

Complacency and Conformity: How the Elimination of Individual Choice Creates
Perfect Dystopian Societies

by

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Abstract

Contemporary young adult novels that focus on dystopian societies often depict places where individual choice has been eradicated. In some cases the masses have chosen apathy over activism and allow those in power to make choices for them. In other cases, those in authority force the populace into obedience and compliance. These dystopian societies may look peaceful on the surface but mask the larger problem and the fact that regular people are unable to think for themselves. While more canonical texts have been widely examined and studied, the new wave of young adult dystopian literature not only updates the dystopian warnings of previous generation's but also make these issues relevant for a new generation of readers. The canonical texts *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury create two divergent paths for contemporary dystopian works. The works *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and *The Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld follow in the tradition of *Brave New World* by depicting societies that lack autonomy by force and often peaceful and orderly, but the people are unable to think for themselves or even understand what essential freedoms they have lost. In contrast the works of *Feed* by M. T. Anderson and *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff follow in the steps of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury show worlds where people have chosen apathy over activism and in turn have willingly given up their autonomy to those in authority. They choose stagnant and ignorant lives in exchange for supposed contentment. However, while these societies may look superficially perfect the tradeoffs have been immense; including no knowledge of the past, lack of a nuclear family or romantic

bonds, and even lack of introspective or reflective thoughts. The framework created by the canonical texts is continued throughout the contemporary novels in order to allow young people to think about how they may be affected if they allow themselves to fall into similar traps of apathy or complacency.

Introduction: No Choice No Voice in Dystopian Literature

Dystopian literature often serves as a warning to readers of what could possibly happen in the future. David Sisk, author of *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, argues dystopian literature is “concerned with improving human existence and directing attention toward contemporary problems” (Sisk 10). A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia. The Oxford English Dictionary defines utopia as “A place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions (“Utopia”). At the opposite end of the perfection spectrum is a dystopia. A dystopia is defined as, “An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible (“Dystopia”). Dystopian societies often appear superficially perfect but often underneath are places of corruption and cruelty. These works not only point out the present world’s flaws, but also urge young readers to be critical rather than blissfully ignorant of what goes on in the world around them.

The comparatively new genre of young adult literature has also begun to tackle the idea of dystopia. Dystopian young adult novels are perfect for the transitional period of adolescence. Critic Susan Stewart points out one of the purposes of adolescence is to “serve as a transition period, a time of change, adjustment, discontent, and rebellion” (32). These works not only often show characters rebelling against the mass population but also help young people to think critically about the world around them. Dystopian literature is useful at this stage because they are beginning to form their own perspectives and opinions. Dystopian novels are also targeted at young adult audiences in order to “make it clear that young

people must be integrated into political life” (Hintz 263). These dystopian works show young people the dangers of apathy. They have an opportunity to share their opinion and make changes in the world around them. The fact that these novels are targeted at young people makes the issues and warnings especially relevant. Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*, aptly points out, “Children may indeed face dark, difficult issues. It would be pure Pollyanna to act as if none of these things will come to them, because they will. Learning such things from books is what enables them to deal with life” (*The Writer*). These books teach lessons that not only make young people more aware of issues in the world but also help them to cope with their own. These novels can create an awareness of the world in teenagers who are in transition and in the process of forming their own opinions about sexuality, self-image, critical thinking, and social responsibility.

Critics and academics have spent a great deal of time discussing the different aspects and possible aims of dystopian literature whether aimed at adults or teens. Many focus on the more canonical texts like *1984* by George Orwell (1949), *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932), and *Anthem* by Ayn Rand (1938). A quick search of an online database yields pages and pages of results. For example, some critiques focus on sex and gender roles, some focus on the dangers of excessive technology, and some focus on excessive government control. Many critics point out that often the purpose of dystopian literature is to warn and to inform generations of what their worlds could look like if they continue on the same path. For example, critic Susan Stewart says, “Dystopian novels serve as cultural critiques and models as

to what might happen if we pursue some of our present courses” (28). Author Aldous Huxley in his forward to *Brave New World* points out that “A book about the future can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true” (Huxley 1946). These worlds have been created to exaggerate and highlight not only the positive aspects of society but also the negative ones. Each of these authors and critics argues that dystopian literature seeks to enlighten and warn readers of a frightening future.

The canonical texts *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953) are commonly taught in high school classrooms because they, like the contemporary dystopian literature, aim to show readers the importance of having an awareness of the world around them and forming their own opinions. Many canonical texts fit into the dystopian genre, but *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451* in particular describe worlds in which the freedom of choice has been stripped from the individual citizen. Without choice, there may be less conflict in society, but in turn the population is infantile and apathetic. The populace is left unable to make decisions without help. Critic Susan Stewart even generalizes that, “US readers in particular have been steeped in the importance of the individual and choice” (Stewart 24). Therefore, an American audience, particularly one of teens, would see the problem of a world without individual choice. Both novels focus on the dangers of giving up individual autonomy whether by choice or by force.

Many critics have tackled the more canonical texts, but fewer have discussed the contribution of the wave of contemporary young adult novels that have been derived from these more classic texts. There have been many more popular reviews on the subject rather than critical studies. I propose that these dystopian young adult novels are in dialogue with the canonical texts *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451*. These newer texts often follow one of the two paths set down by these two canonical texts: the characters are forced by those in power to give up freedom and individual choice or down the other path where apathetic characters allow others to take their choices away. The societies where the lack of autonomy is by force are often peaceful and orderly, but the people are unable to think for themselves or even understand what essential freedoms they have lost. The other path that follows in the vein of *Fahrenheit 451* show worlds where people have chosen apathy over activism and in turn have willingly given up their autonomy to those in authority. They choose stagnant and ignorant lives in exchange for supposed contentment. Both worlds may run more smoothly but at great cost to the individual. The contemporary works are derived from and work within the frameworks set up by the canonical texts in order to not only critique the previous works but also to caution current young adult readers about trends in their societies. These dystopian works are especially important because these texts can be seen as more than just entertainment but also be seen as extended metaphors for issues currently plaguing our culture including threats of terrorism, the prevalence of internet and general media in our daily lives, and even the upheaval in public education. These young adult works also allow young people

to face these issues and question the world in which they live as they begin to form their own opinions and begin to step into adult roles.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss how *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993) depicts a society like *Brave New World* where individual autonomy is eliminated through “Sameness,” i.e. strict societal conditioning and genetic engineering. The world of Jonas, the protagonist, is a peaceful and conflict free one but it lacks individual thought and freedom of choice. *The Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld (2005) also shows a world where individual choice has been erased as a way to keep society orderly. Like *Brave New World* with its behavioral conditioning, *The Uglies* employs a brain lesion to keep people from questioning the norms of society.

The contemporary counterparts of *Fahrenheit 451*, *Feed* by M.T. Anderson (2002) and *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004) will be discussed in Chapter 3. In both novels, the masses have the choice between apathy and activism. Activism allows them to take a stand against the mindless norms of society. *Feed* depicts a world where each person is fitted with a “feed” which is a combination Google search and cell phone all in one. This feed allows the masses to be marketed to by corporations. The feed also keeps them from thinking much because the feed does the thinking for them. Titus, the protagonist of *Feed*, chooses apathy by allowing this feed to manipulate and control his life. *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff mirrors thematically *Fahrenheit 451* because its narrator, Daisy, ignores the outside world and possibly apocalyptic war as a coping mechanism to escape its pressing and frightening problems.

‘Everyone is Happy Now’: *Brave New World*'s Peace in Exchange for Choice

Brave New World serves as the framework for contemporary dystopian novels by depicting a society where there is no individual choice or autonomy by force by those in authority. In this world, “Everyone is happy now” but the price is individuality, thought and emotion of the general public. This future world has the simple motto: “Community, Identity, Stability” (Huxley 1). However, this community and stability stem from creating a strict class system through genetic engineering and behavioral conditioning. There is little conflict because there is little individual choice and little thought from the general population to break down the stability of the communities.

Furthermore, this society is particularly bleak because there is little opportunity for change. Critic Thomas Horan in his article, “Revolutions from the Waist Downwards,” points out *Brave New World* “is the darkest of all projected political fictions because hope has been eliminated along with politics and history” (Horan 333). Along with choice, in this future society, Horan believes that hope, politics, and a collective history have all been eradicated in exchange for control and order. Without hope there is no room for change and in turn no way for the general population to regain individual freedom. Horan further argues, “*Brave New World* denies that our mass-produced descendants will be able to even understand the concept of freedom” (333). Again, there is little hope for change because these genetically altered generations will be forced to think what the powers that be want and will have no room for the choice to make change.

Throughout *Brave New World* people are not born but created with genetics that will be useful for their particular lot and occupation. Additionally, not only are they born with particular physical aptitudes, they are also conditioned throughout childhood and adulthood to believe in and enjoy particular recreational activities and jobs. Lenina is a prime example of her conditioning repeating, "I'm glad I'm not a gamma" (Huxley 63). These repetitions allow her to believe that this is her own opinion when in reality they have conditioned her to make that choice. They even are conditioned against "antisocial" thoughts and behaviors that would create conflict. As the director points out, "That is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny" (Huxley 16). People are conditioned not to question or dislike their jobs or their lives. They are trained to be just as happy being a janitor as they would being a boss. There is little conflict in the world because as Bernard, a dissenting character, argues, everyone is "enslaved by their conditioning" (Huxley 91). The populace is predestined and conditioned roles eliminate even the smallest individual choices. Those in the general population are almost entirely incapable of independent thought because they are conditioned and told what to think by those in power.

