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Negotiating Hope and Honesty: A Rhetorical Criticism of Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

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NEGOTIATING HOPE AND HONESTY: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF YOUNG
ADULT DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

by

Lauren L. Reber

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATING HOPE AND HONESTY: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

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Young adult dystopian fictions follow the patterns established by the classic adult dystopias such as George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, but not completely. Young adult dystopias tend to end happily, a departure from the nightmarish ends of Winston Smith and John Savage. Young adult authors resist hopelessness, even if the fictional world demands it.

Using a rhetorical approach established by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Company We Keep*, this thesis traces beyond the reasons for the inclusion of hope and the strategies by which hope is created and maintained. Booth's rhetorical approach recognizes that a narrative is a relational act. At issue in this study is the consideration of what follows from viewing a narrative as a dynamic exchange between text, author and reader. Through a focus on rhetoric as identification, the responsibilities of both the author and the reader to a text are identified and discussed.

Three young adult novels, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *Feed* by M.T. Anderson will be analyzed as case studies. Together the analysis of these novels reveals that storytelling is an act of forging identifications and forming alliances. The reader becomes more than just a spectator of the author's rhetoric; the reader is a fully involved member of the interpretive and evaluative process.

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INTRODUCTION: HAPPY DYSTOPIAS

You may lead a child to darkness, but you can't turn out the light. (Hughes
156)

It seems a contradiction that Winston Smith, the “would-be hero” in George Orwell’s *1984* inevitably fails to change his world, while the twelve-year-old hero in a young adult text is singularly able to do so. And yet, twelve-year-old heroes seem particularly apt to resist the impulse of dystopian worlds. The more I read young adult dystopian novels, the more a pattern develops—child protagonists rarely suffer the defeat of Orwell’s Winston. Alice wakes up (Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*). Meg Murry is able to resist It (L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*). Jonas travels to a potentially joyful ‘Elsewhere’ (Lowry, *The Giver*). It is clear that young adult dystopian literature has significantly adapted the adult dystopian genre to include hope. In these classic tales, the child or young adult is the utopia in the dystopian world. Authors resist hopelessness, even if the fictional world demands it.

Why should young adult writers resist hopelessness? The audience perhaps provides the answer. After the Columbine tragedy, writer Stephen King was interviewed about a book he had written on a high school shooter. Apparently, the book had been found among the possessions of the young Columbine killer. When asked how he felt about this, King replied, “I immediately called the publisher and had every unsold copy of the book recalled from bookstores and destroyed” (as related in Paterson, *The Invisible Child*, 58). At some point, whether in the beginning stages of the writing process or at publication, a writer has to realize who the audience is. For the young adult writer, this realization can affect the text. Katherine Paterson, a young adult writer suggests, “[Children] are human with less

experience and a narrower perspective than we have. They are, therefore, more vulnerable to injury To write for them is an enormous responsibility, and the writer for children must never be allowed to forget this fact” (*The Invisible Child* 67). Her answer reveals that there is pressure on the writer for the young to take care of the impressionability of youth.

Happy dystopias may be the result of cautious adult writers. When asked if adolescents can handle pure dystopia, Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*, answered, “Young people handle dystopia every day: in their lives, their dysfunctional families, their violence-ridden schools” (“Interview,” 199). She then clarified her response by recognizing that the dystopia should not be complete: “Yes, I think they need to see some hope for such a world. I can’t imagine writing a book that doesn’t have a hopeful ending” (199). Lowry reflects Monica Hughes’ statement in the opening epigram—it appears unethical to ‘turn out the light’ on a young reader. These authorial comments and the pattern of ‘happily ever after’ found in young adult dystopian texts disclose that a ‘happy’ adaptation centers on the audience. These authorial comments also reveal a belief that books can in fact affect a reader’s state of being for better or for worse. Is it any wonder that a young adult author wishes to leave the young, impressionable reader with a sense of hope and not of utter despair?

The Rhetorical Framework

This focus on the audience and the need to establish a hope in a dissolute world highlights an understanding of the rhetorical situation. The young adult audience, though absent, is by no means unfelt by young adult authors. It is obvious that the audience is a prevalent concern in the creation of the dystopian text. It is my contention that the audience should figure as a prevalent concern after the text leaves the author’s hand and is given to the

reader. Instead of just focusing on the strategies an author uses to cement hope in a text, this thesis will also examine the reader's involvement in the narrative situation.

A narrative is a relational act. A rhetorical approach to the narrative situation can reveal the responsibilities that authors and readers have to the text. Authors employ strategies to "impose" the fictional world on the reader (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, xiii). These strategies are rhetorical because they function to persuade the reader to feel, act, or believe in a certain way. According to Booth, the author cannot choose whether to use rhetoric or not: "He can choose only the kind of rhetoric he will employ" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 149). In the case of including hope in dystopian fiction, hope can be a rhetorical strategy that helps the reader understand that in a world of nearly hopeless conformity, she can still remain an individual. The happy ending, romanticized young adult protagonist and other rhetorical strategies all work to create this central message in the reader's mind. One of the objects of this thesis will be to showcase the author's rhetorical strategies used in young adult dystopian literature to provide hope in the text. A second object will be to analyze the relationship established between author and reader through an understanding of how rhetoric induces identifications.

At best, rhetoric is an ambiguous term. Since Aristotle, rhetoric has traditionally been associated with persuasion (among other definitions, such as manipulation and figured language, which I'll exclude as irrelevant). However, while this definition of rhetoric is viable, it offers only a diminished view of the possibilities of a rhetorical criticism. Rhetoric is not solely an isolated act of persuasion, but a complex act of identification (Blakesley 21). Kenneth Burke, in his work, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, identified that the Aristotelian concept of rhetoric as persuasion was not expansive enough. The key term of identification implies that language is used to form alliances (Burke 55), or as Hauser suggests "rhetoric includes any

experience that does the work of symbolic inducement of social cooperation” (14). In other words, the key term of identification implies that a stronger relationship exists between authors and readers. This definition of rhetoric secures a better understanding of how narratives convey morals. By understanding that a narrative seeks to procure identifications and not solely to persuade, the text becomes more than an argument about how the reader should live his life. Instead, the text functions to secure relationships in a manner that influences both the author and reader to join together in a general pursuit of greater happiness. Wayne Booth’s way of describing this relationship is through the metaphor of “meeting minds” (“Modern Dogma” 1512). Booth’s metaphor implies a friendly companionship of the author and reader.

This expansion of the term rhetoric broadens the idea of a rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism is not solely an analysis and evaluation of the means of persuasion; instead, it is an analysis and evaluation of the relationships secured through narrative. Because of the nature of a literary text (author writes to absent reader and reader interacts with absent author), sometimes the relationship between the reader and author is forgotten and dissolved. But, focusing on rhetoric as identification reveals the responsibilities that both writer and reader have to a literary text. Katherine Paterson expresses this joint responsibility succinctly in her philosophy of publication: “Once a book is published, it no longer belongs to me. My creative task is done. The work now belongs to the creative mind of my readers. I had my turn to make of it what I would, now it is their turn” (*The Invisible Child* 258). Her statement and a broadened view of rhetoric reveals the collaborative and interactive nature of the narrative situation. The writer accepts the responsibility of communicating his or her personal beliefs and values through the text. The reader, consequently, accepts the responsibility of analyzing and evaluating the arguments the text

and author make, while deciding (the reader maintains agency) whether or not to accept the roles the writer creates for the reader. In essence, the author offers an argument that readers must evaluate as an alternative to the many competing arguments that make up their values and beliefs (Fisher 109). Both reader and author use rhetorical strategies. The author uses these strategies to influence and the reader uses these strategies to evaluate the influence. It is the author's responsibility to use rhetorical strategies in a way that influences without manipulation. It is the reader's responsibility to consciously make decisions based on the author's arguments.

If writer and reader fail to "meet minds," the text fails to communicate the message. In fact, successful books succeed on the grounds that the distance between the author and the reader is minimal. The author must succeed in creating a fictional world of values and beliefs that the reader can also believe in. If the writer unsuccessfully employs rhetorical strategies, the reader can reject the book, its author and its message. This fact shows how crucial it is for the author to establish fidelity between the reader's real world and the world of the text (Fisher 105). Fidelity pertains to how well the narrative represents "accurate assertions about social reality" (Fisher 105). Therefore, rhetorical strategies become crucial to ensuring successful and reliable relationships between author, text and reader.

Young adult dystopian fiction is an excellent vehicle for examining the relationships established in this narrative act because of the pressing challenges associated with writing about nihilism and despair to a young audience. A dystopia, by definition, portrays a nonexistent future society built on idealistic utopian dreams that have failed. Both the dystopia designed for the adult audience and that designed for the young adult audience expose an exaggerated view of society as it might be in the hypothetical future. Usually, this centers on a perversion of ideals such as equality and security. Technology, instead of being a

blessing, usually becomes a demonic device to ensure adherence to the rules of such a society. Dystopias are designed to be nightmarish. The nightmare is what convinces the reader that change should occur and this type of a future ought to be avoided.

As young adult authors recognize however, this nightmare may be too much for young adult readers. Scholarly articles that analyze the genre have focused extensively on the ethical and educational challenges associated with writing dystopias for young readers. Kay Sambell posits that the happy ending in a young adult dystopia is a staple in the genre functioning as a way to negotiate between hope for the audience and honesty for the plot (“Presenting the Case,” 173). However, a negotiation in favor of hope conflicts with the purposes associated with the genre. Sambell recognizes that the purposes of the genre are twofold: first, the literature cautions young readers about probable consequences of current human behaviors; second, it presents an urgent case for social change (163). Based on her statement, it is clear that young adult dystopian literature acts like all admonitory literature in suggesting a new moral course of action for young readers. Sambell notes that the purposes of this genre create complicated challenges for young adult writers who have felt the need to reconcile the dark truth of dystopia, while “maintaining a sharp focus on hope (often regarded as essential for the young)” (164). There is tension between a need to keep the dystopia real and a need to keep the audience safe. Negotiating the purposes of the literature with the pressures of being a writer for the young is what Sambell calls the young adult author’s “creative dilemma.” This ‘creative dilemma’ cannot be ignored. Each writer of a young adult dystopia necessarily encounters the ‘creative dilemma’ and must find a way to solve it.

The blending of hope and honesty that Sambell identified as a trend in young adult dystopian literature is difficult to achieve realistically. In the first scholarly book published

specifically on the topic of young adult dystopias by Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry entitled, *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), the text considers primarily questions of purpose and the pressures of writing for a young audience. This work is a collection of articles by scholars and authors such as Jack Zipes, Carrie Hintz, Elaine Ostry, Monica Hughes, Lois Lowry and Kay Sambell. Each scholar attempts to answer the problem of fidelity and audience by focusing on major novels in the field as case studies. Of the above young adult scholars, none considers rhetoric as a frame of reference to guide their criticism. And yet their work reveals rhetorical questions about this literature that have previously been unasked such as, “What rhetorical strategies do young adult authors employ to maintain the difficult balance between honesty and hope in their novels?” and “What roles do young adult authors create for their readers to accept and how do these roles promote hope in a dystopian world?” At the present time, the literary criticism highlights the author’s responsibilities to a text and marginalizes the importance of the audience’s responsibility to a text. This is something a rhetorical criticism would remedy as it reveals the interactive nature of young adult dystopias in a way not previously explored. Rhetoric, as a new critical perspective, would provide the reader with a fresh lens for interpreting and responding to the text. Rhetoric can explain how identifications are made and maintained as the young adult writer places the young adult reader in a hopeless world, and still convinces her that hope is not lost. In the case of young adult dystopian fiction, identification is often procured between the main protagonist and the young adult reader. Identification brings with it the suggestion of transformation (Blakesley 15). The adolescent in the story allows the adolescent reading the story to perform heroic action vicariously. The transformation of character and reader is achieved as both reach the happy ending at the end of a long and

arduous journey. Hope can reside in dystopia in this interactive identification between character and reader.

