of the term *first-person narration*, but the implications of these different kinds of narratives are distinctly diverse. Bal states that in some narratives, ". . . the different relationships of the narrative 'I' to the object of narration . . . are constant within each narrative text. This means that one can immediately, already on the first page, see which is the narrative situation" (28). In this chapter, I will apply this idea of alternative narrative situations to illustrate the differences in the narration of Green, Collins and Maskame's respective novels.

Returning to the first pages of the three novels discussed here, they all ascertain a narrative situation where the narration is focalized through an 'I' who does not only testify to others' actions, but recites his or her own emotions and perceptions:

> A. To say that I had low expectations would be to underestimate the matter dramatically. Although I was more or less forced to invite all my "school friends", i.e. the ragtag bunch of drama people and English geeks I sat with by social necessity in the cavernous cafeteria of my public school, I knew they wouldn't come. (*Looking for Alaska*, 9)
>
> B. When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course she did. This is the day of the reaping. (*The Hunger Games*, 3)
>
> C. With one earphone in, my attention half on the music humming into my ear and half on the conveyor belt rotating in front of me, I try my hardest to find a spot clear enough for me to haul my luggage. While the people around me shove and chat loudly with their partners, yelling that their luggage just went past and the other yelling back that it

> wasn't actually their luggage, I roll my eyes and focus on the khaki suitcase nearing me. (*Did I Mention I Love You*? 10–11)

In A, the narrator, who is later identified as Miles Halter, testifies to an event that took place in the past (being forced to invite people to a party) and recounts his belief of what is to take place in the immediate future (said people not showing up). Similarly, in B, the narrator perceives a state of being (Prim not being where the narrator expects her to be) and draws a conclusion of the reason behind that divergence from expectation (Prim must have climbed into their mother's bed because she had trouble sleeping). In both instances the reader concludes that these are personal reflections and thought processes, being presented to the reader via the consciousness of the narrator. Furthermore, in all three excerpts alike, the reader is immediately made aware of the narrative point of view, and positioned "inside the mind" of the narrators themselves.

There is, however, one significant difference: in A, the narrator begins with an assertion implying that he is aware of his reader. "To say that I had low expectations…" implies that the narrator is aware of being read, of being in the process of relaying information for someone outside of his own consciousness. He also narrates the events of his farewell party in past tense, indicating that the events have transpired earlier, and are being narrated after the fact. Whereas in B, the narrator is explaining her perceptions of her surroundings to *herself* ("Of course she did. This is the day of the reaping"), the narrator in A is narrating to an outsider, even though he does not explicitly refer to the reader. The narration of *Looking for Alaska* actually makes interesting use of different tense forms: the first part of the novel, before Alaska's death is narrated in the past tense, but after her accident the narration seemingly catches up to the present moment. After being informed of Alaska's passing, the narration switches to the present tense for a moment, as Miles and the Colonel adjust to the news: "The Colonel and I are walking back to our dorm room in silence. I am staring at the ground beneath me" (170). The change in narrative time does not last for long, and having the narration return to the past tense creates the effect that for a moment the reader was allowed a glimpse into the narrator's mind without having his conscious thoughts process the information first:

> People do not just die. I can't catch my breath. . . . It is so cold today – literally freezing – and I imagine running to the creek and diving in head first, the creek so shallow that my hands scrape against the rocks, and my body slides into the cold water, the shock of the cold giving way to numbness, and I would stay there, float down with that water first to the Cahaba River, then to the Alabama River, then to Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. (170)

This brief shift in narrative technique strengthens the implications that the rest of the novel's narration is, in fact, told intentionally to the reader after the events have already taken place. The switch from past tense to the present functions to highlight the narrative point of view, and to ascertain that even though the narration is in the first person and focalized through Miles's consciousness, he does exert some effort to process the events, and consider *how* he narrates them.