Conditioning along with ample free time and a very comfortable life create even more ignorant bliss that keeps people happy and in turn keeps them from questioning their lack of power and autonomy. The general public has a short work day, ample availability of mood enhancing drugs, and many entertainment opportunities to keep them occupied and with little time to think. While they might

be conditioned to think certain ways, they are also kept content to make sure they do not become discontented and begin to cause trouble.

Furthermore, not only do these citizens have little time to think, they also have little need to feel any particular emotion strongly because their lives have been created to be both emotionally and physically easy. The director says, “Fortunate boys! No pains have been spared to make your lives emotionally easy—to preserve you, from having any emotions at all” (Huxley 44). In this society, there is no familial, romantic, or friendship loyalty and in turn no strong feelings or the possibility of conflict that goes with them. One of the conditioning phrases simply states, “When the individual feels, the community reels” (Huxley 94). In order to have a peaceful society, they must give up individual thoughts and even emotions.

I propose that *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, as a modern young adult text, works within the framework of *Brave New World* in that, like this earlier work, *The Giver* introduces the reader to a world where there is no love, no family, no history and finally no choice. These topics are especially important for young readers who have the majority of their decisions made for them and will soon need to begin thinking about what kind of role they must take in the world and whether that will be one of passivity or one of active autonomy. Both works show citizens make few decisions without intervention by those in control. In the future world of *The Giver* (1993), Jonas’s community has gone to Sameness, where all difference has been eliminated. There is no longer weather, color or even difference in ethnicity. Furthermore, individuals are told what their occupations will be, who they will marry, and even

who will serve as their exactly two children. As Jonas discovers his lack of choice he exclaims, “I want to wake up in the morning and *decide* things! A red tunic or a blue one?” (Lowry 97). The ability to think and then make decisions is at the heart of the human experience. As a way to keep an orderly society, Jonas’s community has strictly eliminated every minute choice an individual could make. While this makes for peace, it also creates a world without depth, without emotion, and without color.

Additionally, like *Brave New World* and *The Giver*, *The Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld depicts a world where not only is difference eliminated by a pretty operation and a brain lesion at the age of sixteen, but also the family unit is chosen for individuals and then broken up when it is time for citizens to be educated. The pretty operation combined with the brain lesion force people to be ignorant and compliant. Individual choice is erased in favor of power of the few and a more peaceful society.

The Giver and *The Uglies* series are two young adult texts in direct dialogue with their predecessors specifically *Brave New World*. These contemporary works draw from *Brave New World* in order to show the dangers of the masses allowing individual choice and thought to be stripped from them. This message and warning are especially important for a new generation of readers that are inundated more than ever instant gratification of entertainment and information. Young people must see that it is important for them to be able to sort through and question the information and entertainment that is thrown at them on a daily basis. Jonas and Tally are seen as not only the catalysts for change in these societies but also the heroes of the novel. Instead of adult subversive “heroes” for change in *Brave New World*, like John the

Savage and Bernard, Jonas is eleven years old and Tally is just sixteen, just entering into adolescence and young adulthood. This shift to young adult and teen protagonists is significant because often adolescence is often a time of feeling isolated and ineffectual. It is necessary for adolescents to see characters like themselves that can take responsibility and create positive societal change.

Fahrenheit 451 and Its Following

Unlike *Brave New World*, where citizens have been conditioned and in turn made and forced into unthinking individuals, *Fahrenheit 451* depicts a world where the population has intentionally dumbed itself down in favor of conformity rather than individuality. This society prefers mindless entertainment instead of facing tough decisions about the state of the world. They prefer to leave those decisions to those in power and those with knowledge. These citizens choose the path of apathy rather than one of activism. Generally, the mass population prefers to be happy and ignorant instead of being depressed and well informed. In this futuristic society, books are banned and burned in response to the desires of the majority as a whole rather than the government trying to control the thoughts of the populace. Critic Rafeeq McGiveron describes a vicious circle that allows people not to think:

In Bradbury's work controllers of mass communication and other producers of entertainment exploit the public's desire for easy gratification by disseminating only mindless escapism, which the exploited willingly consume to the exclusion of independent thought. People grow unwilling to give up their pleasures, even momentarily, by thinking deeply about anything, and

they also become unwilling to violate the norms of society by expressing any original thought (McGiveron 246).

The government gives people what they want, which is easy and mindless entertainment. The skills of evaluating and thinking critically about news or information lie dormant making the masses easier to control. In this way, they do not even have the opportunity to make more informed choices, because not only are they not interested in doing so, it makes the job of the authorities that much easier.

The populace is compliant to the control exerted on them by those in authority because they prefer to not think about or question the way the world works. The government did not burn the books the people did. Rather than giving citizens a choice about what books to read or not read, the people prefer to censor them. Chief Beatty even explains sarcastically,

Don't step on the toes of the dog lovers, the cat lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico...All the minor minor minorities with their navels to be kept clean(Bradbury 57).

Each particular group does not want to be offended, so in turn books that might offend are destroyed and eventually all books are banned. In this future society, the previous generation made the choice for the new not to be allowed to choose to read or to offend and in turn gave up the choice to have individual thoughts or opinions that might be gained through reading and education. Every idea has been boiled

down to a “nice blend of vanilla tapioca” (Bradbury 57). Banning and burning books has led to bland citizens who have chosen not to think and chosen not to be responsible for their own thoughts and opinions.

In turn, the entertainment industry gives people what they want by providing them with mindless entertainment. This, in turn, keeps the government happy because this escapist entertainment distracts them from the real issues in society. Chief Beatty points out, “If you don’t want a man unhappy politically don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war” (Bradbury 61). Beatty points out that lack of choice allows the population not to take an active role or even to have the choice to be active in society. Through mindless entertainment people easily “forget” the rampant violence and war that plagues the world of *Fahrenheit 451*.

Protagonist Guy Montag’s wife, Millie, is a prime example of a stereotypical and apathetic citizen. Instead of finding a purpose or some way to actively spend her time Millie spends all her free time either in front of the television or listening to her sea shell radios. *English Journal* contributor Janet Rodriguez contends that “The banal programs are so simplistic Millie isn’t required to think for herself...Millie’s few conversations with her husband are limited to TV jargon” (Rodriguez 73). Millie even calls the television show characters “her family.” Without television Millie is unable to even entertain herself or her friends, much less communicate her own thoughts. Millie lives her life through television rather than deciding or experiencing any piece of life herself. Millie is a stereotypical member of this society because she

chooses to be apathetic and be more interested in her television family than taking an active role in her society.

In this society, the majority focus on instant gratification instead of working or thinking through a problem. Guy Montag, the protagonist of *Fahrenheit 451*, initially rushes through his life with little thought and a consistent smile on his face until his neighbor Clarisse opens his eyes to the complexity of the world. She points out to him, “You laugh when I haven’t been funny and you answer right off. You never stop to think what I’ve asked you” (Bradbury 8). Montag is so used to making vapid small talk that he takes no time to answer Clarisse’s decidedly difficult questions. His lack of thought during conversation demonstrates that he, like much of his society, does not think much about anything. They live life on autopilot.

Clarisse makes Montag even more uncomfortable by showing him things in the world that he no longer takes notice of. She challenges him with, “‘Bet I know something else you don’t. There’s dew on the grass in the morning.’ He suddenly couldn’t remember if he had known this or not, and it made him quite irritable” (Bradbury 9). Even more pointedly, Clarisse wants to know if Montag is happy further upsetting his mundane life. Clarisse takes Montag even further out of his element when she argues that people do not talk: “No, not anything. They name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly and say how swell! But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else” (Bradbury 31). In this brief conversation, she shows Montag the problems that people of his society have lost their individuality along with independent thought. Their minds have been

reduced to entertainment and brand names and comfort instead of thoughts of substance. Montag is annoyed with Clarisse because she takes their conversation outside the realm of small talk and he is forced to contend with difficult truths he has been avoiding.

Feed by M. T. Anderson draws thematically from *Fahrenheit 451* because in this society, people choose to ignore world war and rampant environmental pollution in exchange for the goods, services, and even thoughts the feed supplies. Titus, the protagonist, argues that the feed “knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are” (Anderson 48). Titus does not need to make his own decisions because the feed does it for him. Titus’s reliance on the feed to make decisions as well as to think for him is similar to the advertising saturation and bland entertainment used to distract the masses in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Also, like Titus, who uses the feed as a wall to ignore the world and to choose for him, Daisy, the protagonist of *How I Live Now*, uses her family’s isolated farm to ignore the outside world. Like Guy Montag who is forced into action, it is only when she is forced to face the dangers of world war in her backyard, that she must make decisions to save her and her family’s lives. Daisy initially chooses to be apathetic and oblivious to the war but is finally forced to take action when it begins to affect her personally.

How I Live Now, *Feed*, *The Giver* and *The Uglies* each update aspects of the canonical texts *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451* in order to fit today’s culture and current issues. Like the earlier works, the contemporary young adult works show

how giving up choice can either be by force or by the general will of the people.

Either way, lack of individual choice leads to ignorance and conformity by the mass population. These contemporary works are important because they continue to make the more classic texts relevant to today's audiences. These newer works focus on contemporary issues and allow a new generation of readers to heed the warnings these novels provide. Furthermore, the shift from adult heroes and protagonists to adolescent characters taking the lead in these dystopian stories pointedly conveys that young adults can and should create social change. These contemporary works paired with *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451* serve to show the importance of maintaining individual choice and in turn individual thought in societies saturated with technology, entertainment, and commerce.