Because a rhetorical perspective implies interaction, it allows all parties involved to exercise agency. Agency ensures that the arguments of the text are made noncoercively and peacefully. Of course, this requires that both the author and the reader must consciously be aware of their responsibilities in the narrative act. According to Greg Clark, “Only when rhetoric is collaborative will it function ethically” (*Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation* 50). An understanding that a novel is a dialogue and not a one-way conversation will free the critic to understand more fully the role of hope in young adult dystopian fiction.

The purpose of this thesis is to go beyond the questions that literary critics have broached and answered in regard to this literature. It is my contention that these scholars have become very good at identifying *why* young adult authors resist hopelessness, but they rarely focus on *how* this is accomplished. Rhetoric can fill in the gap. While literary critics might resist rhetoric as a critical lens for examining a text, rhetoric is a viable and often more complete method for approaching literature because it recognizes the narrative act from the perspective of the reader as well as the author. Applying a rhetorical approach to literature is by no means indefensible. Booth argues that literature is inevitably rhetorical because it is persuasive. Rhetoric produces desires in the reader to feel or believe or act in a certain manner (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, xiv). A literary text is the author’s opportunity to convince the reader “how” she should live her life (*The Company We Keep* 17). In other words, rhetoric functions to persuade the reader to believe what the author believes. Young adult dystopian authors argue that a young adult character can act morally superior to the world around him and ultimately conquer that world. The message of a young adult

dystopian text centers on hope by offering power to the protagonist.¹ Through identification, this also suggests that the young adult reader has the same power as the protagonist. Hope is figured in the young adult—inside and outside the text.

The Project

This thesis traces the rhetorical implications behind the idea of identification through three textual case studies. Chapter one will analyze Madeleine L'Engle's novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. The analysis will examine the author's strategies used to incorporate hope in the text. Wayne Booth's text, *A Rhetoric of Fiction* will be used to show the heavy hand of the manipulative author throughout this text. Chapter two will take the study one step further by moving beyond the author to a more in-depth consideration of the reader in Lois Lowry's, *The Giver*. Booth suggests that we should "measure the value of stories in the same way we measure value in people" (*The Company We Keep* 70). Using this metaphor of friendship, I will analyze the friendship between Lowry and her young readers. While chapter one focuses more on how hope is maintained through the *author's rhetorical strategies*, chapter two focuses on how hope is maintained through the *reader's role* in this collaborative process of meaning making. Chapter three will consider M.T. Anderson's controversial text, *Feed*. Because this novel breaks many of the standard conventions of the genre, including the lack of a happy ending, it will need to be considered more carefully. *Feed* is a wonderfully written, awful story that unflinchingly leads the reader into complete dystopia. Everything and everyone the reader builds trust in deteriorates in Anderson's conclusion. And yet, from the authorial strategies to the roles created for the reader, it is clear who the hope in this novel is centered on—the young adult reader. Despite the nightmarish plot, hope is still embodied in the young adult.

¹ The heroic protagonist is a general trend established in young adult dystopian literature. Chapter three of this work will examine *Feed*, a novel that resists this trend in interesting and significant ways.

The role Anderson creates for his young reader entails infinitely more responsibility than L'Engle's or Lowry's novels require.

The final chapter will consider the ethical implications of a rhetorical understanding of the text. Each of these novels will be rhetorically analyzed equating rhetoric with identification and narrative tools with rhetorical strategies. Through this analysis, a rhetorical approach reveals that rhetoric is value-laden. Meeting minds implies that readers and authors assess and agree with the values presented in a novel. In this process, the author has always had a space in the criticism. A rhetorical approach will place more responsibility on the reader. Adam Zachary Newton in his text, *Narrative Ethics*, suggests that, "Literary texts demand judgment from their interpreters" (10). Surely, this process requires a consciousness on the part of all involved in the narrative act. As a result, a binding of teller, story and reader follows. At issue in this study is the consideration of what follows from viewing a narrative as a dynamic exchange between text, author and reader. The stories we examine participate in not just telling the story, but in serving as the rope of human connectivity.

Together these case studies illustrate a central point of a rhetorical approach to narrative: storytelling is an act of forming alliances. Not only the author, but also the reader will be involved in the critical process. The reader becomes more than just a spectator of the author's rhetoric; the reader is a fully involved member of the interpretive and evaluative process. Interestingly enough, when the reader is considered as playing a part in the drama of a literary argument, the text takes on a new level of meaning and a new character is added to the drama.

CHAPTER ONE: THE AUTHOR'S HEAVY HAND

In short, the author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. Whether its particular forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question, a question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules We must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 20)

A Wrinkle in Time is a classic young adult dystopian novel that has received much praise and criticism over the years since its publication in 1962 by Madeleine L'Engle. The novel focuses on the Murry family. The young protagonist, Meg Murry is a socially awkward twelve-year-old who considers herself an outsider to the small community she lives in. Her father, a famous scientist, has been working for the U.S. government on the concept of traveling in the fifth dimension of time and has disappeared. The novel follows Meg as she journeys with her friend Calvin and younger brother Charles Wallace outside the boundaries of our world to save her father and counteract the forces of evil that hold him hostage. Of course, there are others—a centaur, heavenly spirits, octopus-like creatures, monsters and demons, a living brain, a whole showcase of alien beings—involved in the plot.

Even a short synopsis of the novel reveals one of the problems of science-fiction/fantasy, the plot sounds ridiculous outside of the boundaries of the book, which is why the author must work extra hard to ensure the reader's engagement in the journey. Booth suggests that the influence of the author over the reader will not be accepted if the author cannot provide enough support for the fictional world. The reader will see through

the plot. So rhetorical strategies become crucial to ensure the reader's engagement in the text. L'Engle's fictional dystopia works to persuade the reader that hope is possible in a hopeless world. A rhetorical analysis of this novel reveals that hope is kept at the center of the text through authorial guidance, identification, and the archetypal heroine. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal how the author uses these strategies to induce the reader to participate in the text. The meaning of the text is forged by both the author and the reader together. The author needs the reader to bring her creative work to life.

Authorial Guidance

The need to 'keep' the reader suggests that authors can't just reveal a story. All narratives require the reader to engage with and accept the norms of the fictional world. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth offers a clearer view of the method behind obtaining the reader's acceptance. According to Booth, while an author "can choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear" (20). Readers can infer the author's persona, or what Booth calls the "implied author" through a text. The implied author is "the ideal, literary created version of the real man . . . the sum of his own choices" (75). The implied author shapes the reader's responses to a story through influence. In other words, the implied author influences readers to accept the values they commend and to condemn the values they criticize. We can infer characteristics of the implied author through a look at how the narrator functions in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

The Narrator

According to Gerard Hauser, an author should provide her reader with guidance for understanding the values and codes of conduct presented in the plot of the story (194). L'Engle guides her reader through the use of a narrator (Hauser 194). The need for a narrator to help the reader accept the text is showcased by the characterization of Meg. The

reader's first impression of Meg Murry is not exactly ideal. In just the first few pages alone, we learn that Meg is scared of her attic room during storms, she does not do well in school, she gets into fights, and she is insolent to her teachers. The list continues—Meg doesn't exactly appear to be the girl you would want to make friends with. But L'Engle wants to guarantee the reader's protection of Meg. She needs the reader to like Meg. One way she accomplishes this is through the narrator.

The narrator's comments ensure that the reader orders her values to match the narrator's in a manner that protects Meg from criticism. Burke identified that because of the distance between human beings, the need to establish and recreate an ordering of values is essential to agreement between reader and author (25). Walter Fisher supported Burke's point by recognizing that "Humans are not identical with one another, nor are their valuing's" (114). Therefore, the novel must forge a hierarchy of values that the reader can share with the author. Booth said that a good author must "know how to transform his private vision...into something essentially public" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 395). In the 'fight' scene described below, Meg is placed in a hierarchy of values that make her a morally superior person:

And on the way home from school, walking up the road with her arms full of books, one of the boys had said something about her 'dumb baby brother.' At this she'd thrown the books on the side of the road and tackled him with every ounce of strength she had, and arrived home with her blouse torn and a big bruise under one eye. (4)

The reader may mistakenly feel that this story is being told descriptively, without the author influencing the story. This is a mistaken view. The narrator makes several choices that require a realignment of values. In this passage two conflicting values are presented—peace

and loyalty. The comment “dumb baby brother” incites feelings of family loyalty, while the act of aggression incites feelings of justice. The reader may have been taught to value peaceful negotiations between conflicting parties, but family loyalty is presented as the ultimate value and Meg is forgiven for fighting with “every ounce of strength she had” in defense of Charles Wallace. The rhetorical strategies used that ensure the correct ordering of values are subtle. The boy who makes the rude comment is given no name and no voice in this story. The narrator chooses to present him one-dimensionally. He becomes simply a bully, bent on making the lives of others miserable. Sympathy for Meg can be heightened by withholding comments from this other character. Furthermore, while Meg’s actions aren’t exactly perfect, she is made the ‘defender’ in the fight and not the aggressor. After all, she did not begin the fight; she was provoked. The author defines the ordering of values (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 178) and Meg’s values are acceptable to the reader. Her motives preserve her moral integrity and rescue her from critique.

The reader must judge Meg accurately according to this system of norms presented by the text or else the story fails. In this instance, Meg’s actions shine in comparison with the actions of the bully. Her chief fault in this situation of being ‘too’ quick to defend her brother is placed in a setting where she is easily forgiven. In the event that the reader may still disagree with Meg’s defensive tendencies, the narrator describes the big bruise under her eye to ensure the resistant reader that punishment has been given and justice exacted. The narrator has left no gap in this short episode. There is almost no way to disagree with Meg’s response to the bully. So, as long as the narrator guarantees that we agree with Meg’s actions and motives behind her actions, she becomes a character the reader sympathizes with and wants to travel with for two hundred pages. We like Meg. She is perhaps even more appealing for her impetuosity and imperfections.

Point of view is another useful rhetorical strategy. Authors can reveal character through the choice of perspective used. Booth suggests, “The author’s presence will be obvious on every occasion when he moves into or out of a character’s mind—when he ‘shifts his point of view’” (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 17). Throughout the novel, the narrator allows two points of view to exist, the narrator’s third person omniscient view and Meg’s first person voice. At the beginning of the story, Meg is given only a very small percentage of the telling of the plot. In young adult literature, this is a departure from the standard first person viewpoint used to secure the authentic young adult voice. This is intentional. According to Booth, the “need [for reinforcing rhetoric] increases whenever there is likelihood of crippling disagreement with the reader” (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 179). First of all, since Meg is potentially an unlikable character, the greater use of a narrator’s voice can alleviate some of the problems that might occur until the reader can decide to like Meg. Secondly, when Meg is offered the opportunity to speak, it is usually in the form of self-debasement. She is the one most heavily critical of her own actions. She calls herself “a delinquent,” and “a monster” repeatedly (4, 6). These instances act as direct apologies for her actions and serve the purpose of obtaining reader sympathy. Reader sympathy works for Meg instead of against her.