In the case of C, the narrator describes the intent behind her actions similarly to the situation in B: trying to find a spot in the crowd in order to be able to get hold of her luggage, and reaching out to try and touch a person supposedly lying next to you, respectively. However, differing from A and B, the narrator in C is also describing her own actions in a similar manner than she is recounting her surroundings and the events taking place around her. Narrating the events in an assertive way, she describes the people around her yelling back and forth; and, similarly, she describes her reaction to those people as a physical display of emotion, "I roll my eyes". This makes the reader more distant from the consciousness of the narrator than the narrative situations in A and B, not reflecting on or explaining the events of the narrative to the same degree. The similar way of narrating Eden's own emotional states continues further in the novel:

> "My dad's an asshole," he whispers, his lips barely moving. "I told everyone he's in jail for GTA. That's not true." . . . "He's in jail for child abuse." . . . Those two words cause my *blood to run cold, and a shiver surges down my spine*. The words are painful to hear. They're two words that should never be said together, because child abuse shouldn't exist, shouldn't be a thing, shouldn't be real. (451–2, my emphasis)

Eden narrates her personal feelings by attributing physical sensations to them, even in a situation where there is no outside physical effects to be observed, such as the rolling of one's eyes. This serves to illustrate the way in which Eden engages in less self-reflective processes, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also to ascertain the narrative situation in the novel.

In addition to the way in which Eden narrates her emotions, the narration in Maskame's novel has an implication of being somewhat processed intentionally before the act of narrating takes place: in the previous excerpt, the narrator states that "child abuse shouldn't exist, shouldn't be a thing, shouldn't be real", having a distinctively assertive effect in the narration. This manner of commenting implies a reference to a reader: asserting this kind of a notion of such a topic as child abuse creates a sense of educating a young reader, in terms of informing him or her that child abuse is wrong and punishable. Even though the narrator in *Did I Mention I Love You?* is not explicitly narrating to an outsider as the narrator of *Looking for Alaska* narrating in the past tense does, she is narrating to someone. The interpretation remains dependent on the reader in discerning whether Eden's story is narrated for an outsider, a reader, or if she is in fact narrating the events for herself; either way, it is not easily acceptable to assume that the narrative situation in Maskame's novel gives the reader unrestricted access into the narrator and protagonist Eden's consciousness.

The Hunger Games is narrated in the present tense, creating a different narrative situation from the other two narratives already discussed: Katniss's narration does not refer to a reader explicitly nor imply such a reader's participation in a similar manner that Miles or Eden's do. In Katniss's story, there is a linear structure in the narrative of events in the present time, which is also narrated in the present tense. The sense of being within Katniss's mind and experiencing her life with her is however slightly interrupted by flashbacks to her past in the first part of the novel: the flashbacks reveal events from the protagonist's past by way of having Katniss reminisce about times already lived (for example 60–64, 133–136). These leaps in the narration are clearly separated from the procession of the story by way of their changing the tense between present and past:

> He became my confidant, someone with whom I could share thoughts I could never voice inside the fence. In exchange, he trusted me with his. Being out in the woods with Gale… sometimes I was actually happy. . . . A pang of longing shoots through my chest. If only he was with me now! But, of course, I don't want that. (136)

This manner of remembering past events functions in the narrative to inform its reader of a backstory interlinked to the present events. The reader is allowed a glimpse into Katniss's past through these

memories, and shown information that would otherwise not be apparent in the narration of the events taking place in the present time. The narrative technique here, however, has a different effect than in another such instance of remembering, from *Did I Mention I Love You?*:

> Tyler is staring at me with keen interest, taking in my every move, every word. "When my parents got divorced I was thirteen, and it hit me really hard. I used to cry myself to sleep, because my mom would be crying and my dad wouldn't be there and I didn't know how to make her feel better and it just sucked. It really, really sucked." (369)

Eden is also remembering something that is necessary for the reader to know in order to understand her and her story. The most significant difference in these two alternative ways of having the protagonist provide the reader with additional background information via remembering is that Katniss does not address the memory to another character in the novel. Eden's memories are embedded into the conversation she has with Tyler, and the dialogue does not disrupt the narrative: Katniss's memories, contrastingly, are set apart from the plot of the novel, separated from the linearity of the narrative, and not made known to other characters in the novel.

Katniss's memories are presented as though they are preserved only inside her mind, into which the reader has been given access. The contrast between these two narrators' manners of informing their reader effects the narrative situations they develop: while both narratives are focalized through these protagonist-narrators, Katniss is more distinctively the focalizer of her story, and Eden the narrator of hers. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the positions of focalizer and narrator are conflated in these novels, but there are instances where differences such as this surface. Katniss's entire being is available to the reader and the narrative 'I' has an unrestricted access to all aspects of Katniss's part in the story. Eden, on the other hand, resorts at times to a testimonial method of narrating, granting access to her history and self via showing how she interacts with others.