Chapter 2: The Cost of Contentment in *The Giver* and *The Uglies*

The Giver by Lois Lowry (1993) and *The Uglies* trilogy by Scott Westerfeld (2005) continue in the tradition of *Brave New World* (1932) through those in power seek to eliminate difference and individual choice. In *Brave New World*, this shift is created by the government rather than a consensus decided by the mass population. Without choice, there is little variety and in turn there is little conflict and finally in consequence little emotion or deep thought. Each society is peaceful and content, but the populace's time, actions, and even inner emotions are governed by those in authority. *Brave New World's* society along with the worlds of *The Giver* and *The Uglies* each eliminate individual choice and individual thought through a strict social structure, physical and behavioral conditioning, lack of a collective history, lack of a connection to nature and a general culture of conformity. Each aspect keeps average citizens from making all but the most mundane and trivial of decisions on their own.

The Giver and *The Uglies* series each take cues from and are derived from the themes and ideas found in *Brave New World*. These newer works are in dialogue with the older text in order to keep the warnings of *Brave New World* relevant for a new audience especially to show how dangerous it is for freedom of thought of the individual when those in power make all of the choices. Additionally, the more canonical *Brave New World* has been widely studied and written about but the more contemporary texts have only been covered in popular book reviews. Because of that, discussing these new works in dialogue with *Brave New World* helps to place them in the context of a larger dystopian literature tradition. These new young adult

texts work within these earlier frameworks of all powerful tyrants and ignorant masses. In turn, novels, like *The Giver* and *The Uglies*, are also able to break new ground shedding light on aspects of our own culture including reliance on internet information, threats of terrorism and general saturation of entertainment and media.

The society in *Brave New World* is seen on its surface as an orderly and happy one. However, as critic June Deery aptly points out, in reality, “In accordance with Fordism, truth and beauty have been replaced by comfort and one brand of ‘happiness’ for all, a happiness which to Huxley signals humanity’s quiet and irreversible self-destruction” (Deery 260). People may all look “happy” but in reality their world has left them with no variety and no individual choice. They have given up the aspects of life that make life interesting and eventful. While life would be calmer and easier without romance, adventure, stress, and mistakes it is these that make life interesting and give it variety. Everyone may be comfortable but these placated masses have no idea what they have given up.

The society of *Brave New World* functions so efficiently because of its strict social structure that predetermines a role and a place for every citizen. Through a mass production form of reproduction people are genetically altered to fit into a set class and set occupation. From birth, people have very little choice in what they think and what they become. The strict social structure is also reinforced by breaking up of the conventional nuclear family. In this society, the words “mother” or “father” are seen as dirty or inappropriate. Mustapha Mond, one of the world controllers in *Brave New World*, even describes the family in frightening terms: “Home, home—a

few small rooms, stiflingly over-inhabited by a man, a periodically teeming woman, by a rabble of boys and girls of all ages. No air, no space; an understeralized prison; darkness disease, and smells” (Huxley 37). June Deery points out that Mustapha Mond’s image of family characterizes parents as “suffocating, domineering, and even sadistic” (264). People are conditioned against even imagining family life because it would upset the stability of a society as a whole. Without familial attachments people are loyal only to the state. In order not to interfere with family loyalty, love, or sex, the motto of this society even is “Everyone belongs to everyone else.” Deery further points out that this motto does more to separate people than bring them together: “Without known offspring, these citizens obviously have no close relatives, and sex is generally separated not only from reproduction but also from love. Despite the hectic socializing, each citizen is totally alone” (265). People are kept busy with the superficial aspects of sex so they are not distracted and conflicted by the messier aspects of familial and romantic love. The populace makes no decisions of their own about family life or even their sex lives. They are not able to choose to be promiscuous or monogamous or whether to have zero children or five. *Brave New World’s* society functions by destroying the attachments that upset peace and stability.

Authorities in *Brave New World* not only genetically and physically condition its citizens into ignorant passivity they also find ways to distract them from individual thought through drug use. Critic John Hickman posits about *Brave New World’s* use of drugs as, “*Brave New World* can be read as expressing anxiety about the possibility

that an authoritarian state might develop and encourage the consumption of drugs that pacify the governed” (Hickman 156). People continuously use the government sanctioned Soma and in fact are seen as social misfits if they do not regularly consume the drug. They are conditioned to use the drug if they are ill at ease or unhappy and in reality these moments could be keys to make decisions about their own lives. Instead, the masses are kept from making their own decisions by being lulled into drug induced contentment.

Throughout *Brave New World* the masses are also conditioned to have a predetermined disposition for particular activities and occupations. For example, certain groups are conditioned to “hate the country, but simultaneously condition them to love all country sports” (Huxley 23). The masses are trained to prefer and “are happiest in a neon-lit, artificial environment where nature is as far as possible ignored” (Deery 259). As the director points out, the masses are programmed to stay away from the country unless it is to spend money or consume transit. The populace of *Brave New World* is conditioned to enjoy and prefer their artificial environments in the city in order to not only keep them spending money but also to keep them in an environment the authorities can control.

Authorities also exert power over citizens by making sure they have no collective history. They live totally in the present without taking into account the lessons that could be learned from previous generations. These citizens in turn learn a much manipulated history and even learn the motto of “history is bunk” (Huxley). Without a family lineage and without a societal history, people are unable to make

connections or decisions based on lessons they have learned from others or from previous generations. A true collective history would allow people to question the decisions of those in authority and begin to make their own choices instead of blindly following orders.

The Giver: Peace without Choice

While the society of *Brave New World* eliminates individual autonomy and choice partially through conditioning and the distractions of pleasurable entertainment, the young adult text, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, describes a black and white world of “sameness” where the lack of differences allows each member of the community to have a predetermined role and to follow a strictly enforced set of rules. On the surface, this community seems like an ideal place to live because it is so peaceful and orderly. The lives of all community members are controlled by a group of unseen elders. The cost of this peace and supposed contentment is the lack of freedom or choice by the individual. Because their lives are so regulated they have no reason to question, think or feel with any depth. Since they are generally ‘happy,’ the people of Jonas’s community see no need to speak out against the control exerted upon them. Critic Carter Hanson further argues that, “The stability and static nature of Sameness—depends upon a contented populace who ask few questions and perceive little need for change” (Hanson 49). This “contented populace” shows the importance of thinking critically about the world in order to not be lulled into a false sense of security. Furthermore, this novel shows the dangers of sacrificing

individual choice in exchange for safety and security. In Jonas's community, choice does not exist. Sameness is as critic Hanson describes,

a complex, centuries old system of genetic, social and geographical homogeneity that governs Jonas's society and which inhibits the ability to see colors, forbids monetary currency and distinctions based on wealth, and controls the weather (Hanson 49).

This homogeneity found in Sameness allows people to make few choices of their own because every aspect of their lives is regulated right down to the weather.

As in *Brave New World*, occupations, spouses, even children are chosen for people rather than allowing them to choose themselves. This community tries to protect its citizens from wrong choices but keeps them from thinking for themselves.

All choices in Jonas's community are made by,

The Elders, the dominant and controlling group in Jonas' world, because choice requires acknowledgment of difference and contrast. In a peculiar circular argument, one might propose that choice is dangerous unless exercised only by the dominant who know how to make the right decisions, in which case, choice ensures safety and sameness (Lea 56).

Since the general population is not allowed to choose or to point out differences, they must allow this unseen group to make all of their life decisions. It is never explained to the reader how the elders get this distinction and yet they are allowed to make decisions that will keep this community running peacefully and smoothly.

When Jonas begins to understand the concept of choice he decides, “Definitely not safe. What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And chose wrong?” (Lowry 98). The Giver points out that lack of choice allows people security. Jonas says, “We really have to protect people from wrong choices” (Lowry 99). Jonas begins to understand that conflict and disorder could arise if people were allowed to choose wrong; to make mistakes. There is security in that. However, without making decisions and in turn making mistakes, people do not learn and if people do not learn they continue to let others think for them.

During Lois Lowry’s Newberry acceptance speech she conveys her hopes through writing *The Giver*. She points out the dangers of insulating people from the world:

And if I’ve learned anything... is that we 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 and diversity would disappear, feelings for other humans would no longer be necessary. Choices would be obsolete (Lowry).

Sameness attempts to get rid of diversity in order to curb the conflicts and problems that stem from difference. However, if everyone were the same, as Lowry points out, the complexity of the human experience positive or negative would disappear. Lois Lowry’s fears about a “walled world” are strikingly similar to *Fahrenheit 451* where initially the move to ban books is decided by the masses and in turn upheld by the firemen and the government. Jonas’s society decides as a group to go to Sameness

and the elders uphold this ideology. Each gives up individual choice for the possibility of peace and a comfortable life.

Sameness and in turn peace and comfort has a cost as the Giver points out, “Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with differences. We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others” (Lowry 95). Jonas’s society lacks colors, weather, and even spontaneity, but they may now have control and they have peace. However, it is at the cost of beauty and emotion out in the world. Jonas leaves behind a place where, “nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or Unusual. The life without color, pain, or past” (Lowry 165). Without difference between people as without difference between colors the community’s lives are very mundane and almost artificial. Without abstract thought, emotion, and beauty one is merely existing rather than living.

Lack of choices in the areas of career and family life allow each member of the community to fit in and be a part of it. In Jonas’s world sameness allows everyone the peace of fitting in. Jonas is so used to everyone finding their niche and successfully existing within the community that he even wonders, “How could someone not fit in? The community was so meticulously ordered, the choices so carefully made” (Lowry 48). The elders are so careful to keep people not only from standing out or facing ridicule for being different, but also so there is no room to question a choice the elders or authority have made. The expectation of fitting in and filling a particular role in society even extends to compliments and giving

recognition. When Jonas thinks about complimenting the strengths of one of his age mates he refrains because, “There was never a comfortable way to mention or discuss one’s successes without breaking the rule against bragging, even if one didn’t mean to” (Lowry 27). No one is made to feel special with individual gifts or aptitudes. In Jonas’s community people even have collective birthdays. Rather than being given one’s own day, they celebrate each age once a year at a ceremony. The lack of birthdays and individual recognition further takes away any individuality in the community. This regulation of expression in this way also keeps people from expressing individual views and in turn from expressing dissent. This collectivity and making sure everyone fits in are further checks to keep from experiencing conflict or upsetting the peace.