There would have to be many breaks in the point of view since Meg cannot be wholly trusted to tell this story. The introduction clearly lays her out to be a character immersed in the problems of adolescent awkwardness. As Warner states, “Meg is emotionally tense and impatient” (12). Her quick emotional responses to the actions around her make her credibility somewhat suspect and require the narrator to lead the reader more directly. The narrator counteracts the question of reliability through third person stage directions. For example, in one short episode, Meg is confronted by the principal, Mr.

Jenkins for bad behavior in class. The narrator describes Meg's responses to the principal as "rude," "sulky," "wary," "uncooperative," and "antagonistic" (25-27). Surely, we could look at the portrayal of Mr. Jenkins to see how Meg's depiction is positively counteracted in this episode, but it isn't necessary. The narrator has couched this story of Meg's defiance around two stories of the interaction she has in her family. In both the episode preceding Meg's interaction with the principal and the episode following, Meg is depicted as a motherly figure who protects and looks out for her younger brother Charles Wallace. The sequencing of events offers the reader an inside view of Meg's worth, while also making sure that he objectively looks at her faults. Knowing both Meg's good and bad traits allows the reader to sympathize openly, while also maintaining objectivity.

The analysis of the narrator's involvement in the story introduces questions of distance between the narrator and Booth's implied author. According to Booth, "One cannot experience a fiction without inferring . . . certain qualities in the character of its maker" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 113). How does the author feel about the beliefs and values of the narrator? Is the narrator reliable? Does the narrator share the implied author's beliefs? The novel suggests that the narrator and the implied author share the same moral ground, possibly even the same physical ground. For one, the narrator in *A Wrinkle in Time* is not dramatized and thus seems less distanced from the author. And two, both narrator and implied author work to support the moral ground of the work. They share a common value system. The identification forged between narrator and implied author seems to highlight a trope in young adult dystopian fiction. Reliable narrators that the reader can trust and accept are the prevalent strategy. Perhaps, the author rejects an unreliable narrator because the young reader may mistake this unreliability and miss the moral message of the work.

Whatever the reason, in this text, the distance between the narrator and the implied author is very slim. In other words, the implied author and the narrator identify with each other.

Moral Ground

One way to figure out where the narrator and the implied author stand in relation to the norms and values presented in the book is to find the moral center of the novel. Richard Weaver suggests that “the rhetorical content . . . which the speaker habitually uses is the key to his primary view of existence” (55). For Weaver, rhetorical content refers to the dominant form of argumentation the rhetor uses. This could include the method used to convey the message or the message itself. According to Weaver, a rhetor’s form of argumentation reveals his codes of values and beliefs. In other words, the rhetorical content can reveal the author’s moral view. In this story, the moral center is discovered in the characters of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, ethereal, heavenly beings who guide the children on their quest. Their moral authority is obvious through other character relationships. When Mrs. Which announces to the Happy Medium, “Wwee Arre Hherre,” the Happy Medium “curtsied deeply” in respect of the three beings (85). The mere presence of these three beings causes Meg, Calvin and Charles Wallace to look at them with awe and respect.

The moral authority of the three “Mrs. W’s” is further strengthened through the alliance of the ‘good guys.’ The ethos of these three characters is firmly established by aligning them with well-known and morally principled historical figures. When Mrs. Whatsit attempts to explain how the entire universe is working to fight against evil, she says, “All through the universe it’s being fought, all through the cosmos . . . some of our very best fighters have come right from your own planet” (88). Then there is a list of some of the most well known ‘fighters’ in this battle: Jesus, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo,

Shakespeare, Bach, Einstein and many others (89). These figures represent many of the most creative and wise individuals of our time. By aligning these well-known and well-respected figures with Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, good becomes concrete instead of an abstraction.

The three “Mrs. W’s” allegorically represent the idea of the creative artist/individual. “All wisdom figures are allegorical; specifically in the L’Engle worlds, the allegorical significance is religious and moral” (Warner 10). Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which represent wisdom embodied. Similar to the Three Muses, these characters guide the three children on their journey. The reader is encouraged to recognize the authority of these three guides.

In an effort to more firmly clarify the morally correct side for the reader, good is juxtaposed by evil. IT, a disembodied brain, also resembles wisdom embodied. The brain is an obvious symbol for knowledge. But this wisdom is soon revealed to be tyrannical. The tyranny can be analyzed, not just in the plot, but in the ‘telling’ of the plot. The children are sent into the planet of Camazotz to attempt to rescue their father. IT resides on this planet. The portrayal of the town symbolizes the evils of IT’s tyranny:

Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door In front of all the houses children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing ball As the skipping rope hit the pavement, so did the ball Down came the ropes. Down came the balls. Over and over again. Up. Down. All in rhythm. All identical. Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers. (103)

The town metaphorically represents IT's moral view of life. The rhetorical figures of anaphora and repetition restate a rhythm that is difficult for the reader to break from. The pattern becomes horrifying. "Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers," echoes the incessant rhythm of the bouncing balls and jumping ropes. The pattern rhetorically represents the argument because the rhythm limits freedom. The reader concludes that wisdom without agency is horrific and crippling. "The planet of Camazotz proves to be the antithesis" of the good, represented by strong, creative individuals like Jesus, Leonardo da Vinci and Bach (Estes 245). The landscape is L'Engle's symbol for the ills of the world caused by a lack of individuality and creativity. The implications are clear. Individuality is hierarchically greater than coercive equality. IT's moral view is debunked rhetorically, not just on a plot level, but on a sentence level as well.

A Wrinkle in Time does not allow any ambiguity between darkness and light to exist. While IT represents wisdom controlled, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which represent wisdom chosen. The alignment of values is clearly laid out through juxtaposition. Anyone who aligns with the three "Mrs. W's" is morally superior. This applies to all the characters of the story: Meg, Calvin, Charles Wallace, the implied author and the narrator. All hold the same moral ground. The reader is then given the choice to follow or reject the moral ground. Because of the overt dichotomy between good and evil, the choice is reduced significantly for the reader. According to Walter Fisher, the narrative must offer good reasons to produce belief and action: "Good reasons are elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice" offered in the novel (107). The reader is given good reasons—figured by the ethos of the good and the juxtaposition of good and evil—and strongly encouraged to align herself with 'good.' In L'Engle's novel, the hierarchy of values is one that everyone can then share within and without the text—author, characters, and

reader. When the reader chooses to align herself with the ‘good’ figured in the novel, hope is further established and maintained in the dystopian world.

Identification

In addition, the relationship L’Engle establishes between the reader and Meg ensures that a degree of hope remains fixed in the dystopian world. While Meg is an imperfect being, through the devices of the narrator and a prolonged inner view of her psyche, L’Engle ensures that the reader will travel with her rather than stand against her (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 245). We must like Meg. So, L’Engle sets out to ensure total identification between reader and the protagonist. According to Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, identification is the strategy that an author uses to decrease the distance that inevitably separates every human being (38). Identification between the protagonist and the reader would solve the problem of distance separating those involved in the narrative act. Total identification between Meg and reader is necessary for the reader to agree with the moral ground of the work. Because of this necessity, L’Engle uses several strategies to build identification. We come to know Meg as an admirable person, despite, or perhaps because of her faults.

Meg is ideally suited for the young adult reader. Adolescence is not just a period of change and growth; it is a period of awkwardness, instability and insecurity. Meg is all of the above. Even Charles Wallace notes, “Meg has it tough....She’s not really one thing or the other” (33). Meg simply doesn’t belong anywhere. She says, “I hate being an oddball. It’s hard on Sandy and Dennys, too. I don’t know if they’re really like everybody else, or if they’re just able to pretend they are. I try to pretend, but it isn’t any help” (12-13). Her inability to fit is a trend in many young adult novels (Hintz, “Monica Hughes,” 257). The reasons for this trend seem to center on the need for identification between reader and

character. Identification is not achieved by the author's strategies alone. Richard Peck, a young adult author suggested that "at every age people read fiction for the shock of recognition" (10). In other words, readers search for themselves. Meg's tendency to act without thinking, to respond emotionally to situations and to experience quick mood changes not only appeals to the common young adult experience, but also appeals to our sense of Meg's complexities. Paterson suggests that "Children do not go to novels looking for role models They go to understand themselves and to understand others" (*The Invisible Child* 139). Meg's character works for the young adult because she could be a real life young adult. She is more than a cardboard cutout. She is a three-dimensional character with good and bad qualities.

Because of an ambiguous overlap between the years of childhood and adulthood, adolescence is often a period where teens feel they have no definite role ("Adolescence" 1). Meg's journey is not solely about saving the world from Evil; this novel is also about Meg coming to terms with the world and herself. According to Carrie Hintz, the young adult dystopian novel advances "a particular type of utopian pedagogy: one in which political action is addressed within the developmental narrative of adolescence" ("Monica Hughes" 253). In other words, Meg's pursuit of an authentic and autonomous self is just part of the experience of growing up. Therefore, both character and reader are engaged in similar battles of adolescence and growth. Burke said, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, imagining, identifying your ways with his" (55). Meg epitomizes the trauma of the young adult experience. The reader and Meg jointly share growing pains. Empathy is the result of this shared experience and results in identification between protagonist and reader. There must be this common ground for identification to occur (Burke 45). The common ground for Meg and the reader is the

experience of adolescence and the search for freedom. Freedom seems to figure as a value with supreme value for young adults.

L'Engle's argument against dystopian coercion meshes perfectly with the metaphor for freedom figured both as a political issue and a developmental issue in the novel. As Meg pursues autonomy and as she fights against the political tyranny of IT, freedom is central to the negotiation. This conflation of the personal and political situation is extended to the young adult reader. The fact that political and social change is centered in the young adult developmental experience acts as a "metaphor for the kind of change that any society goes through as it progresses toward utopia or away from dystopian worlds" (Hintz 263). Susan Cooper suggests that the creation of identification comes from a sense "of the parallel" (43). Identification occurs in this novel because the protagonist's pursuit of freedom in both developmental and political realms mirrors the reader's pursuit of freedom and autonomy in the real world. The reader and the character have merged through identification.

Heroism

As Meg works to promote freedom in the dystopian world, the reader journeys with her. This joint effort to rid the world of its bad influence is one of the chief ways that hope can exist in the text. Together, reader and character will create a new utopia. Obviously, this is a strategy L'Engle uses to promote hope in the dystopian world. Hope is figured in the young adult protagonist who can defeat dystopia. Interestingly enough, young adulthood becomes a metaphor for heroic superiority in this novel.

In general, young adult dystopias function to critique the adult social world. In that world, the child characters are "pitted against a powerful adult regime" (Sambell, "Carnivalizing the Future," 250). Children in *A Wrinkle in Time* are figured as the only beings capable of changing the dark world of Camazotz. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs.