The level of self-reflection produces variation in the narrative situations of Green, Collins and Maskame's works, and the underlying differences in narrative techniques result in diverse narrative situations. Even though the narrators of works such as the ones discussed here are technically similar – first-person narrators, who both narrate as well as act – their narrative situations

have dissimilar effects, and the positions of focalizer and narrator become merged in different ways. The simple categorization of these narrators as first-person narrators oversimplifies the multiplicity of positions these narrators take, and respectively also allow the reader to assume. The effects of the narrative strategies and manners of focalization will be dealt with further in the next chapter, since the effects they have on the novels' reader constructs is inherently connected to the last remaining central characteristic of YA fiction: its readers.

4.3 Readers: Ambivalent Implied and Intended Readers

The very label 'young adult fiction' presupposes a notion of age: calling a work of fiction for example 'young adult science fiction', instead of simply 'science fiction', makes a clear distinction between adult and adolescent readers and their expected reading habits. The problematics of categorizing YA works into their own specific niche of fictional writing on the grounds of intended readership is significant, due to the tendency to coalesce the ideas of intended and implied readers in categorizing YA (an observation made in chapter 3 of this thesis). When taken into account that all YA fiction does not necessarily involve the construction of an adolescent *implied* reader, and that the reality of crossover, actual readerships is becoming more and more significant, these problems become evident.

4.3.1 Constructing an Ambivalent Implied Reader

Constructing an adolescent implied reader has been suggested as one typical characteristic of YA literature, and used to justify treating YA as a genre. 'Implied reader' is a concept that is inherently linked with textual elements in a literary text, and as such, at least in my thinking, if this argument can be shown to hold merit, categorizing YA as a genre on the basis of implied readers is a defensible claim to make. However, the reality of YA works is not as clear-cut as that suggestion entails; the potential for crossover readerships of YA fiction especially challenges the idea of an implied adolescent reader.

As has been observed, the way in which narration and its focalization is constructed in YA novels is often such that implicitly addresses the reader, even when not explicitly doing so. In an excerpt from *The Hunger Games* (example B in the previous chapter), even though Katniss Everdeen is explicitly explaining the world around her to herself, reasoning that her sister must have left the bed to join their mother, she is implicitly explaining the situation to her reader as well. Similarly, when Miles Halter refers to the events preceding Alaska's death, he simultaneously explains the events and his thoughts to himself as well as the reader: "Her [Alaska's] moodiness had annoyed me too, sometimes, but not that night. That night I let her go because she told me to. It was that simple for me, and that stupid" (*Looking for Alaska*, 179). The mere act of narrating, explaining events of a narrative to a reader, does not necessarily imply anything specific about the implied reader as is, and certainly not about the age of said reader construct. However, the narrative choice of focalizing through an adolescent consciousness in itself does have different implications for the decoding of the implied reader than narratives featuring adult or child narrators (or focalizers) do.

In YA novels, the focalization of narratives through the consciousness of an adolescent as discussed earlier in this thesis, serves to position the reader into the narrative as an adolescent; the reader sees, hears and feels whatever the focalizer does. Reading *Did I Mention I Love You*? the reader joins in on Eden Munro's experience of peer pressure, having tequila shots at a party:

> I feel dumb all of a sudden. It's like I'm in freshman year all over again, where I'm subject to scrutiny by the much older, much cooler students. But this isn't high school and they aren't other students. This is a party and they know exactly what to do and what to say and how to fit in. I, on the other hand, have no clue. (88)

Now while on the surface every unique reader who engages with this text is positioned here to witness the events from the sixteen-year-old Eden's point of view, the reality of readers of different ages might create different effects. The narration of Eden's uncomfortable initiation into the group of older kids by way of learning the specifics of the tequila-drinking ritual offers a look into the workings of the reader position the novel constructs: Eden does not know the steps involved in drinking tequila shots, and the events are focalized from her perspective. It might then be argued that the implied

reader of the novel is a teenager similar to Eden, who does not know the ritualistic elements involved in this instance. But this is a ritual familiar to many an adult: thus the narrative also provides an adult reader with a possibility to reminisce about being in a similar situation as Eden, already familiar with the process about to take place before Meghan instructs “salt, tequila, lime” (89).