In contrast to *Brave New World*’s society where lust and sexuality are given precedent over romantic love in order to keep everyone in line, Jonas’s community instead suppresses, through drugs, what they call “stirrings” meaning sexual feelings. The feelings of lust or even love could create huge havoc in this community. If citizens do not feel deeply, they are easier to manipulate and control. Critic, Thomas Horan, contends that, “Lust threatens the establishment because every dystopian world is built on cold methodological logic, and lust is fundamentally illogical” (318). If people actually got to keep their “stirrings” chaos in the community would ensue. Families would be loyal to the family unit instead of the community, couples could break up, friends could fight, each of these relationships that make our own world so complex and often troublesome. By preventing emotions that are largely illogical,

they also prevent community members' from choosing loyalty to their family unit or group over the good of the whole. To further curtail disruptive and dissenting emotions, Jonas's community even has mandated the sharing of feelings each night after dinner and dream telling every morning after breakfast. These mandated sharing times allow the community to monitor and suppress feelings that could create conflict. These feelings are not allowed because if people had deep emotions and thoughts they may begin to question the elders' choices that have been made for the populace's lives.

Similar to suppressing stirrings that could create misplaced loyalty and conflict each family unit's "genealogy is systematically truncated" (Hanson 49). Similar to *Brave New World* where families do not exist and children are brought up by the government, the community in *The Giver* also keeps people from feeling too connected to their particular family unit. Each spouse pair is given two children and when they are grown they then move into the "Childless Adults" home and then finally into the "House of the Old" never to have much contact with their children again. Not only does this keep these families from having any collective history together, it also keeps them from forming strong bonds that might disrupt the peace of the community as a whole. These planned out families and systematic stages in life keep people loyal and regulated to the rules and wishes of the community as a whole instead of the sometimes messy loyalties found in the bonds of family and romantic love. Again, even the choices of who people spend their lives with are decided by those in authority.

The Giver expresses his wish for a societal change where family life, love, even hate can coexist except he believes, “But they don’t want change. Life here is so orderly, so predictable—so painless. It’s what they’ve chosen” (Lowry 103). The Giver says the masses have chosen this, but the elders and the rules of the community keep them so they have never known these thoughts, conflicts or feelings in order to make the choice whether they would prefer to have them or not. Their lives in the community seem robotic, but to them it is routine and orderly because they have no concept of deep feeling or thought. The norms of this society keep people ignorant not only at the expense of the outside world but also at the expense of the inner workings of their own minds and emotions.

The citizens of *The Giver* not only lose their ability to think through lack of choice and autonomy in their everyday lives, but also because their collective past has been taken from them. Lowry’s update of this lack of collective history that is seen previously in *Brave New World* not only serves to keep people free of suffering but also keeps them ignorant of previous generations’ mistakes. In this society, the collective history of the world is given to one person, The Receiver. The community is built this way in order for people not to know pain. The Receiver can learn from the past and advise the elders but no one else can learn from any other generation’s previous mistakes. Without this collective or even personal past, critic Carter F. Hanson, in his article, “The Utopian Function of Memory in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*” says, “Lowry shows that living without a past and its accompanying pain numbs emotional capacity and creates a citizenry with only childlike levels of awareness”

(Hanson 51). This is especially shown through Jonas's parents and his friend Fiona. While they may seem like reasonable adults, they really only have superficial feelings. Each plays with other people's lives and yet feels little emotion over it. As the Giver points out about Jonas's friend Fiona, "She's very efficient at her work, your red haired friend. Feelings are not part of the life she's learned" (Lowry 153). While the governing body may have had good intentions when creating a receiver to shoulder the burden of this collected past and pain, people become desensitized and have learned nothing to widen or deepen their perceptions of the world around them.

The Giver and Jonas, because they have knowledge of past events and history, realize history and public memory are the keys to make change. Everyone must have the memories and to truly find out what it is to live fully and to cope with both the pleasure of life along with the pain. Hanson argues that, "Memory, historical awareness and hope can be harnessed to bring about resistance and significant change" (Hanson 46). Through Jonas and The Giver giving the memories to everyone the community's perceptions of the world will greatly increase and in turn so will their ideas and their emotions. The only way to learn and to grow is not only to learn from one's own mistakes but to learn and to grow from society's mistakes as well. In the end, the masses need to not only learn how to make independent decisions but they also need to learn how to make informed independent decisions.

However, critic Susan Stewart contends that while The Giver and Jonas's choice to release the memories back into the community is a positive one it further takes away individual choice from those still in the community. She points out that,

“With that decision, they make a choice to leave the remainder of the community without choice, which represents a fundamentally ironic and deconstructable moment. The people of the community have no choice but to accept the inevitable flood of memories” (Stewart 24). While these memories will allow these citizens to experience a fuller range of emotions, and in a sense have more choice with these experiences it will also interrupt the peace that has existed for generations.

Without difference and a collective past Jonas’s community have not acquired the ability to think for themselves. In turn, the world of *The Giver* shows the dangers of eliminating individual choice in exchange for safety and security. *The Giver* warns the reader against ignorant contentment. Jonas is forced out of this contentment to realize that without individual choice he is missing out on the beauty and complexity of the world around him.

The Uglies: Frivolity without Freedom

Similar to the black and white world of *The Giver*, *The Uglies* trilogy by Scott Westerfeld also describes the dangers of eliminating difference in favor of a more peaceful, but apathetic society. In this future world, everyone is given an operation at age sixteen to be made “pretty” and live a life of frivolous fun. However, unknown to the society at large the operation not only changes people physically but also changes them mentally giving each person a brain lesion that keeps him or her from thinking and questioning the norms of society. Again freedom of thought and in turn individual choice are eliminated in this society resulting in superficial and complacent citizens.

The Uglies series' society as in *Brave New World's* society each function through a genetic caste system that keeps people carefully in line. The brain lesions that genetically alter the populace's personalities are similar to *Brave New World* where people are not born but "decanted" with certain amounts of intelligence and predispositions for particular forms of labor. For example, people are physically and psychologically conditioned to be field workers or plant supervisors. Throughout the characters continually mimic their conditioning. They always repeat "I'm glad I'm not a Gamma" or any other caste they do not belong to. *The Uglies* citizens and *Brave New World's* citizens are trained to be content with their status because they have been genetically and psychologically altered to be that way not because they choose to be content with their position.

Similar to the genetic caste system of *Brave New World* and the predetermined nature of *The Giver's* family units, the structure of *The Uglies'* society also only allows its citizens to make few choices of their own. A second method of control in this society is that each person's stages of life are meticulously planned out. At twelve, they move out of their parents' homes into dorms with other 12-15 year olds and are "educated." Tally, the protagonist, points out about this twelve year old change, "Twelve was definitely the turning point, when you changed from a cute little into an oversize, undereducated ugly" (Westerfeld 77). This separation at twelve is especially significant for the young adult genre in that by separating teens from what they are familiar with the government exploit the awkward time of puberty in order to mold them into model citizens. This societal structure forces young adult

readers to see that they must be aware of information being presented to them because at this time in life they are very vulnerable to being molded or persuaded by many different sources. *New York Times* book reviewer James Hynes further points out that this change, “Mirrors the experience of venturing from the relative safety of childhood into the harsher realities of adult life” (Hynes). These young people are removed from the homes of their childhood at a vulnerable and impressionable time of life in order for them to be programmed to desire to be pretty and to fit into the norms of this society.

Then, at sixteen they are given the operation that makes them “pretty” and move into new pretty town where they are allowed to have fun all the time. This time of life where they are “new pretties” is especially disturbing. Reviewer James Hynes argues that, “On the face of it, it’s an appealing fantasy—what adolescent wouldn’t want to be good-looking and able to party 24/7?—but it isn’t long before the inherent creepiness of a permanent club kid existence leaches through” (“Children’s Books Review”). Similarly, Shay, Tally’s best friend, further points out, “Doing what you’re supposed to do is always boring. I can’t imagine anything worse than being required to have fun” (Westerfeld 49). After the operation, they are allowed to live a care free life of constant parties and amusement. This allows them to continually be self-absorbed, rather than taking an interest in the workings of the world. This is comparable to the citizens of *Brave New World* being mandated outside of work to socialize and have fun. Society intentionally distracts the new pretties with empty entertainment and has them out of the way so they do not form

their own thoughts or opinions during this usually intellectually transformative time of life.

Finally, the government places a time limit on self indulgence and fun and the next stage allows them to get the typical suburban existence with the house, the job and the family. In this stage they are required to be responsible members of society. The homogeneity and planned nature of this society also destroys the concept of the nuclear family, further keeping people from forming close bonds and in turn having deep thoughts and emotions. That the children leave home at an early age keeps people from becoming attached to each other and creating loyalties to their family unit rather than to the society as a whole. Breaking up the family unit keeps people from feeling too strongly about anything or anyone.

The nuclear family is further disrupted by the lack of connection between the relationship between the intelligent but ugly teenagers and the beautiful brain lesioned adults who because of the operation cannot handle the emotions and discontents of the average teenager. Tally's description of her family even seems detached:

Her parents had always been so sure of themselves, and in a way so clueless.