Which send Meg, Calvin and Charles Wallace into the city in an attempt to rescue Mr. Murry. Unfortunately, Charles Wallace falls a victim to IT's trap. When a council is gathered to determine what to do to rescue Charles, Meg has the unique abilities and capacities for saving her brother. Meg is the only one (195). As she accepts the task she states:

I'm the one who's closest to him. Father's been away for so long, since Charles Wallace was a baby. They don't know each other. And Calvin's only known Charles for such a little time . . . but—oh, I see, I see, I understand, it has to be me. There isn't anyone else. (196)

Her ability to act as the heroine is not solely the result of her strong relationship with Charles Wallace, it is also her childhood. Meg's reliance on emotion—love, hope and trust—acts as the perfect foil for IT. In a sense, childhood is figured as the “antidote to corrupt adulthood” (Sambell 252). And yet, Meg's decision to independently battle IT—her acceptance of responsibility—makes her more of an adult. The tension between childhood and adulthood is evident. Meg, in her adolescence, becomes the bridge.

Ironically, Meg becomes the character who acts most courageously, perhaps because her fears are the most exposed to the reader. Meg is a hero. She triumphs over IT in her ability to love Charles Wallace. In the final scene of the book, Meg travels into Camazotz and the lair of IT to rescue her brother. She comes to the conclusion that the only way to withstand IT is to represent everything he stands against. So, she offers up her love to her brother Charles Wallace. “Charles. Charles, I love you. My baby brother who always takes care of me. Come back to me, Charles Wallace, come away from IT, come back, come home. I love you, Charles” (208). The ordering of values in this novel places love as superior to all else. In Walter Fisher's mind, this is superior to any other ordering. He

suggests, “I would place love as the highest virtue or motivation in life....Love provides the ground of being and is the motive that should inform all others in human decision making and action” (136). In other words, Fisher suggests that placing love as the superior value in the novel is something the reader cannot argue against. Meg’s capacity for love provides an upbeat coda to the dark world of Camazotz, placing her as a character of moral authority.

Hope is maintained in the plot through Meg’s heroic actions. She alone redresses the evils of the dystopian world and creates the space for a world with a new hierarchy of values to exist. She ensures that everything reaches a state of happily ever after. Charles Wallace is saved. Death is averted. The family is reunited. The Murry family is able to go home to a place of new and unique beauty, free from evil. And since the reader has been following Meg’s journey, the reader is also a participant in the heroic adventure and foil of IT and is offered moral authority. The reader can rejoin the real world armed to redress its evils.

The Argument

Since I am trying to evaluate the quality and validity of the influence the book exerts over the reader, a look at the text’s major message is in order. Walter R. Fisher, in his critical text *Human Communication as Narration*, suggests that all communication should be viewed as narrative and sets up a paradigm to guide listeners/readers or viewers in interpreting and judging any communicative act as narration. In his book, he suggests that the first step in testing out an interpretation is to determine the message of the communication, and then, determine if the message is justified by the rhetorical strategies, such as narration and characterization (175). Through our study of the rhetorical strategies of L’Engle, the message is clearly that through her individuality and courage, Meg can be and is an active

agent of social change. In other words, she makes the happy ending possible. This argument is central to this text and is generally the argument of young adult dystopian texts.

It would be easy to stop there and evaluate the message for its fidelity to our own experience, but the message would be missing the greater part of the argument. This argument is only part of an enthymeme. An enthymeme is an argument with a segment omitted (Lanham 65). The reason that the argument can be easily identified as only partial is because the young adult reader is not a part of the final conclusion. And through the analysis of rhetorical strategies, the young adult reader always has a central place.

In tracing the enthymeme's premises, we can reveal its full conclusion. The first premise of the novel rests on the definition of rhetoric as identification. In order for the author to convince the reader to share the codes of values and beliefs extended in the story, identification has to occur between Meg and the reader. Therefore, the first premise suggests that Meg and the reader are linked; they are forged through identification. The second premise is the most obvious, previously stated above, that Meg is able to change her world for the better. Once the reader can see these two premises together, the conclusion easily falls into place. The reader and Meg are merged through identification. Meg acts heroically and changes her world for the better. Therefore, the young adult reader has power to be an active agent of future social change. In the process of supplying the missing pieces to the enthymeme, a new conclusion is revealed and the reader becomes a cocreator of the meaning of the text. Hauser suggested that enthymemic arguments are "coconstructed by audience and rhetor" (125). Furthermore, this form of argumentation is very persuasive because it requires audience interaction. According to Hauser, "Enthymemes actively join the audience with the rhetor in the process of supplying premises that support their shared

inferences . . . the enthymeme works as a self-persuasive appeal” (125). In supplying the missing piece of the argument, the reader persuades herself to agree with the text’s message.

If we continued to follow Fisher’s paradigm, we would then evaluate whether or not the message rings true in itself and finally whether or not it rings true to our own world and experiences (175). I can suggest that this message is likely to ring true in the minds of L’Engle’s readers, if only because it places the readers as heroes. Whether it rings true for each reader against their own beliefs, attitudes and values . . . well, that’s up to the reader.

If we examine the ways the author induces identifications with characters, we can infer the deeper meaning of the text. By uncovering the argument of the text, is it possible to see how rhetoric is truly collaborative and interactive. Through the analysis of *A Wrinkle in Time*, L’Engle indeed argues that child readers can become active agents of future social change. L’Engle trusts her audience with the responsibility of making the world a better place. The superiority of the young adult’s placement in the real world makes the text’s argument justifiably appealing to her young audience. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth proposes that authors imagine ideal audiences for their stories and readers correspondingly were willing to accept the roles assigned to them (397). Because L’Engle has imagined an audience of the utmost integrity, courage and talents, she succeeds in winning her readers to join her in the journey of the text. We can see that rhetoric is, as Burke suggests, “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation” (41, 43). The reader is surely willing to cooperate in such a noble task.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING FRIENDSHIP IN LOWRY'S *THE GIVER*

[A]ll literary work is an appeal....You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it. Jean-Paul Sartre (as cited in Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 124)

I have previously suggested that there is a fine line in young adult literature between telling it how it is and drowning the reader in darkness. This is particularly true for young adult dystopian literature—literature that envisages the world as it may become, usually with terrible results. For young adult authors, there is great deal of tension between choosing to honestly portray a hopeless world or to integrate hope in the text and make sure the light never goes out. In the previous chapter, we explored the rhetorical strategies that Madeleine L'Engle uses to imbed hope in the text. The analysis focused more directly on the author's role in the rhetorical situation highlighting certain authorial choices such as perspective and characterization. In this chapter, I will look more in depth at the reader's role in a storytelling scenario through a look at Lois Lowry's novel, *The Giver*. This novel is an ideal case study because it relies on the reader to bring closure to the text. Placing the audience as a central member of the narrative experience clears up the misconception that the author lives at the center of the rhetorical event and the audience waits passively to receive the author's appeals.

The story is about an eleven-year-old boy named Jonas. He lives in a wonderful town that emphasizes principles of equality and security. Violence and hunger are absent. Peace and contentment are abundant. But when Jonas is assigned his vocation at the Ceremony of the Twelves, his task opens his eyes to the haunting reality of his world. Jonas is selected to

be the community's Receiver of Memories. Each day Jonas visits the Giver, the previous Receiver of Memories, who transmits to Jonas memories of the past. At first these memories are pleasant, of snow, color, family, love and sunshine, but then the Giver must transmit more difficult memories of war, physical pain and hunger. Jonas begins to understand that his community has sacrificed "choice and freedom for control and predictability" (Campbell 719). He figures as a scapegoat in his community by accepting all of the memories of the past. In this role, Jonas learns that sameness is not worth the sacrifice. His realization is undeniable when he views a "release." People who do not fit the community's needs are "released," a euphemism for euthanasia (Levy 52). Jonas is horrified and that horror causes him to act. With the Giver, he plans his escape from the community. Taking only a bicycle, a little food and his foster brother Gabe, Jonas travels to Elsewhere. *The Giver* doesn't reveal whether he makes it or not for a surety (although *The Messenger*, a companion and sequel, clears up the mystery).

Before exploring the true ambiguity of the ending, it should be noted that Lowry intended for the ending to be happy. In response to the question, "Is it an optimistic ending? Does Jonas survive?" Lowry responded, "I will say that I find it an optimistic ending. How could it not be an optimistic ending, a happy ending, when that house is there with its lights on and music is playing?" (Lowry, "A Reader's Guide," 6). Lowry, along with L'Engle and others, has chosen to reward resistance and provide hope for the readers. This hopeful coda to Jonas's dystopian world follows a trend similar to that established by L'Engle.

The audience for *The Giver* is not offered a passive role. The ambiguity of the story allows the reader to exercise freedom in creating his or her own sense of closure. And not

all readers take the same path. There is no simpler way to showcase this phenomenon than to talk about Lowry's ending and offer some reader responses and interpretations.

In the end of the book, Jonas is exhausted and baby Gabe is near death. They are starving and the winter cold is upon them. Jonas has to drop the bicycle as he trudges up a hill. Just at the point of giving up, he reaches the top of the hill where there is a sled. He gets on the sled and rides toward Christmas lights and music and even the faint suggestion of music behind him. The end. That's it. In her review of the book, Patty Campbell asks, "Is it a dream? Are they already dead? Or will they find a new life? Will the community they left behind reshape itself in a more human mold? Lowry refuses to provide a tidy ending" (721). Readers feel the jolt of unresolved closure and attempt to fill in the gaps for themselves. In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech for the novel, Lowry reveals "a few endings which are the right endings for a few children" (419).

From a sixth grader: 'I think that when they were traveling they were traveling in a circle. When they came to 'Elsewhere' it was their old community, but they had accepted the memories and all the feelings that go along with it.'

From another: '...At the very end of the book, when Jonas and Gabe reached the place that they knew as Elsewhere, you described Elsewhere as if it were Heaven.'

Finally, from one seventh-grade boy: 'I was really surprised that they just died at the end. That was a bummer. You could of made them stay alive, I thought.' (420)

Lowry has expertly woven one of the central themes of the novel—choice and the freedom to choose, right into the reader’s experience with the book. Many authors have commented on the importance of creating a space for the reader to bring her own experience to a book. Katharine Paterson said, “The author has no right to tell a reader how to read her book. It is the privilege of the reader to discover what a book means for his or her particular life” (*A Sense of Wonder* 160). Lowry herself suggests that children bring their own life to a book and such is happening, “as I hoped it would happen—with *The Giver*” (Newbery 419). These authors recognize that readers are agents. They are free to listen to the text, agree with the text and even turn the text off.

There just simply isn’t a right ending. Lowry couldn’t have been more specific about this fact when she said, “There’s a right one [ending] for each of us, and it depends on our own beliefs, our own hopes” (Newbery 419). Lowry’s novel is a perfect exploration of the centrality of audience because she included the reader in the creation of meaning. In this book, the reader is required as co-author to bring closure for good or evil. So, when we ask the question, “How did Lowry find an honest hope to share with a reader?” the answer is that she allowed the young adult reader to supply the hope in the text.

Gerard A. Hauser’s portrayal of audience in his work, *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory* suggests a clearer look at how and why the audience must play a dynamic role in the narrative event. He suggests that “a defining feature of a rhetorical situation is the audience” (48). Audiences are not inactive recipients of the author’s rhetoric. A rhetorical understanding of audience insists that the reader must be “capable of being influenced” and “capable of mediating change” (Hauser 49). In other words, the narrative succeeds when the author offers the reader a role that he can fill.