The narrative strategy, reciting events of a story in the voice of a teenager, in itself guides all interpretations of a narrative: the reader is invited to realize that she is being positioned as a teenager and to accept that stance, or to alternatively reject it. Either way, positioning the reader within the consciousness of an adolescent protagonist inherently partakes in the production of an implied reader. Nevertheless, the act of narration, of describing events and emotions, even though narrated as though the reader is privy to the workings inside the narrator’s mind, does invite the reader to recognize that she is being *told* something, that the narration is not the stream of someone’s consciousness but rather processed information. How that information is presented (and processed), then, is of importance for the construction of an implied reader. And yet the question remains, in encoding an implied reader, is it possible to separate that textual reader construct from the *intended* reader?

Reading and readers are a part of the process of meaning making: if a text is never read, arguably there is a part of its encoded meaning that is never truly realized. Iser’s contention that the virtual dimension of a text, “coming together of text and imagination” (284), exists somewhere in the liminal space between the text proper and the reading process, suggests that any given text can potentially realize itself in countless ways, regardless of authorial intention. An implied reader construct is decoded from a text by an actual reader, who in turn might have been affected by being targeted (or alternatively disregarding this kind of targeting) as an intended reader – reading and its effects on the construction of meaning is by no means a straightforward process.

Actual readers of works of fiction do not partake in reading processes inside a vacuum: coexisting with other humans, we unavoidably all learn to read the world around us in ways pertaining

to the status quo of the society and culture in which we live. In schools as well as elsewhere in our social spheres, we are all essentially *taught* to read. Trites considers it necessary for YA literature to depend on the notion of individuals as social constructs that is insisted upon by postmodernism, and presents an argument of ways of reading and the implications poststructuralist theory has had on reading and readers:

> If there is one thing poststructuralism has offered critics that most liberates the adolescent reader, it is the concept of exactly that: the adolescent reader. Before critics like Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish started talking about the possibilities of multiple readings and implied readers, high school students were told too often that only one literary interpretation was ‘‘correct.’’ As Patrocinio Schweickart observes, everyone was taught to read like a white male (adult). (145)

Being taught to read like a white male adult would inevitably have its impact on the ways in which a reader decodes a text, and subsequently in the implied reader the text constructs. Yet acknowledging that there are different kinds of readers, and that every unique reader's interpretation of a text is "correct" since every reader reads differently due to their individual experiences, gives way to the question: Is there something about the imagination of adolescents that is different from that of adults? This question, which is addressed among others by Sally Sugarman in connection with the analysis of science fiction intended for adolescents, is relevant for all approaches to YA fiction. Does the adolescent reader read differently than an adult? Some critics have observed differences in the ways of writing for adolescents, and for example Godbey concludes that there is "reluctance to write or publish dystopian fictions that might overwhelm young readers ill-equipped to question, much less challenge, the ideologies and institutions in which they and their families participate" (16).

Perhaps attempting to adhere to that idea of difference between adolescent and adult readers and their capabilities to process narratives, there certainly are works of fiction with adolescent protagonists living in dystopian worlds that seem to avoid this "overwhelming" of young readers. For instance, Kiera Cass's 2012 novel *The Selection* features a dystopian future world with a thriving caste system and societal unrest, but the plot of the novel mainly focuses on matters of the heart, depicting a competition where young women are made to vie for the chance to become a prince's

wife. Contrasted with another recent dystopian novel with a similar setting of a competition to obtain better chances in life, *The Hunger Games* and *The Selection* provide their readers with markedly different takes on dystopian worlds and being powerless under the rules of government, despite their apparent similarity. Trites's argument that YA novels most often feature a sense of indoctrinating adolescents into social acceptance (27) is in this case both validated and challenged: in these two dystopian worlds, the young protagonists (Cass's America Singer is 17 years old) take significantly different stances towards their circumstances. While America is struggling with a love triangle, not much is said about the negative aspects of her society, even though they do exist. Contrastingly, Katniss Everdeen's emotional struggles are always presented through the framework of her society and its hold on people; while in the Games, Katniss pretends to have feelings for Peeta as a strategical move in order to stay alive, and only after they have survived the Games does she consider what her true feelings are:

> . . . it's no good loving me because I'm never going to get married anyway and he'd just end up hating me later instead of sooner. That if I do have feelings for him [Peeta], it doesn't matter because I'll never be able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children. And how can he? How can he after what we've just been through? (453)

Falling in love and having children cannot be separated from the atrocities of the oppressive government in Katniss's world, and not wanting to have children is a choice directly caused by the institutions governing her life, not an independent choice.