But they'd always seemed that way: wise and confident, and at the same time disconnected from whatever ugly, real-life problems Tally was having

(Westerfeld 272).

The brain lesions make pretty people lack the cognition to form strong attachments or understand what their children are going through. Brain lesions combined with a

strict social structure each break up and disconnect family members from one another further keeping people from forming alliances or bonds that may disrupt social order. Overall, the structure of this society not only keeps this society orderly but through this structure, Westerfeld is also able to provide commentary on aspects of our own culture including lower marriage rates and the rate of divorce. *The Uglies* not only shows what our world could look like without the bonds of romantic and familial love but also critiques aspects of our world now.

The Uglies societal structure further keeps people from questioning or thinking about with its choice of citizens for their police force or “Specials.” A Special is slang for special circumstances a type of secret police that keeps everyone in line. Throughout the series, specials are recruited from those citizens, who as uglies, caused trouble and tried to trick the systems. They keep people from questioning by placing the smart ones in a powerful position to get them to hold up the status quo rather than destroy it. These Specials are similar to the Elders seen in *The Giver* and world controllers, like Mustapha Mond, in *Brave New World* who have the “secret” insights into how the society actually functions and yet these clever people seek to keep this social order.

These mapped out stages of life not only allow society to mold its citizens it also allows the populace to eliminate difference so each person’s experiences are basically the same. In this society, it is difficult to have opinions because difference is even eliminated down to the citizens’ physical appearance. Even childhood taunts are given out equally: “Fattie, Pig-Eyes, Boney, Zits, Freak—all the names uglies

called one another, eagerly and without reserve. But equally, without exception, so that no one felt shut out by some irrelevant mischance of birth” (Westerfeld 277). Therefore during this time of life everyone feels ugly, rather than each person’s adolescence being shaped differently based on his or her individual experiences. These “ugly” differences are finally erased after the operation further erasing difference and individual choice.

Before Tally’s realization, she imagines “growing old, wrinkled, gradually ruined, all without ever having been truly beautiful. Never learning how to dress properly, or how to act at a formal dance. Never having anyone look into her eyes and be simply overwhelmed” (Westerfeld 95). Tally wants to learn how to be a “pretty” rather than a person of substance. For most teens this “prettiness” would, at least on the surface, be very appealing. She initially places great value on what she will learn socially after her transformation, rather than what she might be losing in the process. Tally has been programmed to believe that superficial fun like dances are far superior to learning how to be a good and intelligent human being. Tally places value in being pretty because through physical beauty she will be able to fit in and be a valued member of her society. At the start of the novel, Tally sees New Pretty Town as an ideal where all the beautiful people continually eat, drink and be merry. This is in stark contrast to her current situation where she is still forced to go to school and clean her own room. In turn, an adolescent ugly is easily influenced to value what she will “learn” in New Pretty Town. Tally, at this point, prefers to be told what she will be like instead of creating herself from scratch.

Westerfeld further emphasizes the frightening implications of a society that values superficiality over thought in the quote prefacing part one of *Pretties*, “Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless” (Westerfeld). These new pretties are useless because they serve no purpose other than selfishly having fun until the authorities force them to stop and grow up. They do not better the world through their thoughts or actions, instead they party. They are kept as superficial shells so they do not rebel or question those in authority. As superficial shells, their only choices are what to wear and which party to attend. For example, Tally, post operation, complains that the cool clique, the crims, will not, “vote me in if I can’t even come up with a non-bogus costume” (Westerfeld 12). Her biggest decision and biggest source of anxiety stems from her choice of costume for a party. Tally and her friends do not even know that more serious choices in life have been taken away. Again the emphasis on superficial looks and leisure time follows directly in the footsteps of *Brave New World* and its wake of leisure time and Soma. They work and then after work they have a set amount of time for leisure and fun. They have no time to think, to feel, or to make choices.

Furthermore, citizens do not have any choice in their pretty looks. They are decided by as they put it the “pretty committee”. Rather than genetics deciding their looks, an unseen committee does. Similar to the unseen group of “Elders” in power throughout *The Giver* this unseen committee decides on how a person will look and then the operation molds and shapes him or her in to perfect specimens with “perfect” teeth and symmetrical features. While “ugly” teens have an opportunity to play with

software that allows them to imagine what they will look like post operation in the end the committee decides what they will look like based on a fairly narrow set of standards. Shay caustically points out after Tally shows a computer preview of her post operation looks, “That’s not me. It’s some committee’s idea of me” (Westerfeld 45). Shay, unlike most of her society, has more interest and places more value on her individual identity rather than the equality of the populace. Shay has more concepts of individuality and a particular self-image than most of her society which allows her to question why she needs her looks decided by an unseen “pretty committee.”

Shay further points out the problematic nature of losing one’s individuality or choice when she says, “Or maybe when they do the operation—when they grind and stretch your bones to the right shape, peel off your face and rub all your skin away, and stick in plastic cheekbones so you look like everybody else—maybe after going through all that you just aren’t very interesting any more” (Westerfeld 50). Out of everyone in the series that are part of regular society, at least initially, Shay is the only one to question or want to hold on to her autonomy and not become just part of the mass population. She points out that once a people’s looks are changed maybe that keeps them from being interesting or curious as well.

Without choices in appearance, whether cosmetically or physically, people are kept from rebellion. In an interview, author Scott Westerfeld, additionally makes a parallel to our world today by pointing out that, “And in my future, the local government forces you to have an acceptable face—that is, a certain kind of pretty face. Sort of like now, when adults try to control how teenagers dress, cut their hair,

use make-up, and get tattoos or piercings. This is the stuff of rebellion” (Westerfeld). The government in *The Uglies*’ society makes sure people are unable to question authority in the realm of appearance. Any opportunity to rebel, to choose is through the pretty operation and the resulting brain lesion. Not only is the operation done to keep everyone “equal” and in turn eliminate choice, it also done to keep everyone from questioning those in power.

Similar to many protagonists in dystopian literature, Tally too must be made aware of her ignorance. Like Jonas being educated by the Giver about the realities of his world, her friend Shay along with those from the rebel society the Smoke are the catalysts Tally needs to see the truth behind the lies she has been told. Shay makes her aware that unlike what they have all been taught, “We don’t have to look like everyone else, Tally, and act like everyone else. We’ve got a choice. We can grow up any way we want” (Westerfeld 89). In this society, they are programmed to live a well regulated world without choice. Shay forces Tally to realize that there other options out there. Shay also forces Tally, with this statement, to begin actively questioning the norms of her world.

This world without conflict or choice stems from mistakes of the previous societies. However, as the founders of the rebel society Smoke point out to Tally and in turn the reader,

History would indicate that the majority of people have always been sheep.

Before the operation, there were wars and mass hatred and clear cutting.

Whatever these lesions make us, it isn’t a far cry from the way humanity was

in the rusty era. These days we're just a bit...easier to manage (Westerfeld 272).

In reality, the operation, along with the accompanying brain lesions continue the mistakes of the previous generations. They do so by erasing physical difference as well as individual personality differences. In the end, this society of uglies and pretties only masks the conflicts and problems of human nature by taking away citizens' freedom ability think for themselves. The "Smokies" additionally contend, "Maybe it's not so complicated. Maybe the reason war and all the other stuff went away is that there are no more controversies, no disagreements, no people demanding change. Just masses of smiling pretties, and a few people left to run things" (Westerfeld 267). The reason they are so content and so peaceful is because they allow the few to run the world, while their brain lesions keep them content with parties and fun. Before Tally becomes aware of the harsh realities of her world she believes, "Once they were both pretty, there wouldn't be anything to fight about anymore" (Westerfeld 86). She believes that any disagreements she has with Shay will magically disappear after the operation and never thinks to question why or how these issues might magically go away. Tally is not unusual in her thinking, since everyone is so content, no one questions or thinks deeply about how their society is run. After Tally is informed of the realities of society, she realizes after Shay is made pretty and forgives her for betraying them that, "Shay's blessing was meaningless. It wasn't forgiveness, just brain damage" (Westerfeld 384). Shay should not have easily forgiven Tally for the magnitude of her offense and yet she does so easily. To

Shay the ugly conflicts of the past are no longer important when she is allowed to live in absolute comfort.

The Smokies and Shay open up Tally's eyes to the reality of not only her society as a whole but also the operation and what it actually does to a new pretty's brain. Lesions make the new pretties not only superficial on the outside but shallow on the inside too. However, the lesions can be cured as David points out—"in those whose professions require them to react quickly, like working in an emergency room, or putting out a fire. Those who deal with conflict and danger" (Westerfeld 265). Lesions are cured in "People who face challenges" (Westerfeld 265). Other new pretties in other occupations have little to no real conflict in their lives. They do not need to react or pay close attention, but in order for society to run smoothly, like the Elders seen in *The Giver*, those in charge and in essential jobs must be able to think. Like those "decanted" into particular class systems in *Brave New World*, those with intellectual ability are placed in positions of power to keep order. Additionally, their lack of intellectual stimulation through conflict or problem solving further keeps them from curiosity or real intelligence.

Tally begins to realize even the technology she so relied on in the city is also a tool to keep her in line. Her interface ring, that each citizen must wear, allows a person to "exist" it acts as a cell phone and allows a person to run elevators and other equipment out in society. Additionally, Tally's automated dorm room is also programmed to her every want or need giving her particular clothes, turning off the lights, finding movies she would like to watch. For example, in *Pretties*, the room

“had this thing about guns, even fake ones” (*Pretties* Westerfeld 10). The room also wouldn’t “give them cigarettes or cars” (*Pretties* Westerfeld 11). While these automated rings and bedrooms may give the appearance of choice, the wall will not distribute anything that could harm the person. While these are not positive choices to make, the fact is common people are not allowed to decide for themselves. They may stay safe and secure, but they are not allowed to think or make mistakes on their own.