The reader has a job to do when opening a book. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth traces the many rhetorical strategies an author has access to when convincing a reader to take part in his fictional text. *The Company We Keep* is a companion text to this critical work, but instead of focusing on the author, Booth focuses on the reader. In this text, Booth identifies why we (readers and critics) should do a rhetorical and ethical criticism and what is at stake if we don't. In order to explain his approach to reading a text, Booth uses the metaphor of friendship. "I suggest that we arrive at our sense of value in narratives in precisely the way we arrive at our sense of value in person: by experiencing them in an immeasurably rich context of others that are both like and unlike them" (70). In other words, the reader should evaluate the text the same way he evaluates a person. This broadening of rhetoric and text suggests that rhetoric has the irenic purpose of understanding, knowing and identifying with others. Burke's theory of rhetoric as identification agrees. Rhetoric is peaceful and friendly. Rhetoric reduced to conflict and coercion is a perverse version of the term.

Besides freeing the term from some of its derogatory uses, this friendship metaphor also suggests a better sense of Booth's definition of rhetoric through a clearer sense of how it functions. Booth's projects seem to focus on "how communication can function as a process of mutual inquiry" (Clark, "Wayne Booth," 49). In *Modern Dogma*, he describes rhetoric as "meeting minds" (1512). This metaphor is an extenuation of Burke's idea of identification. It further suggests how communication strives to create relationships. All parties of the narrative act, author and reader, should be actively involved in coming together. If either the author or reader fails to fulfill their role, minds can't meet.

It is easy to see that the reader does have an important responsibility to the text, but there has to be some direction for evaluating the influence. What are the grounds of

determining if Lowry's friendship is worthwhile? How do we decide if *The Giver* is the type of company we should be keeping for 179 pages? Booth's work offers guidelines on how we can measure the friendship offered to us through a text. In order to evaluate Lowry's friendship, Booth suggests that the questions a reader might ask include, "What is the moral ground of the work? How is it expressed? What moral course of action does the book encourage me to enact?" (Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 136-140). "Should I believe this narrator? Should I accept the implied author among the small circle of my true friends?" (39). These are just a few of the questions that we will pursue as we open the pages further into *The Giver* to evaluate its friendship.

The Message

Booth said that novels are inevitably didactic (*Company We Keep*, 151). While, *The Giver* does not consciously moralize or lecture, it does present an ordering of values that reveals the message and moral center of the work. Understanding this hierarchy of values is central to evaluating what type of friendship Lowry is offering us.

When the reader first opens the text of *The Giver*, he is confronted with a seemingly normal reality. Lowry purposely presents details of Jonas's world that win our approval. For example, within the first two chapters of the book, we learn that Jonas lives in a family unit with a father, mother and a little sister. There are no single-parent families. Families have certain regular rituals including eating meals together and sharing feelings and dreams with each other. Each person is assigned to a vocation best suited to his or her individual aptitude. The community lives a very ordered lifestyle. There are rules and clear consequences for breaking the rules. Jonas's community has a seductive appeal—it sounds cheerful, ordinary, safe.

But gradually Lowry begins adding details that hint at something off balance. Campbell suggests, "Lowry's skill at depicting cheerful, ordinary reality...makes the revelation of the sinister difference in this alternate reality so chilling" (717). For example, we learn that the family units are not biological family units. There are only a few women called to be birth mothers. Everyone else has to apply to have children. Spouses are chosen for each individual by a committee based on an application process. The family is more of an earned privilege or acquisition than a right. This process of gaining a family begins to hint at the unfamiliar. As a further example, Jonas describes to his parents a dream he has where he wants to give a girl his age a bath (36). His parents identify his feelings, the "wanting" as "stirrings" and prescribe him a pill that everyone in the community takes to prevent stirrings (37). Immersed in a culture where love is a common subject and teenagers are bent on establishing relationships and finding love, this response to liking a girl seems somewhat restrictive. But, while these ideas may not win the reader's approval, the reader is still unsuspecting of what truly lies at the heart of the community. The world is different and unfamiliar, but not unsettling. It is not until Jonas begins his apprenticeship with the Giver, that the truth is unfolded.

When trying to explain Jonas's new vocation to him, the Giver decides to transmit to him a memory. It is a memory of sledding downhill. Jonas is overjoyed. He, and the reader along with him, begin asking the questions, "Well, why don't we still have snow?" The Giver identifies "Sameness" as the reason behind the loss of these things (84). As Jonas receives more memories, we learn that his community has no sunshine, no snow, no weather (due to Climate Control). The community has no biological families, no grandparents, no twins. There are no colors. There are no deeper feelings. Love, joy, anger and pain cannot be

understood. The feelings are shallow. We begin to understand that the community has traded differences for sameness, freedom for security.

It is at this point that Lowry throws the real wrench into the storyline. After all, a world without differences is not without its appeal. Even Lowry says of the book:

I tried to make Jonas's world seem familiar, comfortable, and safe, and I tried to seduce the reader. I seduced myself along the way. It did feel good, that world. I got rid of all the things I fear and dislike: all the violence, prejudice, poverty, and injustice; and I even threw in good manners as a way of life because I liked the idea of it. (Newbery 418)

Certainly, a world without pain or violence has a universal sense of rightness and goodness about it. But, the sacrifice entailed in the creation of a world devoid of violence, prejudice and poverty is ultimately inferior to a world of agency and Lowry had to ensure that her readers would truly see that sameness encourages a stifling of differences that is malignant and evil. To do so, she reveals the meaning of "release" in a horrifying manner.

In one of his sessions with the Giver, Jonas mentions that his father, a Nurturer (a caretaker of babies), has been given the assignment to "release" a baby, born a twin. Twins aren't allowed in the community, so one of them has to be "released." At this point, Jonas has been taught to think of "release" as being sent outside the community to Elsewhere. For the very old, "release" is a celebration. For the young, it is sad. For those in the middle, "release" is a punishment. The Giver offers to let him watch the video of the release. Jonas watches as his father weighs the two twins. He takes the smaller twin and inserts a needle in the forehead (149). Slowly, the baby "no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still" (150). From his new memories, Jonas recognizes this as death and he is absolutely horrified.

At this point, the reader should be horrified as well. Lowry intended for the reader to feel the same shock that Jonas feels. Morally and ethically in our world, killing the innocent is wrong. What provokes us even more is that Jonas's father, a man presented as a kind, caring, nurturing individual, is able to perform the vile deed so calmly.

Through this climatic moment of realization for Jonas, Lowry has revealed the community as a true dystopia and has established the moral ground of the work. We cannot agree with a society that kills the innocent to preserve the sanctity of order, control and sameness. Lowry has succeeded in portraying a hierarchy of values that her reader can agree with. The reader knows, Jonas knows and the Giver knows that regulated sameness is morally subordinate to difference and agency. The community has traded their color TVs for black and white versions. Maybe the black and white version is cheaper, but color is sacrificed.

Once the values are clearly ordered, the characters are easy to place within the fixed norms of the fictional world. As the only members of the community with any knowledge of what has been sacrificed, the Giver and Jonas maintain the highest ethical and morally sound ground. Everyone else is blurred in the background. After all, they have no real knowledge and thus cannot be responsible for the problems in this society. As the Giver suggests "They can't help it. *They know nothing*" (153). The only other individual in this text is the narrator. While, Jonas is the lead character, he is not the narrator. The narrator uses a third-person omniscient voice to capture Jonas's story, his thoughts and feelings. It is unnecessary to catalogue the entire book to determine where the narrator fits into the fixed norms of this text. Through the description of the baby's death, it is easy to discern that he (or she) is sympathetic to a world of choices. The narrator chooses words such as "helpless, motionless, numbly, darkness, bitter, ripping," to describe this inhumane act (152-53). Jonas

and the narrator react similarly in this scenario and throughout the book. In this episode, the narrator hints at the irony of a world that silently accepts violence in order to secure sameness.

If we were ever in doubt about the moral ground of her work, or even about the trustworthiness of the narrator, we could always read Lowry's own thoughts on the text to determine what moral course of action she encourages her readers to take. In her Newbery acceptance speech for the novel, "[W]e can't live in a walled world, in an 'only us, only now' world, where we are all the same and feel safe. We would have to sacrifice too much. The richness of color would disappear. Feelings for other humans would no longer be necessary. Choice would be obsolete" (418). She stresses the need to examine Elsewhere by describing it as an ethereal place, a place "that held their future and their past," a place "where families created and keep memories, where they celebrated love" (178). Jonas and the Giver are sure, and the reader is convinced likewise, that Elsewhere is good and welcoming (88). So, it appears that the characters, the narrator, the implied author and even the flesh-and-blood author agree, Elsewhere has a greater appeal than sameness. The character's responses and the narrator's responses to this fictional world are fixed by Lowry's manipulative hand. At this point, the reader alone is given the opportunity of choice.

After the moral ground is established, Booth's questions then lead to action. The reader is not solely a witness of this drama; she also plays a part. Because all books inevitably teach "how we should live," (17) Booth suggests that all readers should ask the question, "What moral course of action does the book encourage me to enact?" (*The Company We Keep*, 140). Jonas decides once you know the color version, you can't go back to black-and-white. "He knew he couldn't go back to the world of no feelings that he had lived in so long" (131). And so he makes his escape, leaving the Giver behind to help the community cope with the

memories that would be released to them. If Lowry has been successful at convincing the reader that Jonas's world has sacrificed too much, the reader will join Jonas on his journey and hope for a happy outcome. Certainly, the reader is offered an invitation to join Jonas. Booth encourages that not only should the reader ask, "What course of action does the book encourage me to enact," he suggests that the reader should decide whether or not this course of action is indeed ethical or not. Lowry's invitation to reject Jonas's world is open to the reader; she must decide if it should be accepted or not.

Finding Friends

Booth identified that one of the variables we use to measure a friendship is the "sheer amount of activity a narrative invites us to engage in" (*The Company We Keep*, 182). In other words, there are some novels that require the reader to take a back seat and enjoy the ride, and others that require fuller participation. Booth suggests, "There is a sharp difference between authors who imply that we readers are essentially their equals in the imaginative enterprise, because we are embarked on the same quest, and those who suggest that we are either their inferiors or their superiors" (*Company We Keep* 184). Lowry, in offering her readers a fair share in the 'imaginative enterprise,' leaves a great responsibility on their heads. Lowry allows the reader to act as an agent in the text. A reader could not feel inferior reading her text; there is too much to do. This is a gift of great responsibility and honor. Walter Lorraine, in his analysis of Lowry's work, suggests that:

She [Lowry] invites each reader to bring his or her personal experience to the story. In one sense her writing becomes more complete with the reader's participation—a true Gestalt in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Often provocative contradictions result, sometimes to the extent that

the protagonist dies or lives happily ever after, each reader being convinced of a different interpretation. (424)

Lowry's dystopia is a metaphor for comfort, for sameness, for familiarity. She is able to confront and counteract the problems of this world by offering the reader freedoms. Throughout the book's seductive portrayal of dystopia to its ambiguous ending, the reader is given an opportunity to make choices and take risks. Lowry doesn't correct her reader's interpretations of her ending. Hauser reminds us that a rhetorical understanding of the narrative situation offers the audience freedom to act independently of the author's strategies. The ambiguity of the ending is intentional—an invitation to interpret and respond to the text. She treats the reader like she treats herself; both have an equal share in bringing meaning to this text. As a result, author and reader collaborate in a more meaningful exchange, a truly mutual process of communication.