The alternative stances that these two novels then provide the reader with, as concerning a society with deep issues and a thriving caste system, are markedly different. They are both still narrated from the point of view of a similar character, a female teenager, and because they are labelled as YA novels, one would possibly expect them to construct a similar implied reader. The latter of those two characteristics becomes questionable, in my view, when the subject matter as well as the effects of narration in these novels are analyzed further. The ambivalence of the implied readers that these novels construct stems from the alternative ways of decoding the reader construct. In the case of Eden's first tequila experience, as was presented earlier, the reader could be an adolescent wishing

to accelerate her own initiation into adulthood similarly as Eden. Alternatively, an adult reader of the novel could be regressing back into the time of life where the new experience and breaking of rules might have been exciting, and the only worry to be had was getting caught doing so. The dystopias providing different views on caste systems and social hierarchy construct implied readers with differing levels of interest towards social justice and equality: Cass and Collins's novels provide their readers with markedly different levels of social critique and commentary, the decoding of which is not necessarily dependent upon the actual reader's age.

The ways in which YA novels construct an implied reader is evidently difficult to separate distinctively from the intended readers that they are pursuing. The sole characteristic of featuring an adolescent protagonist can serve as a distinguishing trait in considering intended readers, and when that protagonist is simultaneously acting as the narrator or focalizer of his or her own story, as has been observed here earlier, that arguably factors into the construction of an implied reader. However, the decoding of an implied reader is a precarious process, since it involves the participation of an actual reader, and actual readers can differ in their contexts of reading quite significantly.

I assumed in the beginning of the present chapter that constructing an adolescent implied reader could be considered as a defensible characterization in categorizing YA fiction as a genre. The reality of YA reader constructs, however, is multiplex and complicated to the point where I consider it challenging to effectively separate the implied reader from intended reader, thus problematizing the idea of an adolescent implied reader. The convoluted merging of implied and intended reader in YA fiction is part of what in my view makes YA fiction inherently crossover literature, and in the following chapter I will assess the applicability and effects of considering YA as such.

4.3.2 Deviation from Expectation: Intended Readers and the Crossover Potential of YA

In the three novels that have been assessed in this thesis as exemplifiers of the multifaceted reality of YA fiction, the narrative strategies as well as some elements in their themes and subject matter have been observed to offer alternative reader positions and interpretations. The developing identities of Eden, Miles and Katniss realize themselves in ways that offer a reader ample possibility to identify with the characters' struggles, and the narration in each novel positions each individual reader into the position of a teenager facing some kind of obstacle in life. However, the differences identified in the themes as well as narration of these novels do allow one more important point to be stated about the nature of YA fiction: the very same shared elements that define YA fiction can also be considered as markers of crossover fiction.

Rachel Falconer discusses the ways in which our current society with its rapid technological development and problematizing of individual identity has affected the tendency of adult readers engaging with YA novels in increasing numbers in the twenty-first century ("Young Adult Fiction"). It is attractive, at least in my thinking, to draw a parallel between the reality of the world surrounding us all to the adolescent existence on the precipice of adulthood: we are facing a rapidly changing future that most of us have no control over. The idea of a linear development from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is challenged in what Falconer calls the 'edge' of adulthood, which has become double-sided: ageing flows in both directions, allowing for adults to regress back towards childhood and children to accelerate their development into adults (92).

Considering the current situation as per Falconer's view brings into question the relevance and continuance of adolescence as a distinct stage of life. Adolescence was not regarded as a separate stage from childhood and adulthood until in relatively modern times, and the idea of a separate category of fiction for young adults, specifically, followed the categorization of adolescents as a separate group of readers – or perhaps more accurately, consumers. In the contemporary climate of uncertainty, Falconer stating that "we are all adolescents now" does not indeed seem that far-

fetched: there is much in the adolescent experience and its uncertainties that adults can recognize in their daily lives as well.