Both *Brave New World* and *The Uglies* condition their populations to dislike nature in order to keep them contained. Furthermore, nature is ultimately eliminated in *The Giver* because of Sameness. Each society intentionally creates a disconnect between nature and the citizen in order to keep them in line. The authorities have programmed the masses, including Tally, to fear and willingly disconnect themselves from nature and the wilderness. Cities are designed to be self sustaining from other cities and are surrounded by wilderness to keep people contained. In *The Uglies* initially, Tally adamantly believes that, “It’s wrong to live in nature, unless you want to live like an animal” (Westerfeld 92). In order to keep people from exploring outside the city, they teach people from a young age that living out in the natural world is wrong because the “rusties” or the previous generations ruined it. Shay further points out about those who choose to live in nature, “That’s just school talk, Tally. They’ve still got technology. And they’re not like the Rusties, burning trees and stuff. But they don’t put a wall up between themselves and nature” (Westerfeld 92). Shay is talking about the rebel society the Smoke that are able to live among

nature rather than preserving it by separating themselves from it. When Shay first takes Tally outside the city to the ruins of a former city, Tally has no idea how vast the world is. Without a knowledge of or interest in people willingly ignore Nature and further insulate themselves from reality.

The societies of *Brave New World*, *The Giver* and *The Uglies* are technically ones of comfort and perfection. Each are without war, without poverty, without illness, and without deprivation of any kind. However, the only way for these societies to exist peacefully and quietly is to alter, condition, and manipulate its citizens so the problematic nature of the human condition does not get in the way of this perfection.

Without a connection to nature, without a connection to a nuclear family, and without a connection to individuality, citizens' choices on the type of life they would like to have are severely limited. *The Giver* and *The Uglies* each depict societies in which the populace's life choices down to their looks and occupations are decided by those in power. The lives of those in these societies are easy without pain but in turn without emotion. They give up their individuality and the ability to think for themselves in exchange for peace and stability. This trade off individual autonomy in exchange for peace is directly derived from *Brave New World*. *Brave New World's* genetic caste system, and its physical and its psychological conditioning allow its citizens to make few choices of their own but to have comfortable and easy lives. Overall, *Brave New World* along with its contemporary counterparts each shows the cost of living in a totally stable and peaceful society.

Chapter 3 Apathy Versus Activism: *Feed* and *How I Live Now*

Similar to the complacent adult populaces of *Fahrenheit 451*, *Feed* by M.T. Anderson (2002) and *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (2004) show young adult characters who are apathetic and choose not to take an interest in not only world events but even issues that are in their own backyard. In turn, their complacency causes them not to protest when those in authority to take their choices away and uphold the attitudes of the masses. *Feed* by M.T. Anderson highlights a society that willingly gives up individual choice in exchange for a culture of instant gratification and consumerism. In contrast, *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff, shows the frightening possibilities of living in the shadow of terrorism through the obliviousness of teenagers. Unlike *Feed*, the characters in *How I Live Now* tend to use this apathy as a coping mechanism in order not to worry about things that are out of their control. Both novels portray characters that choose not to care even in the face of anxiety inducing issues. Characters must choose between activism and apathy. While Titus, the protagonist of *Feed*, is conditioned and manipulated not to care he still has an opportunity to pay attention and take an active role in making change in his society. Daisy, the protagonist of *How I Live Now*, at least initially chooses to be apathetic and oblivious, but in the end decides to be aware of the frightening world around her.

The characters of *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag, Clarisse and Faber versus those like Mildred and Beatty set up this dichotomy between people choosing activism and trying to make change in their world or choosing apathy and allowing the powers that be to choose for them. Guy Montag, the protagonist, initially chooses to be oblivious

and allows himself to be lulled into his routine of work and married domestic life. However, it is the eccentric Clarisse who takes him out of his complacency and creates the spark for him to take action against those who burn books and knowledge. Montag, along with Clarisse and his reluctant ally Faber, are in stark contrast to Montag's wife Mildred who is the epitome of apathetic and oblivious to the world around her. She prefers to submerge herself in her television family, her seashell radio, and her sleeping pills. *Fahrenheit 451* sets up the idea that people must make the choice between taking an active role or choosing to be complacent and allowing others to think for them. Respectively, Titus and Daisy face similar awakenings and dilemmas of whether to continue ignoring the outside world or taking an active role in it.

Feed: Insulated Ignorance

Feed by M.T. Anderson presents a world where people are seemingly content even in the face of war, mysterious body lesions, and rampant environmental pollution. The citizens' feeds allows the population to easily ignore these pressing issues. Most people are fitted with a "feed" which is basically a computer in their brains tuned to their every want or need. Titus, the narrator, contends that the feed becomes popular because "it knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are" (Anderson 48). The feed allows people to tune out while it makes their decisions for them. For example, Titus's friend "couldn't think of anything he wanted, so he ordered this really null shirt. He said it was so null it was like ordering nothing" (Anderson 31). They are conditioned to

continue to buy even when they do not need anything in particular. This boy buys a shirt he does not even like in order to follow the feed. People willingly give up independent thought for trends and convenience.

In Nancy Lee Daily's journal article, "America's Consumerocracy: No Safe Haven," she further points out *Feed's* parallels to the present American youth consumer culture, "Advertising is not subliminal, but it has become so integral to teens' lives that many of them don't realize how far it has encroached into their psyches" (39). *Feed* author M.T. Anderson reiterates this point with, "No longer can we imagine ourselves exterior to the media, outside of sales oriented image complexes—because these things formed us" (Shoemaker 101). Just like Titus's trademarked "School," the article points out that today advertisements are everywhere including schools. No longer are adolescents' expectations of the world formed by themselves entirely, instead they are now formed in part by the messages that are thrown at them on a daily basis. The choices they make every day based on the media and advertising are so conditioned that they do not even realize they are making choices at all.

This idea that the advertisement and the internet culture form the personalities and perceptions of the teens seen in *Feed* is similar to the television culture seen in *Fahrenheit 451*. Millie and her friends are continuously bombarded by advertisements and information provided by their televisions to the point that Millie even calls the characters on her favorite shows her "family." Instead of forming her own opinions, Millie chooses to be molded by what she sees on television and in turn

only learns about what authorities and the censors choose to disseminate to the mass population. Titus and his friends are shaped through what the large corporations choose to show on the feed. Because of this bombardment, it is difficult for these characters to turn it off and choose to make their own decisions or form their own opinions.

Feed shows that this population willfully allows itself to be manipulated by the corporations. Unlike other dystopian literature, where the information is being intentionally withheld by those in power, in this society people just do not care to think deeply, look into particular situations or events, or to learn the truth.

Throughout *Brave New World* the population is genetically and behaviorally conditioned what to think and what to do. However, throughout *Feed* the population has a choice but it chooses apathy instead. For example, schools are no longer run by the government, but are funded and controlled by major corporations. Titus explains,

When no one was going to pay for the public schools anymore and they were all like filled with guns and drugs and English teachers who were really pimps and stuff, some of the big media congloms got together and gave all this money and bought the schools so that all of them could have computers and pizza for lunch and stuff, which they gave for free (Anderson 110).

Society, in exchange for pizza and computers, allows corporations to teach students only what would serve the corporations' self-interests. Rather than teaching people how to learn, trademarked School teaches them how to successfully use their feeds. M. T. Anderson uses Titus and friends to warn contemporary readers of the dangers

of mindlessly buying into consumer culture. Rachel Wilkinson in the article, “Teaching Dystopian Literature to a Consumer Class” further points out the effects of the feed, “People are so dependent on these transmissions that education, awareness, and language decay” (23). The courses in the trademarked schools do not teach students to question or to be aware they teach them how to be “good” consumers.

Feed deliberately updates the warnings about these “educational” systems that are first seen in *Fahrenheit 451*. The schools seen in *Fahrenheit 451* teach people little else other than to follow the crowd and not question the ideas of the majority. Fire Chief Beatty even argues, “The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That’s why we’ve lowered the kindergarten age year after year until we’re almost snatching them from the cradle” (Bradbury 60). *The Uglies* society also separates children from their parents to be educated in order to control what people think and learn. People are required to go to school at a young age to be “educated” but in reality the authorities want to keep them in the proper environment where students will only learn what the majority and the government wants them to learn. In the end, what they learn is not much at all.

As Titus has learned to be an A+ consumer in School, buying material goods even helps Titus to feel better about himself. While he stresses about whether or not he is as smart as Violet his parents cheer him up not through a pep talk but by buying him his own upcar. Titus even says, “And I was like holy shit, by tomorrow I would be driving to pick up Violet in my own goddamn upcar, and suddenly, suddenly, I didn’t feel so stupid anymore” (Anderson 118). Titus’s retail therapy is also

highlighted when he is trying to grapple with Violet's deteriorating health and their fading relationship. He orders the same clothes over and over until his credit is depleted. He explains, "I stayed up all through the early morning, shivering, ordering, ordering, and was awake at dawn, when I put on clothes, and went up to the surface, and watched the shit-stupid sun rise over the whole shit-stupid world" (Anderson 294). Unlike the car, this buying binge does not make him feel better, but only emphasizes the terrible situation he is in. Either way, Titus does not know how to use human interaction or self-reflection to make himself feel better so instead he uses material goods. The reader does see a change in Titus because this retail therapy can no longer fix his problems. However, because this is his only outlet of expression he continues to buy and spend but ultimately cannot stay in his previous state of apathy.