Following Jonas in his journey is not the only requirement placed on the reader. A rhetorical understanding of audience reveals the dialectical nature of narrative. According to Hauser, "rhetorical discourse is addressed communication . . . it speaks to an individual or group in particular . . . [and] it seeks a specifiable response from the audience" (48). In this case, Lowry addresses a young adult audience (although we surely have eavesdropping adults), and asks for a specifiable response from the audience. We traced Lowry's invitation by finding the moral ground of the work. There is more of a demand upon the reader than that she should just follow Jonas to Elsewhere. Lowry certainly suggests that agency should be celebrated in the real world as well. Her message applies inside and outside the text.

In order to ensure that her audience would be able to comply with this invitation to social action, Lowry works to persuade her audience that change is possible. Hauser suggests that "[P]eople in the audience must be capable of mediating change...when people think

they cannot influence the outcome, they are less likely to respond to messages; they become excluded from the audience” (Hauser 49). In order to ensure her audience’s inclusion, Lowry first of all provides Jonas as an example of being capable of mediating change. She then implies, through identification, that the young reader can also influence outcomes in their own stories. Furthermore, Lowry provides the reader with tools to meet this challenge. When Jonas is given his assignment as Receiver, he is told that he will need intelligence, integrity, courage and finally, he will need to acquire wisdom (62-63). These are the values that Jonas is encouraged to develop throughout the book in order to succeed in his task of changing his world. These values are the antithesis of the community’s, and therefore stand as the highest values to be developed. Lowry demands that her readers also develop intelligence, integrity, courage and wisdom in order to, like Jonas, make positive changes in the world.

Lowry’s novel is not for spectators only. The argument contained in the text also applies outside the text. Through the analysis of *The Giver*, Lowry is not different from L’Engle in arguing that child protagonists and readers can become active agents of future social change. Lowry trusts her audience with the responsibility of making the world a better place. Booth’s most pivotal question to ask a text follows from his sense of the relationship established between author and reader: “Is the pattern of life that this would-be friend offers one that friends might well pursue together?” (22). The reader is surely willing to cooperate with Lowry in fulfilling this assignment. *The Giver* has offered the reader the gift of valuable company.

The fictional worlds presented by L’Engle and Lowry provide a useful lens for discovering how hope is imbedded in a young adult dystopian text. The two novels are similar in message and in method. L’Engle and Lowry encourage the young adult to be an

active agent of social change by encouraging identification with the main protagonist who heroically overcomes the dystopian world. The next chapter is not as tidy. The hope figured in *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Giver* can be analyzed, but it is also obvious. In the next chapter, M.T. Anderson's novel requires a more subtle examination because hope is not easily found in this text. In fact, it may be absent altogether.

CHAPTER THREE: BLURRING BOUNDARIES

When we worry about bleak books, what we're really worrying about is the readiness of teenagers to face life's darkest corners. But what the popularity of these novels tells us is that many kids are already living there. (Mosle SM34).

In the *New York Times Book Review* of *Feed*, Elizabeth Devereaux notes that young adult authors usually create dystopian worlds so that “their characters [can] have a go at dismantling them” (47). Meg has a go at it, saving her brother, father, and the world. Jonas has a go at it and saves Gabe and his community. Hope resides in Jonas and Meg who resist the dystopian impulse. Kay Sambell’s article “Carnivalizing the Future: A New Approach to Theorizing Childhood and Adulthood in Science Fiction for Young Readers” suggests that most children’s authors have adapted the classic ‘adult’ dystopia, “usually by compromising the dire warning and supplying hope within the text itself, rather than leaving it implicit or barring it completely” (252). The young adult’s more informed and positive outlook on the world allows the author to “provide an upbeat coda to an otherwise unrelievedly dark story” (252). *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Giver* support this hypothesis, but *Feed* does not. The story unflinchingly leads the reader into complete dystopia. Monica Hughes says that a young adult book must never end in “nihilism and despair” (156), but Anderson ignores the ethical and educational challenges associated with writing for a young audience. *Feed* breaks the traditional line of young adult dystopian

stories in its pursuit of an honest dystopia. The dystopian world of *Feed* is a true nightmare. Why does Anderson choose to do this?

Up to this point, chapters one and two traced the strategies for incorporating hope in a young adult dystopian text in novels that require the reader to identify with the protagonist and forge alliances based on the author's guidance. But what happens when the protagonist is morally suspect and the author is silent? Simply in its refusal to provide the reader with clear guidance, *Feed* presents a much more difficult challenge.

The characteristics of the adult dystopian novel are present in *Feed*, but without the redemptive, 'happily ever after' quality of the young adult dystopian novel. The major tropes of the genre are easily uncovered. Anderson's dystopia perverts utopian ideals. The dystopia of *Feed* certainly did have the seeds of a utopian dream. The feed, the Internet connected to the brain, was intended to be a "big education advantage" (39). It was the great equalizer. Violet's father describes how he was made fun of and rejected as a potential candidate for a job because he lacked a feed (226). His acquisition of the feed eliminated future humiliation. Furthermore, anyone could be "supersmart" with absolutely zero effort if they had the feed (39). Schools taught the wonderful methods of using the feed. History, math, art and science were not necessary any more. It sounds appealing to a reader who may like to be "supersmart" with no effort.

Anderson's pursuit of a true dystopian world makes him push beyond the boundaries set by other young adult novels. In this case, instead of being a great equalizer, the feed becomes the means of society's ruination. Erika Gottlieb suggests that there is always a "conflict between the elite's original utopian promise and its subsequent miscarriage" (10). The feed is able to enter "what Orwell called, 'the few cubic centimeters' within the skull" making it "capable of achieving total domination over the individual's

private self, family feelings, sexuality, thoughts and emotions” (11). In essence, because of this advanced feed technology, the demarcation between the public and the private sphere breaks down completely. According to Titus, “the braggest thing about the feed . . . is that it knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are” (40). His sentiments expose the loss of privacy. Using the information compiled by the feed, corporations produce a consumer profile of every individual and use that profile to further their power and advantage in society. While Titus recognizes the potential danger in submitting so readily to such a powerful hegemonic force, he is content to accept it as just a part of life. He recognizes that the corporations “control everything,” but he remains unwilling to get “pissy” about it because then he couldn’t “get all this stuff” or “know everything about everything whenever [he] wanted” (40). While Jonas and Meg wanted to get out, Titus likes his life. During his brief period of disconnection from the feed, Titus says “I missed the feed” (39). Perhaps the most terrifying thing about this novel compared even to the adult prototype *1984* is that Titus behaves the way Winston Smith behaves *after* he has been brainwashed. Titus doesn’t have the power or courage to behave like Winston Smith *before* he was brainwashed. He likes his life. He sees nothing wrong with his world. As the main protagonist, this is a departure from the common trend in dystopian fiction. Generally, the main protagonist plays the role of ‘outsider’ in the dystopian world, functioning to see the world for what it truly is. This is the role played by Winston Smith, Meg Murry and Jonas. This is not Titus’s role in the novel. As a result, the decision of who to identify with becomes very complicated for the reader.

Unlike other works of young adult dystopian fiction that move from dystopia to a potential utopia, Anderson’s novel goes from bad to worse. On the moon, Titus, Violet and several of his friends are “hacked” into by a group of terrorists called the “Coalition of Pity.”

Violet is told that she may not recover from the experience. Her feedware is damaged beyond repair. As a result, Violet becomes even more aware of the apathy of her society and decides to resist the feed by making it impossible for the feed to categorize her. The feed is a device that is supposed to understand you so well that it can provide you with all of your desires and wishes. In other words, it notes what you purchase, what you look up, what shows you watch, the friends you have, etc. As a result of this knowledge, it classifies you by consumer profile. Violet decides to resist this classification. She confuses the feed by looking at odd products and then refusing to buy the product. She challenges the feed in every direction. Unfortunately, her resistance backfires. When Violet's health is further threatened by her feed malfunction, her petition for repairs is turned down. It becomes apparent that Violet's purchasing history makes her a wily and unreliable "investment" (195). In order to receive help, she has to become a better customer (196). In this world, people are not individuals; they are investments. She is destined to fail. It would be unrealistic in Anderson's story to allow Violet to continue her rampage against the feed. Worlds like Anderson's have to rely on a system of severe discipline to maintain order, and Violet's resistance is a threat to order (Lantham 3). In this setting, if you can't be classified, you will be exterminated (Chaston 114). If a person behaves like an individual (someone who is too complex to be categorized), that person is punished. Unfortunately, Violet's heroic effort has no impact on her world. "Violet's individualism does not improve her life nor does her sacrifice appear to have any impact on the dehumanizing of mankind when information technology, consumerism, and corporate greed become indistinguishable" (Blasingame 88). As a result, Violet slowly loses her capacity to physically function and fades out of existence. Anderson differs most from the young adult author in refusing to reward Violet's resistance. This results in a tragic ending, one that refuses to secure hope for the characters in the story.

In the negotiation between honesty and hope that Sambell identified for young adult authors of dystopian fiction, honesty wins in *Feed*. Everyone and everything the reader builds trust in deteriorates in Anderson's conclusion. By the end, there is not a character left to identify with. The one character who attempts to dismantle the dystopia is annihilated.

So is that it? Did Anderson completely abandon his readers to their hopeless visions of ruin and despair? For the young adult author, there is always the question of just how much the audience can handle. The dystopian novel for the young adult addresses "political action . . . within the developmental narrative of adolescence," meaning that overcoming political problems is joined with coming-of-age problems (Hintz 253). Because it would be tragic if a young adult assumed that the ruined, future world in *Feed* is utterly unavoidable, most young adult authors turn away from the complete nightmare of the dystopian genre. This ensures that the young adult believes dystopia is preventable instead of unavoidable. Did Anderson just ignore this possibility for his audience? Is there an honest hope to be found in the novel that rests outside of a happy ending or an idealized protagonist?

Finding Hope in the Hopeless

I will not deny that Anderson refuses to dilute despair in his novel. But, as I have traced in the previous novel case studies, a rhetorical approach to this literature reveals a more complete understanding of the reader's responsibility to the text. In *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Giver*, this rhetorical approach revealed that a happy coda to the story resides not just in the action of the characters, but also in the reader's involvement. I think this conclusion holds true even in the utter dystopia of Anderson's *Feed*. So, despite the nightmarish plot, hope in Anderson's novel is still innovatively embodied in the young adult, except this young adult lies outside of the text.

Point of View

Told through the first-person lens of Titus, *Feed* is a departure from the other two novels. The story begins when he first meets Violet on the moon for spring break. He is immediately captivated by her differences and desires to begin a relationship with her. Violet introduces Titus into a new world—her world. She is unique from his other friends because she is home-schooled, she recognizes the feed’s control, and she resists it. This story is all about Titus’s encounter and response to an awakened sense of the world around him.