The way in which crossover novels address their readers has been characterized as a dual address (Wall), when a narrative speaks to two alternative demographics simultaneously. This form of address is especially applicable to crossover children's literature, whereas YA crossovers entice vast audiences also on the account of their subject matter and the events of the narrative. As Falconer posits, adult life is becoming more similar to adolescence in the face of our contemporary times, and narratives of adolescent trials and triumphs are easy to identify with, by adults as well as teenagers. Research has shown that the reality of dualist readerships is significant in the consumption of YA titles (see for example Garcia), and contemporary YA is ever increasingly becoming a part of mainstream cultural production. With the multimedia convergence of many a YA story, the contemporary climate for YA fiction is characterized by YA stories' adaptations into films and television series, many of which attract expansive audiences.

The possibilities of interpretation provided by the narrative choice of focalizing a narrative through an adolescent consciousness, as discussed in chapter 4.2, are multiple in relation to the context of reading by an actual, individual reader. The stories told through the eyes of sixteen-year-old Eden, Miles and Katniss, respectively, are examples of narratives that can be considered in differing light depending on the reader's position towards them. For a teenager, Eden's story might be about a forbidden love, Miles's musings about the meaning of life material for the reader's own identity development, and Katniss's struggle for survival mere entertainment. Contrastingly, an adult might interpret Eden's story as a warning example about damaging a child during a divorce process, Miles could provide his reader with insight into the most fundamental questions in life, and Katniss might enlighten a reader to realize just how difficult life must be like for people living in totalitarian societies. Even though all of these novels feature stories told through the eyes of teenagers, the ways

in which they are narrated provide alternative stances to be taken by the individual reader – and material for differing kinds of interpretations and enjoyment to be extracted in reading them.

Karen Coats concludes that YA literature is inherently connected to society and culture, and serves to interpret their fluctuations for a reader:

> Young adult literature thus responds to and helps contextualize cultural trends for its readers. In this way, it is itself dialogic–that is, it participates in the vibrant and constantly shifting cultural dialogue regarding what we value and how our lives might be lived both responsibly and responsively in the face of increasing globalization, perspective-altering technologies, and ideological challenge and change. (320)

This indeed seems to be the case in many YA novels written and published in the twenty-first century, but it appears to me that this tendency of YA fiction to interpret the changing world around us is relevant for adults as well. Even though the medium of YA fiction is necessarily not primarily intended for the purposes of adults making sense of the world, it does not rule out the possibility of that being the case for many contemporary readers of YA works. If a novel is intended for a younger audience, it seems easy to assume that whatever message the work is attempting to convey should be simple enough to decode if it is intended to be understood by less developed minds, and in this respect it is easy to find the attractiveness of YA narratives in adults' reading habits as well. Admittedly, there must be adults who read YA works simply as escapist entertainment (there certainly are adults who read all kinds of fiction for those intents and purposes), but narratives told through the consciousness of young adults can be relevant for an adult reader equally. Contextualizing cultural trends and making sense of the world, while negotiating one's own identity, are certainly elements of narrative that offer a reader of any age possibilities to interpret one's own world and identify with a narrative.

The way in which a novel such as *The Hunger Games* deviates from expectations in the message it sends to a reader is an interesting aspect of problematizing intended readerships. In Katniss's stance towards her government, and the rebellion that she subsequently incites defies the ideas presented about YA fiction as serving to indoctrinate youths into the rules of society (Trites) or

not telling stories that an adolescent mind cannot process and might be overwhelmed by (Godbey). Katniss herself is not the instigator of the eventual rebellion, and everything she does in the Games serves the single purpose of survival. However, even though she does not herself actively promote resistance to government, her narration intentionally sheds light on the atrocities of her society:

> Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. Straggling through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow. . . Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one. (33–34)

Describing people dying of starvation, and the way in which their deaths are dismissed in official contexts is definitely not an exemplary feature of YA narration not shocking the reader. Even though Katniss acting as narrator here does not explicitly tell her reader what to think of this situation (compare for example with the instance from *Did I Mention I Love You?* discussed in 4.2.2, where Eden clearly states, "child abuse shouldn't exist"), she is still showing her reader the circumstances of her society in a negative light. She pulls focus to the way human life is undervalued, without ameliorating it for her reader, and while she does not say, "my society is wrong", the implication of her narration is clearly tinged with a negative stance towards it.