Titus is conditioned to continually consume as a coping mechanism and yet no matter how much buys he is never able to fill it in. He buys stuff to feel better, to fit in, to entertain himself, but in the end these items only make him want to buy more stuff. Titus is indecisive about which car to buy. In the end, he chooses the one that none of his friends want to ride in. His car is no good if none of his friends accept it as the best or the coolest. He explains, "It was like I kept buying things to be cool, but cool was always flying just ahead of me, and I could never exactly catch up to it. I felt like I'd been running toward it for a long time" (Anderson 279). This shows that no matter what, the one item that will really make him feel good and accepted is actually not for sale. He is manipulated to chase cool. Titus's quest is very similar to

the consumer longings of Montag's wife Millie. Almost immediately after Montag buys a third wall for the television, Millie wants him to install a very expensive fourth. Montag reminds her of the expense and she responds, "Is that all it was?" (Bradbury 21). Both Millie and Titus are trained not be content with what they have but with what they want. They have been trained to consume instead of feeling or thinking.

Violet, in contrast, is one of the few of Titus's peers that has an understanding of self-control and not consuming material goods in order to help her mental well being. She believes, "everything is better if you delayed it" (Anderson 143). Instead of immediately buying an item she would go through an elaborate ritual of trying to decide whether she actually wanted it or not. This simple self denial shows that she chooses to resist this culture of want and actually show restraint and resistance. Furthermore, in addition to Violet's restraint this instance serves to show the reader that Violet is taking an active role in her own life and in turn this active role inadvertently helps her to resist the influence of the feed.

Like Clarisse in *Fahrenheit 451*, Violet serves as the catalyst to awaken Titus from his oblivion to the realities of the world. Violet stands as a representative of individual choice and the voice of reason against the apathy and mindless consumption of the majority. She and her father are the only characters to criticize society and the feed. They choose activism over oblivion and apathy. Her final outburst at a party cuts to the quick the problem of their society: "Look at us! You don't have the feed! You are feed! You're feed! You're being eaten! You're raised

for food! Look at what you've made yourselves!" (Anderson 202). Violet shows that Titus and his friends are literally being consumed by their over the top spending habits. Rather than being forcibly conditioned to consume goods and services like in *Brave New World*, the general populace actually prefers the feed to make substantial or difficult choices about their own lives. As Violet points out people prefer to be consumed by consuming instead of by participating in any activity of substance or thought.

Violet even fights against being consumed by the feed through individual resistance efforts. Unlike her peers, Violet sees the terrible state of the world and believes her resistance might allow people to take back their own thoughts and decisions instead of a computer chip doing it for them. Violet resists by instead of allowing the feed to help her to find goods and services for her, she tries to confuse it. As she puts it she is "complicating, resisting" (Anderson 99). She goes to the mall and does not buy anything. Violet browses and shops for all sorts of items like searchlights, Bleakazoid actions figures, rugs, and even dresses for Titus just to confuse the feed so they are unable to market to her. This small act of resistance keeps them from as she puts it, "making you want things" (Anderson 91). The feed corporations want the general population to conform in order to fit into a categorized type that they can easily market to.

Throughout the novel, Violet continually resists the feed. Unlike her peers, she chooses to get informed about the frightening facts about her world. For example, she learns what she can about the practices of the corporations, causes of the

wide spread lesions, and even how animals and plants are adapting to the takeover of human industrialization. Violet continually tries to inform Titus of what is really happening without much success. He “said to her that she stop reading it, because it was just depressing” (Anderson 111). Titus makes the choice to remain uninformed because it is easier. He chooses not to act on these issues. Violet may not be able to make huge changes to society but through becoming informed she takes an active role in society.

Titus chooses to ignore reality because his life revolves around easy fixes to keep him “happy.” Elizabeth Bullen and Elizabeth Parsons also point out that,

The teenagers who populate the novel never engage with politically pertinent information because it cannot compete with the entertainments offered by constant chat with friends, feedcasts of soap operas, the government sanctioned news bulletins that reassure them about the proliferating risks of their world, and the constant advertising that motivates their existence (136).

The harsh news of real life has no chance of competing with the entertainment and attention grabbers that Titus has come to expect in his life. Violet, on the other hand, prefers making her own decisions about the truth even if it is more difficult to obtain.

Violet takes a stand even further against the pervasive selfish attitude of entitlement which she sees in her peers. She points out, “Do you know the earth is dead? Almost nothing lives here anymore, except where we plant it? No. No, no, no. We don’t know any of that. We have tea parties with our teddies. We go sledding. We enjoy being young. We take what’s coming to us. That’s our way” (Anderson

273). Anderson uses this focus on the entitlement of youth as a parallel to the prominence placed on youth culture today. The youth culture ignores the big problems in the world to focus on what they think they deserve as young people. Titus shares this attitude when he feels that he deserves a new upcar from his parents after being attacked by the hacker at the dance club. Violet sarcastically points out how ridiculous this youth culture is because they expect to achieve and receive whether it is social status or material goods without any work on their parts. Titus follows in this attitude of entitlement while Violet gets informed about the state of the world instead of blindly accepting the information given to her by the feed. However, this sense of entitlement is not all Titus's peers' faults. The corporations, the feed, and their parents easily breed this complacent sense of entitlement. The feed breeds ignorance and in turn the idea of instant gratification in that they should get everything they desire immediately after desiring it. The society as a whole uses this entitlement to keep from taking a hard look at themselves and being self reflective about their own lives and choices.

The tragedy and irony of *Feed* is that while Violet serves as the voice of reason and a call to action it is she who is actually consumed and dies from a feed malfunction. By killing off the voice of reason, as Clarisse is also killed in *Fahrenheit 451*, it shows that people who do not conform cannot stay or even survive in this society. Bullen and Parsons further point out that, "In this regard, capitalism kills the individualist agenda and Violet, too, because she is no longer fit for, nor fits into, her society" (134). Her father even compares her to a disposable product: "We

Americans are interested only in the consumption of our products. We have no interest in how they were produced, or what happens to them—he pointed at his daughter—what happens to them once we discard them, once we throw them away” (Anderson 290). In reality, with the feed in place she is a commodity. The nickname, “unit” used by Titus and friends throughout the novel furthers this idea that each individual fitted with a feed is a commodity not a person. When the feed corporations no longer see her as profitable they refuse to fix her because to the corporations Violet is not a human life but an item to be bought and sold. Violet’s demise emphasizes how strong the complacency and will to consume are in this society.

Violet’s activism and demise highlight how apathetic and complacent her peers are to the dangers of the feed and the terrible state of the environment and the human race. Even after meeting Violet and seeing her terrible demise due to an uncaring corporation Titus remains mostly unchanged. Critic Rachel Wilkinson contends that Titus does not “possess either the skills or the character to awaken to reality. Consuming goods and entertainment is all he knows to do” (Wilkinson 23). He continues to allow the feed to do the thinking and in turn the living for him. Even after he sees Violet’s functions reduced to almost nothing, he continues to lead his vapid life of malfunctioning and malls. For example, he talks about his summer: “When school ended for the year, Link and Marty and I went to one of the moons of Jupiter to stay with Marty’s aunt for a few weeks. It was okay. We had a pretty good time. By that point I was going with Quendy, and I kind of missed her” (Anderson 277). He makes no mention of Violet or seems to have any memory of all that they

went through together. Titus is so conditioned to the feed that he is unable to make a conscious choice to even feel bad about Violet and how he treats her.

Titus's apathy and ignorance are shown greatly through his language choices not only when he speaks to others, but also in his own thoughts and narration. Titus repeatedly replaces the precise word he wants to say with the word "thing" because he cannot think of what he actually wants to say. For example while talking about kitchen clean up he says, "They crashed down into the thing, the incinerator" (Anderson 128). Furthermore, when he tries to express the quiet in his head after his feed breaks down he explicitly states, "Everything in my head was quiet. It was fucked" (Anderson 44). Overall, he has difficulty expressing himself without one of the many swear or slang words that pepper the general population's conversation. Without being able to say exactly what he means to say through precision of language it further limits his choices of expression. Critic, Rachel Wilkinson also points out about Titus's limited vocabulary "One symptom of Titus's ignorance is that he cannot find words for what he wants to say. As a result, he knows only to articulate what he wants to buy, wear, or watch because the feed is focused solely on advertising, entertainment, and consumption" (23). Titus has no difficulty making superficial decisions about what shirt buy, but has great difficulty expressing actual thoughts and feelings.

Titus's inability to communicate is highlighted by the only way he can deal and communicate his feelings about Violet. He tells his and Violet's story in a movie preview format because he does not know how to tell stories any other way.

Even the last lines of the novel are that of an advertisement “Everything must go”(Anderson 299). In this way the feed has disabled him, allowing him only to communicate through the feed’s language. The last lines of the novel show the tragedy of *Feed*, not only is the world ending, but the protagonist the readers root for does not awaken to the harsh reality of the world around him. As Bullen and Parsons state, “Indeed, everything about this culture must go if humanity is to survive” (138). Because of the mindless consumption of this society they all need to make changes. While, the reader does not feel overly optimistic for Titus’s apathy to shift to activism we do see a glimpse that because of Violet he has become more aware of the world. Even though he can only tell their story in movie preview format he says,

There’s this one story I’ll keep telling you. I’ll keep telling it. You’re the story. I don’t want to you to forget. When you wake up, I want you to remember yourself. I’m going to remember. You’re still here, as long as I can remember you. As long as someone knows you (Anderson 297).

The fact that he wants to continue to tell her story, wants to continue to remember her shows how he has grown as a character throughout the novel. He chooses to remember her rather than repress his pain through consumption and entertainment. By the end of the novel, Titus chooses to take a more active role in the world.