The first person voice presents several challenges in this work that were nonexistent in the other two novels. Because the protagonist speaks directly to the reader, identification can be established more easily. But, first person narration implies that Titus is unaccompanied by an author. Anderson is noticeably absent in direct authorial commentary or authorial judgment throughout this work. He never speaks to the reader, only Titus is privileged to do that. According to Booth, both of these effects “decrease emotional distance” between the reader and the character (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 274). And yet, the text offers subtle clues that Titus might be a character we should disassociate ourselves from. Fisher suggests that “respecting fictive literature generally, the first inference a reader must make is one regarding the narrator’s reliability” (171). Is Titus a reliable narrator and how will the reader decide when his judgment must be clouded by the fact that we hear the story from his perspective? Anderson offers a few clues to help the reader determine whether or not Titus is worthy of our admiration.

Language

First of all, while Anderson plays a silent part in this drama, he is by no means absent. As Booth suggested, the author can never entirely disappear (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 20). Language plays the interesting role of laying the moral frame of reference in *Feed*. The

way a person speaks separates the individual from the masses, and the one to follow from the followers. This division of the characters acts as a way to teach the readers who they should like and who they should dislike. Those connected to the feed exhibit a disturbing lack of vocabulary. In fact, the language is peculiarly full of slang and expletives—“slanguage”—used by adults and teens alike. For example, in the examination room, Titus’s doctor asks, “Could we like get a thingie?” (57). This is hardly the kind of prose a reader would expect to hear from a doctor. Even Titus’s father sounds uneducated. In a conversation with Violet about the declining state of the environment he says, “Dude, I remember when I was like you. You should grow up to be a, you know. Clean-air worker or something” (103). Both of these examples show that language has lost its precision in this dystopia. Anderson speaks specifically about the function of language in *Feed*. On the book cover, he says, “To write this novel, I read a huge number of magazines like *Seventeen*, *Maxim*, and *Stuff*. I listened to cell phone conversations in malls. People tend to shout. Where else could you get lines like ‘Dude, I think the truffle is totally undervalued?’” Imprecise language is the mark of a follower. It is not a compliment.

There are a few notable exceptions to this debasement of the language. For example, Violet offends Titus’s friend by using the word “incited” (131). She stands out and is ridiculed for it. Violet’s father, a teacher of the “dead languages” (Fortran and Basic), greets Titus for the first time by saying, “I am filled with astonishment at the regularity of your features and the handsome generosity you have shown my daughter” (111). He stands out and is alienated. Violet and her father are identified as outsiders simply because they are able to use three and four syllable words that others have to look up on their feeds. Unfortunately, in this dystopian world, nonconformity is punished and contained. Violet and her father don’t gain any friends by exposing their differences in this way. But the reader

exists in a different world, a world where originality and difference are encouraged and celebrated. The reader has been trained and socialized to view individuals like Violet and her father as potential heroes.

Titus's language is not remarkably different from that of his friends. When he tries to comfort Violet because of her feedware damage, he says "I was like, I don't think you have to worry. Science is like, they're always discovering things" (143). The word 'like' signifies Titus's reliance on being a follower instead of a leader. Like is not grammatically appropriate, but is used so commonly throughout the book that Titus unconsciously succumbs to this usage. Furthermore, his language is obviously colored by the feed and reeks of commercialization. In the very last scene, when Titus sits at Violet's deathbed and tells her the story of their relationship, he says:

"It's about the feed It's about this meg normal guy, who doesn't think about anything until one wacky day, when he meets a dissident with a heart of gold Set against the backdrop of American in its final days, it's the high-spirited story of their love together, it's a laugh-out-loud funny, really heartwarming, and a visual feast They learn to resist the feed. Rated PG_13. For Language . . . and mild sexual situations" (234).

This short excerpt shows how much Titus's language has been influenced by the feed. In essence, the synopsis form of the story echoes the feed's advertisements for shows to watch and movies to see. Titus is firmly a part of his commercialized culture. And yet, while Titus doesn't markedly stand out from his friends and the rest of the world around him, he does have a small streak of the 'subnormal.' When Violet chooses Titus to be her 'special' friend, she notes that he is the only one who uses metaphors in his speech (52). His ability to

describe the world in metaphors marks him as someone who can think as an individual. Titus could be a hero. He has potential.

Characterization

Violet also plays an instrumental role in determining how much sympathy Titus should be awarded. Violet's actions and her ability to see the feed for what it is mark her as the outsider in this story. It is Violet who reveals the society as dystopian, not Titus. She functions as Anderson's mouthpiece in verbalizing the problems with the feed. At a party, Violet snaps at the obvious apathy everyone has for the world. She says to the group, "Look at us! You don't have the feed! You're feed! You're being eaten!" (160). Her ability to resist and her persistence, even as she slowly (percent by percent) dies, marks her as the most heroic character in the book. Furthermore, by juxtaposition with all of the other characters in the book, including Titus, Violet is the most intelligent, the most aware, the most unique and the most interesting. Her reliability is established early on because of her differences. She plays an important function for Anderson in the dual role of commentator and heroine. She comments critically on the actions of people around her. She thinks it is absolutely silly that no one knows that entire communities are disappearing, or that there is no explanation for the ugly lesions appearing on everyone's skin. She can even criticize Titus for his errors in thinking. And yet, her association and love for Titus give the reader a sense of freedom to do the same. She trusted Titus. She calls him "my hero" (207). She even understands and forgives him for rejecting her. The reader is encouraged to continue with Titus's story. Anderson couldn't create a narrator that the reader would shut the book on. Violet is important in ensuring that the reader will continue reading.

Despite Titus's potential, Anderson still suggests that the reader should not completely identify with him. Fisher suggests that we can assess reliability by judging

character (47). “Determination of one’s character is made by interpretations of the person’s decisions and actions that reflect values. In other words, character may be considered an organized set of actional tendencies” (47). If we were to catalog Titus’s actions throughout the novel, we’d have a very complex list of virtues and vices. He likes Violet and yet he is embarrassed to bring her around his friends. He cares about Violet, but he is also desperate to fit in. He supports Violet’s decision to resist the feed, but he won’t do so himself. Through most of the novel, Titus is able to maintain a stable neutral ground. He is not perfect, but he’s not bad either. He doesn’t accept or reject Violet’s understanding of the feed. His neutrality cannot last forever though. In a pivotal scene in the book, Titus is given a choice. Violet wants him to be her friend as she dies and he refuses. In fact, he abandons her as she gradually slips away from this world. Instead, he chooses the “null” life. Adams notes in the *Horn Book Review* that “there is no climactic uprising, no heroic transformation” in Titus’s choice (564). For his failure to join Violet or even to be her friend when she sickens, the reader distances himself from Titus. Titus is reliably human, but not a reliable hero.

At this point in the novel, sympathy for Violet has been heightened through a first person look at her sickness and her sense of loss. Because of the feed technology, Violet is able to send memories to Titus so that he experiences them as if he were her: “I was Violet . . . Suddenly, I couldn’t move my legs, I couldn’t even scream, I just tried to grab on to the banister . . . There was no space in me for breathing” (194). Through this ‘feed-sim’ of Violet’s sensations, the reader and Titus experience a taste of Violet’s pain. This offers Anderson the unique opportunity of switching perspectives in a way that furthers Violet’s heroism. We see first-hand how it must feel to be told that you cannot be fixed, that death is inevitable. Violet’s situation is compounded by the fact that she faces it utterly alone. Titus’s

inability to show her sympathy causes the reader to disassociate from him. He has offended us with this action. His behavior is intolerable. Anderson uses the reader's emotional response to Titus's actions to push a plane between them. Our emotion of distaste for Titus's action is an "expression of judgment" that decreases the chance for identification (Hauser 171). After Titus's pivotal rejection of Violet, the reader is encouraged to reject him. He heartbreakingly shuts himself off to someone in dire need. Our emotional distance is further increased when Titus forgets about Violet, starts going out with Quendy (a girl with questionable style and vain aspirations), and throws himself into what he characterizes as a "meg null" life. The reader is finally encouraged to realize that "I am me; I am not Titus." Identification is impossible. Titus has offended our sense of right too much. The sense of Titus's failure is magnified because the reader knows what might have been.

The Author

Titus's failure to play the hero is what truly separates *Feed* from *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Giver*. And yet, there is still hope to be found. As suggested above, Anderson may not directly comment in this novel, but he is not absent from it. Booth suggested that a reader needs to know where "the author wants him to stand" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 73). Through a series of helpful rhetorical strategies such as language, the reader is directed to follow and identify with the silent author. Titus is too painfully human and Violet is almost in her grave. Only the silent author remains morally superior to the dystopian world.

According to Zipes, "Dystopian literary works emanate from a critique of 'postmodern' advanced technological societies gone awry—and from a strong impulse for social change" (ix). Anderson's novel begins from this same impulse, but it is unique in one particular way. Where most young adult novels critique the adult social world, this novel is written for teens as a critique of their social world and values. This book directly portrays the

audience's life in a negative manner. In an interview done James Blasingame, Anderson reveals that his novel critiques our "culture of instant gratification," "herd psychology," and our "refusal to confront problems" (4). It is clear from the text and the interview where Anderson's sympathies lie. Morally, he is in favor of those who resist a culture of instant gratification and who combat herd psychology. He does not identify fully with Titus. He obviously wants the reader to behave most like Violet. As the outsider, she is the most worthy of emulation.

But Violet dies at the end of the novel. Identification with a corpse is too difficult to achieve. It seems that 'happily ever after' cannot exist in *Feed*. Anderson refuses to reward resistance, even if he agrees with it. There is no hope contained in this text.

Blurring Boundaries

And yet Anderson didn't abandon his readers to despair. Anderson's unique method of teaching the audience by negative example results in a transformation of the reader. Walter Ong has theorized about how a writer transforms the reader. According to Ong, the writer's audience is always removed. Technically, the term 'audience' is an abstraction. As a writer writes, there is no immediate feedback because the audience is not present. In order to deal with this removal, a good writer constructs a fictional audience (Ong 12). A writer casts the audience in a fictional role and correspondingly, "the audience must fictionalize itself" (Ong 12). Ong's theory of audience perfectly accords with Booth's theory of the need for the author to "make his reader" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 397). Anderson dedicates his book "to all those who resist the feed." He speaks to the audience not necessarily how they are, but how he would like them to be. Anderson has created a dialectical relationship between the fictional world and the real world (Newton 48). The dedication page initiates a conversation between the reader through a direct invitation from the author to dare to resist. In essence,

the boundaries between the real and the fictional are blurred as the reader is invited to enact the role of dissident. In other words, Anderson casts his readers in the fictional role of a hero who resists any power that infringes on the rights of the individual. Ong hypothesizes that the “reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him” (12). If the reader refuses the role, the text and author are unsuccessful in conveying the argument. In order to play the role in Anderson’s story, the reader fictionalizes herself as a resistor, sympathizes with Violet, hopes for Titus’s redemption and identifies with the silent author.

Ong’s theory supports Booth’s idea of a collaborative rhetoric. The act of storytelling lays claims upon all its participants, those within the narrative as well as those without. In Anderson’s novel, the reader’s responsibility is heavy. Because Anderson remains silent, the reader must decipher and decode the values and beliefs of the fictional world through other means, including the language of the text, a judgment of character and the clues for where our allegiance should be. Booth suggests that the author is thus “making his readers by forcing them onto a level of alertness that will allow for his most subtle effects” (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 302). Indeed, author and reader enjoy a more intimate relationship in *Feed* simply because the reader is asked to join the silent author and accept Anderson’s invitation. Identification centers on the reader and author in this novel.