Katniss's narration, then, does not seem to exemplify a way of familiarizing a teenage reader with social responsibility and submission to institutional rule. The novel features some negotiations of identity, but those negotiations do not revolve solely around growing up, as one would probably expect of a YA novel. What *The Hunger Games* does feature, in accordance to the common definitions of YA, is an adolescent protagonist, through whose consciousness the narrative is focalized. Possibly due to that element in the narrative, the novel has been categorized as YA in its marketing strategies, and is positioned in children's or young adult sections in libraries and bookstores. The crossover potential of the novel is only realized when actual readers digress from intended readers, allowing the novel to be relevant to a wider audience than solely adolescents close in age to Katniss.

Falconer argues that crossover fiction has "helped to generate public recognition of the child's perspective in the adult, the adult's in the child and both perspectives converging in the adolescent" ("Young Adult Fiction" 92), and this convergence of perspectives is perhaps precisely what draws adults to YA novels. Reading Katniss's perspectives about her society, the violence of the Games, her conflicted romantic relationships and her views on uncertain future prospects converge action with responsibility, romance with realism and risk with reward much in the same way as her position as an adolescent converges childhood with adulthood.

Earlier in my assessment of the contemporary category of YA fiction I have stated that the intended reader of YA is not applicable as a marker of a literary genre, when genre is considered as a literary category that exists in a historically formed context, and whose works share thematic as well as formal elements (the working definition of 'genre' for this thesis). The intended reader of YA does nonetheless have its place in this definition as well: it partakes in the historical process that the category is and has been formed in. YA literature came to being without the realized notion of an intended readership (if we include works such as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Lord of the Flies* as YA novels), and developed this sense later on. Now, following the vastness of the crossover phenomenon, this notion of an adolescent intended reader of YA can be seen as diminishing in significance.

Considering YA fiction as inherently crossover literature has in my opinion one significant consequence: defining YA as a genre, specifically, due to the age of its *intended* readers, is by consequence challenged by that kind of definition. Crossover potential in YA narratives does not seclude the possibility of a text constructing an adolescent implied reader. However, defining the intended reader of YA as a young adult loses its significance as a defining characteristic or generic trait if YA's crossover potential is considered as intrinsic. The crossover potential of narratives told through the eyes of adolescent protagonists does not in itself make the similarities of YA works inconsequential. Considering YA fiction as a specific literary category remains uncontested by the

idea of it being simultaneously crossover fiction, if the categorization of works into the field of YA fiction is based on other shared characteristics than the intended reader.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to assess the applicability of considering the category of YA fiction as a literary genre. In the discussion of different approaches to the notion of genre it was concluded that genre as a term has a literary use as well as a somewhat differing use in marketing efforts. These aspects of the idea of genre have been extensively compounded together in the current categorizing of YA fiction. As such, the literary definition alone has become irrelevant for the analysis of the contemporary category of YA, since the field's extensive marketing efforts and multimedia conversion have become pervasive in overall production.

Contemporary YA narratives are heterogeneous and vast in their themes and stories: the three novels that were analyzed in this thesis alone include a romance novel, a coming-of-age story and a dystopia. What they share in their protagonists and intended readerships is what makes them commonly regarded as YA literature, adhering to the more marketing-based definition of the term. The liminality of the adolescent existence, as well as the contemporary climate of blurred boundaries between different stages of life, are in turn what makes these novels inherently crossover literature, which was observed here to affect and further problematize the categorizing of YA as a literary genre.

As has been noted in this thesis, it is difficult to separate YA fiction entirely from the actuality of readers and reading processes, as well as the workings of the publishing industry. The influence of these elements of literary production and consumption are key in the categorizing of works into YA, adult or children's literature. As such, drawing a conclusion about whether YA is actually a genre cannot be separated from the ways in which the publishing industry applies the term. The approaches to genre that were assessed in this thesis allowed me to form a working definition for my analysis: the analysis provided by this thesis was based on the notion of genre being a literary category that exists in a historically formed context, the works of which share thematic as well as formal elements. It was then concluded that YA fiction can indeed be seen to share some thematic elements, but only on a large scale. Young adult fiction has developed in a historically formed

process, and as such does present some of the key characteristics my definition of genre requires, and the field continues to develop to this day, allowing advances in research as well. The similarities in the themes of my example novels were shown to be obvious only on the surface, and my findings revealed significant differences in the ways in which the novels approach the themes of identity formation and coming of age. Even though these themes are evidently present in all of the three novels analyzed, the differences in their treatment complicate the matter of treating this element of shared themes as an indication of a shared genre.