Anderson’s treatment of the audience indicates a great respect for his readers. While Anderson does write for a young adult audience, he treats them as adults. In an interview with Blasingame, Anderson expressed his belief that young adults are able to act and respond to the evils of the world in a way that adults cannot (Blasingame 6). This book asks for a response from his readers—a response that could change the world for the better. In a reference to the end of the book, which repeats the words “Everything must go” several times, Anderson noted that “willingly or unwillingly, we’re going to have to change radically

the way we live” (Blasingame 5). This is Anderson’s plea to his young adult readers to be the force that changes our world. While his story is irreversible, Anderson intended for the reader to reverse the effects of the story. Anderson’s story differs so radically from his predecessors because he trusts that his audience can handle the bleakest depiction of the world. Hope is embodied in the young adult reader who can take the bleakness of the text and do something constructive about it. There is pleasure in a collaborative venture where the challenge is so formidable.

Yes, the novel does reveal that bad things happen to those who resist the feed, but morally, it is the right thing to do. And because it doesn’t always result in positive effects, it is also a very courageous thing to do. Because the reader can recognize this, she is transformed into a potential hero. Transformation suggests that the act of reading is a conversion process (Paterson, *Gates of Excellence*, 59). This transformation also makes room to support Sambell’s argument that young adult authors resist complete hopelessness even in hopeless worlds.

Richard Peck wrote in his intro to *Anonymously Yours* “I read not for happy endings but for new beginnings” (1). M.T. Anderson’s novel certainly feels like an unhappy ending without the new beginning. Violet’s opportunity for growth is completely halted by her death. And Titus has lost the reader’s trust enough that we become ambiguous about his future. He will have to earn back our moral approval. And yet through his shaping of the audience, Anderson has provided a way for the novel to have a new beginning and a hopeful sequel. At least one character in this novel has been given the opportunity to grow—the reader. “In that potential growth lies whatever redemption the novel might offer” (Trites 15). Unlike dystopian novels that preceded *Feed*, Anderson leads the reader into the complete darkness of an adult dystopia. The text does not supply the hope, the hope in Anderson’s

novel lies outside the text, in the readers. The readers are the hopeful element in the hopeless world of *Feed* because only they remain able to resist the feed in the future. The light may go out in Anderson's novel, but the reader, with enough power and courage, can turn it back on.

CONCLUSION: THE ETHICS OF READING

A book is a cooperative adventure. The writer can write a story down, but the book will never be complete until a reader of whatever age takes that book and brings to it his own story....Don't ask me where I get my ideas as though you have no part, no responsibility, in bringing what you read to life.

(Katherine Paterson, *The Invisible Child*, 194)

A young adult author is not required to include hope in her novel. The fact that most young adult authors do incorporate hope into dystopian texts suggests an understanding of the impressibility of the audience. The trend implies an awareness of the person who actually reads the text. In the introduction, I brought forward quotations from young adult authors who suggest that hope is a necessity in a young adult text. Katherine Paterson says that despair should be used “sparingly. A drop or two goes a long way” (*The Invisible Child* 59). Lowry agrees, “I can't imagine writing a book that doesn't have a hopeful ending” (199). These comments reveal that the audience is the reason behind a happy dystopia. Authors care about the welfare of their readers. This further suggests that an inclusion of hope in dystopian novels is an ethical choice. The young adult author mitigates the despair of the dystopian world to persuade the reader that hopeless will not have the last word. In my opinion, this need to ‘protect’ the audience has at its roots rhetorical and ethical purposes. So, this thesis project portrays *why* and *how* authors negotiate between hope and honesty in dystopian texts. In the process, the interactive nature of the narrative situation was explored revealing *how* the reader plays a role in promoting hope in dystopia.

Madeleine L'Engle's method for including hope is contained in the very meaning of her text. L'Engle's purpose is to persuade the readers to believe that dystopias can be overcome. In chapter one, using her novel *A Wrinkle in Time*, I traced the strategies she uses to provide a happy coda to Meg's quest. In order to be persuasive, the author must use rhetorical strategies to establish a fictional world that the reader can share. A rhetorical analysis of this novel reveals that hope is kept central in the text through authorial guidance, identification, and the archetypal heroine. The author, through the narrator, teaches the reader where the moral frame of reference is and essentially where the reader should stand in relation to the fixed norms of the fictional world. Because of these tools, the reader can learn where her allegiance should lie. Identification is an important tool that establishes a closer bond between the protagonist and the reader. Meg's romantic role as heroine offers the reader a similar role. The young adult reader is offered the opportunity to experience heroic action vicariously through Meg Murry. The stronger the two characters identify, the more this journey is jointly experienced. L'Engle's role in the rhetorical situation is to convince her readers of this central message: the protagonist and the reader have power to change their worlds for the better. Certainly, the author's responsibility to the text is crucial in ensuring that the fictional world will be understood.

And yet, as Paterson's epigram at the beginning of this conclusion suggests, the reader is equally important in completing the book. In order to showcase this phenomenon, chapter two focused on Lois Lowry's novel, *The Giver*. *The Giver* also employs several of the same strategies identified in *A Wrinkle in Time*. The two texts share similar messages and purposes. The moral ground is remarkably consistent (though revealed differently), and the main protagonist is the prototype of a romantic hero. But *The Giver* is more complex because it is less complete and more ambiguous than *A Wrinkle in Time*. In fact, the reader

cannot even be sure whether or not Jonas lives. This open-ended quality of the ending offers the reader a unique opportunity to fill in the gaps of the narrative. In an analysis of the novel, it is clear that the reader plays a much more pivotal role in promoting hope in this dystopian world.

If Lowry's text is ambiguous about hope, then Anderson's text crushes it in pursuing a nightmare dystopia from beginning to end. However, through a similar evaluation of the message of the story, its moral frame of reference and the author's place in the drama, it became clear that while hope doesn't exist inside this text, hope can reside outside the text. Anderson's inclusion of hope is more complex than L'Engle's and Lowry's. Anderson's protagonist is deeply flawed, enough so that identification is difficult. The character who attempts to overcome dystopia dies in the end of the book. There is no happy coda or 'Elsewhere' to run to. But, hope can be found nevertheless. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth proposes that authors imagine ideal audiences for their texts and readers correspondingly were willing to accept the roles assigned to them (397). In *Feed*, the reader is offered the role of one who can overcome the feed. Through an analysis of where identification occurs in the text and where the moral frame of reference is, the reader is invited to be the heroic protagonist missing from the text. This suggests that ultimately it is the reader's responsibility to provide the hopeful coda to the dark world of *Feed*.

What becomes clear through a short synopsis of these chapters is that the audience is not just the reason behind the author's decision to include hope in a dystopian text. The audience plays a much more central role in the very creation of hope in these texts. The act of storytelling is about forming alliances. No story is neutral. There are villains and heroes. Readers have to know where to stand in the story, so the writer must create a world of beliefs and values in a manner that is transferable to the audience. In other words, the writer

and reader must identify with each other. Rhetoric is identification. In fictional texts it is the process of bridge building between authors and readers, or as Booth would say “meeting minds.”

Rhetoric views the reader as a more active participant in the drama of storytelling. In order for identification to occur at all, the reader must be able to share what is imparted through the text—its messages, its authors, its characters. “The rhetorical power of identification, then, resides in the individual experience that is rendered shareable by the narrative” (Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes*, 20). In order to create this shared experience, according to Booth, the writer must appeal to an ideal audience he creates. “A writer makes his reader” (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 397). If the reader accepts the role offered by the author, reading is an act of transformation.

For an author to work with the utmost integrity, he must understand that the audience he writes to has freedoms. Turner suggests that “identification is optional” (150). This statement implies that a reader is able to choose for himself whether or not to agree with an author’s text. An author’s main responsibility to a narrative is simply to create a world of values and argue for a course of action that the reader and author can pursue together. To be truly genuine in the pursuit of the audience’s agreement, the author must create an argument where all parties, author and reader, have a vested interest (Hauser 64).

Readers have creative power similar to the author in that they can open and close the window of the fictional world. The audience is free to ignore, refuse and reject an author and his arguments. There is a choice involved. However, the kind of rhetorical study that has been exhibited throughout this thesis implies that the choice offered by a rhetorical analysis should be more than a mere reaction or response to our reading friends. It is easy to close the cover of a book that merely offends our senses without ever asking why. Booth would

suggest that readers consciously consider the rhetorical aspects of a text and consider whether or not the arguments ring true to their personal experience. We would all be better readers if we made it a conscious activity. The novels analyzed show how a rhetorical analysis can uncover the deeper meaning behind a collaborative understanding of the narrative situation. When a reader is conscious, she cannot be manipulated. When the freedom to choose is accepted and used by the reader, rhetoric can operate in its ideal state. This state is never coercive or forceful. Rhetoric as identification implies a peaceful intimacy between parties trying to establish and maintain shared ground.

In *The Company We Keep*, Booth argued that an important question to ask ourselves of our reading material is “What kind of company are we keeping?” (10). His question implies that books can affect their audiences for better or for worse. Being conscious becomes much more crucial if this principle is understood. There is such a thing as good company and bad company.

The purpose of this thesis is not finally to conclude that hope is alive and well in young adult literature thanks to a collaborative effort of authors and their readers. The purpose of this thesis is to suggest that we would all be better served if we consciously approached narratives. We should recognize that a novel can do something to a reader. Booth’s friendship metaphor, besides suggesting a more intimate relationship between author and reader, also imparts freedom to the reader to choose who he should be friends with. If our friendships with people can be compared to our friendships with books, we must know that all texts are not created equal. We should ask ourselves what the author is asking of the reader. We should discover the moral ground of the work. We should understand and evaluate the message of the text. We should know what kind of company we are keeping. Hauser argues that “Rhetoric forces us to choose, and choice entails

freedom. If rhetoric presents us with alternatives and if we are compelled to choose, rhetoric is the judge or condemning agency that makes us face up to what we are and what we could be. Rhetoric makes us take on the burden of freedom” (74). This quotation refers to the burden of freedom that follows from the choice offered in a narrative situation. A story offers the reader choices. It is the reader’s obligation to choose and take upon himself the responsibility for that choice. If rhetoric were used as a lens for critical study, then authors could no longer manipulate unconscious readers.

L’Engle, Lowry and Anderson each make arguments in their texts. The reader is encouraged to live his life in a certain way. What is most important to understand about the analysis and evaluation of their arguments is that the argument is not coercive or manipulative. When Booth asks, “Is the pattern of life that this would-be friend offers one that friends might well pursue together?” I believe that these authors are not asking for their readers to resist dystopia on their own; the authors ask that the readers join them (*The Company We Keep* 22). We should consider L’Engle, Lowry and Anderson friends because they ask the reader to accept a role that they themselves would accept.

For too long, authors have been considered the center of the narrative act. They are creators and gods. It is time now to consider the grave importance of the reader’s role in the narrative act. Certainly there is a lot at stake if narratives are read senselessly. The absent-minded reader should be rejected. We should remember that “Literary texts demand judgment from their interpreters” (Newton 10). We ought to take up the burden of responsibility for being readers. Good writers demand better readers.

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