Featuring an adolescent protagonist has been presented as another defining characteristic of the YA genre: some definitions do however require in addition that protagonist acting as the focalizer of his or her own narrative in order to qualify. However, it was observed here in my analysis that even in novels where protagonists act as focalizers as well as first-person narrators, the effects of their narratives can differ greatly in the ways in which they address their readers. The effects of the narration in Maskame, Collins and Green's novels were found to have notable differences, producing alternative narrative situations.

The narrative situations produced by these first-person adolescent protagonists in turn affect the ways in which they construct an implied reader. The problematics of decoding an implied reader without the comingling of the intended reader was also discussed, and the difficulties of ascertaining any factual conclusions on the matter of readers was identified. The element of readers is however one of the central arguments for treating YA as a specific category separate from children's or adult fiction. The similarities produced in novels featuring adolescent protagonists as focalizers do mainly revolve around the aspect of different reader constructs. Nevertheless, the crossover potential encoded into YA narratives does complicate the matter of YA having an adolescent intended readership, resulting perhaps in a more befitting idea of YA as a form of fiction *primarily* written for and marketed for adolescent readers.

In the field of publishing and marketing of books today, the intended reader of YA fiction is defined as an adolescent due to their attractiveness as consumers. Because the field of writing and selling fiction to young adult readers, and subsequent, market-based knowledge of their reading habits is fairly well established, we can conclude that the intended reader of a YA work is affected by matters outside the text itself. There are conventions of the "genre" of YA that are thus inherently derived from outside in, from the market to the works. As such, it is difficult to accept these similarities as characteristics of a literary genre, but rather a marketing genre – which has a significantly looser definition than the prerequisites I presented for my consideration of the term's literary denotation.

In a parenthesized side comment, Falconer remarks that YA fiction is a class of fiction "broader, messier and more inclusive than a genre" ("Young Adult Fiction" 90). This is more or less what my analysis here has also eventually arrived at: young adult fiction is so vast and heterogeneous in nature that it is futile to restrict these works as exemplifiers of one comprehensive genre. Research into what YA in itself entails has been foreshadowed by studies mostly about the uses of YA in educational contexts, which aims to establish the use of YA fiction as relevant, and to renegotiate the undervaluing of YA as "lesser literature". The scope of my thesis only briefly touched upon this idea of YA as an inferior form of fiction, but my analysis has provided insight into the issue to the extent that I believe it justifiable to conclude that YA should by no means be forgotten in literary research. The relevance of YA fiction in the literary field of today will probably only increase as YA literature has become so popular it attracts wider audiences, and approaches a multitude of topics and themes.

YA fiction encompasses such a wide variety of possible interpretations and mixing of elements from several established genres that it would be derogatory for the literary accomplishment of the writers to assume all of these works as representatives of a single, all-inclusive genre. However, the similarities in YA works are easily traceable, and do advocate for the categorizing of these works as distinctively separate from children's literature, and to some extent from adult literature as well.

Subsequently, I do consider it valid and defensible to consider YA as an independent category of literary production. It might be that calling this body of works a *category* or *genre* is merely an issue of semantics, and does not affect the ways in which the works are read or researched. However, the fact remains that YA fiction is evolving fast, and the future of the category will require more research into the history and workings of the denotation of YA fiction.

The problematics of categorizing YA fiction that has been addressed in this thesis seems to stem from attempting to define an inherently modern phenomenon according to somewhat outdated theory and terminology. The contemporary state of the field has surpassed its traditional definitions, and has overcome the restrictions of readership that the label 'young adult fiction' in itself indicates. The nature of YA fiction calls for new ways of thinking about genres, and most importantly considering matters outside the texts themselves – the multitude of readers, writers and publishers, for instance – as an inherent part of the YA phenomenon.

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