How I Live Now: From Oblivion to Activism

Similar to *Feed*, Meg Rosoff’s *How I Live Now* depicts young characters that intentionally detach themselves from critical thinking about dire current events.

However, unlike *Feed* where the characters prefer to allow others to make choices for

them because it is an easier existence, the characters throughout *How I Live Now* intentionally insulate themselves as a coping mechanism to escape the harsh realities of the outside world. Throughout *Feed* many of the characters live in artificial bubbles and compounds to protect them from the decaying environment as opposed to the characters of *How I Live Now* who must deal with death and war in their own neighborhoods and backyards. Initially, Daisy and her young cousins choose to be apathetic and choose to be oblivious because it allows them to insulate themselves from the frightening world events occurring around them. As the story continues, Daisy is forced to activism and forced to deal with the world outside.

How I Live Now presents a possible near future where war with a number of faceless enemies looms. Initially Daisy, in *How I Live Now* is especially insulated and apathetic about the war. She is flippant when she says, “There’s that old war again, popping up like a bad penny” (Rosoff 15) or when she describes it as “You Know What” (Rosoff 21). When Daisy puts the war in these inconsequential terms it is easy for her to separate her life from it. Not only does the war seem remote while she lives on her cousins’ farm, but also because she is, at least initially, a complacent and self-absorbed teenage girl who cannot see how impending war has an effect on her personally. Again, she chooses to be flippant because it is easier than trying to take an active role in a world where she feels she has no control.

Daisy’s narration allows the reader to see first-hand how disinterested and uninformed Daisy is about world war. As a result, reviewer Geraldine Bedell points out, “Daisy can be an unreliable narrator, especially when it comes to things she's not

much interested in, such as the details of war” (“Observer Book Review”). While Daisy may be unreliable when discussing world events, she is reliable in the information she relays about her own life and experiences that she deems pertinent to share. For example, she is very forthcoming about her evil stepmother Davina, her unwillingness to eat, and even the death of her mother. She is unreliable in that she is not on top of the news and filters everything through her slightly self-absorbed teenaged lens. For example, when her cousin Osbert is relaying news about attacks in America she admits, “I said How terrible, where?” (Rosoff 33). Daisy in this case is trying to be polite, but these attacks seem unimportant to her everyday life. In this case, Daisy is an uninformed and apathetic narrator.

Daisy’s apathy and disinterest in the war is highlighted by her consistent capitalization of words that she believes are supposedly important but not to her. The capitalization in Daisy’s narration shows her sarcastic take on world events. For example, she uses capital letters for, “Imminent Threat of War” (Rosoff 15), “Whether This Meant War” (Rosoff 25), “Gloom and Doom” (Rosoff 25), “In a War or Not” (Rosoff 27). Daisy most often capitalizes items having to do with the war and yet does not take an actual interest in them. This use of capitalization mocks these supposedly adult concerns. Even before the war becomes the main topic of conversation, Daisy’s complacent attitude is evident in the opening pages of the book. When talking about her lack of knowledge of rapeseed oil she off handedly says, “But the only kind of rape I know is the kind you read about in the paper ten times a day and always ignore unless the rapist turns out to be a priest or someone on TV”

(Rosoff 8). Similar to the use of capital letters, this statement shows her disinterest because she ignores stories of rape on the news because they happen “ten times a day.” These stories seem remote on the television almost as if they are not real. Seeing these events filtered through the media not only allows Daisy to easily detach herself from them, but also desensitizes her to the trauma and violence that pervades the news and television in general.

This “rapeseed oil” episode also shows out of touch Daisy is previous to coming to the farm and meeting her “wood nymph” cousin Piper with the natural world. Previous to this, Daisy chooses not to connect with nature as she spends most of her time in the urban setting of New York City. For example, upon her arrival at the farm, she describes the experience as, “Oh boy so much for civilization and felt a little freaked out and thought of that movie where they say No One Can Hear You Scream” (Rosoff 11). Daisy is more concerned with her cellular connection to her friends her own age than with her connection to nature. Again, Daisy initially chooses to be apathetic not only about world events but nature in her own backyard as well. In this case, her detachment from nature is very similar to Titus’s who takes no interest in the crumbling environment even after he and Violet go to the sea and cannot swim in it because of its toxicity. Both Daisy’s initial desensitization to the natural world around her along with Titus’s disconnect from his deteriorating environment demonstrate how each protagonist chooses to not to care and chooses not to take action. Daisy is not alone in her detachment from the events she sees on television. As previously seen in *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag’s wife Millie also avoids

reality through her being completely absorbed in the television as well as Titus and his friends being completely absorbed in the entertainment provided on the feed. These characters all make the choice to detach easily from the harsh news and reality shown through the media in order to not think about it.

Daisy not only has no interest in the current status of the war, but also even has a hard time feigning interest in the many people that have been killed by it in the news. Daisy makes this clear when she states, “No matter how much you put on a sad expression and talked about how awful it was that all those people were killed and what about democracy and the Future of Our Great Nation the fact that none of us kids said out loud was that WE DIDN’T REALLY CARE” (Rosoff 42). While Daisy is trying to ignore these events and these victims, the capital letters demonstrate she cannot. The letters may spell out that she does not care, but in fact the capital letters emphasize that Daisy actually does worry and is unable to ignore the war and the tragedy. Additionally, Daisy goes on to say, “And although there was tons of rumors coming from every direction, nothing THAT BAD seemed to be happening to any of US” (52). Daisy has some understanding that negative events are happening to people out in the world, but she chooses to ignore them. Additionally, Daisy chooses to worry about only her immediate circle instead of all of those unknown suffering people out in the world. She in turn attempts to cope with this uncertainty feigning disinterest. For Daisy it is easier to focus on the people she cares about and her immediate surroundings that she has some control over rather than the faceless victims that she cannot help or control. Daisy’s lack of focus on the outside world

and her intense focus on her immediate family show the initial shift for Daisy from apathy to activism. Her awareness is growing outward and instead of being self-centered for the sake of it she is beginning to focus on herself and her family now because she has no control over anything else.

This parallels Titus and his friends who make a conscious choice not to worry about world events. Throughout they spend a great deal of time showcasing lesions as a fashion statement and ignoring why they get them. Titus chooses not to care often and yet similar to the force of Daisy's capital letters he is unable to keep up this façade. For example, near the end of the novel Titus parallels the fun he and his friends have on summer vacation with, "Everything was not going well, because for most people, our hair fell out and we were bald, and we had less and less skin" (Anderson 278). He then goes on to talk about how people are freezing midsentence and how he is losing sleep over it. His flippant admissions about the state of the world show that while he tries to ignore them with fun he cannot. Both Titus and Daisy make the conscious choice not to care or take an interest in world events.

Daisy's uninformed apathy, in addition to her belief that the war has nothing to do with her, also stems from the lack of control she feels over it. Her reasoning is, "I didn't spend much time thinking about the war because I was bored with everyone jabbering on for about the last five years about Would There Be One or Wouldn't There and I happen to know there wasn't anything we could do about it anyway so why even bring the subject up" (Rosoff 15). As an average citizen and more importantly an underage teenager, she feels her voice or her actions would go

unnoticed in the larger scheme of things. This feeling of powerlessness and detachment mirrors the attitudes of apathy and detachment seen in *Fahrenheit 451*. People give up choice, power and rights not only out of apathetic laziness but also out of feeling like they have no power to create change. This uncertainty causes Daisy to choose to be apathetic and detached in order to feel a small sense of power in a situation where she is powerless. Daisy's feeling that she is powerless to control the bad events that happen in the world is paralleled with Titus's blind acceptance of the corporate control of the feed. Titus believes,

I mean, it's not great, because who knows what evil shit they're up to.

Everyone feels bad about that. But they're the only way to get all this stuff, and it's no good getting pissy about it, because they're still going to control everything whether you like it or not (Anderson 49).

Both Titus and Daisy believe there is no point in over thinking issues that they have no control over. Instead they choose to focus on what is in their control and that is in this case choosing not to care; choosing not to be informed.

Daisy and Titus's detachment is very different than Violet's acts of individual resistance. Violet through her activism with feed confusion and anti-consumer tendencies serve as a counterpoint to this idea of apathy. She takes back a small amount of control through these small efforts at resisting the feed and in turn thinking and making choices for herself. Similar to Violet's activism, Daisy's cousin's Osbert and her cousin Piper each in their own ways not only find ways to cope with the uncertainties of war, but also find ways of taking active roles to help. Osbert chooses

activism by learning as much as he can about the war and when the time comes choosing to fight. Even though Daisy is sarcastic about Osbert's actions he and his friends are described as "waiting for the real action to get going so they could smoke out collaborators and look danger in the eye while carrying messages across enemy lines" (Rosoff 51). Again in his own way, even if Daisy sees it as a bit like play acting, Osbert takes an active role by paying attention and exchanging pieces of information with his friends. Piper takes a quieter role by using her skills to forage for food and later after Daisy is back in the states help others in a medical role. These characters choose activism in the face of war whereas Daisy for much of the book chooses apathy.

Daisy's apathy and disinterest in world events is seen as a common attitude of American teenagers. At the end of the novel, an older and wiser Daisy points out, "It was only a few months ago that there was finally a pause in the thousands of wars being waged all over the planet. Or was it one big war? I forget. I think everyone has" (Rosoff 171). Through Daisy, author Meg Rosoff points out how short the general population's memories are and often people are doomed to make the same mistakes because they choose not to learn from them. While much of the novel focuses on the apathy and disinterest of one particular teen, Daisy's statements here show that this attitude of apathy is a pervasive one. Titus and Violet make a similar point after their feeds are hacked by a protester. Violet and Titus point out, "I feel like we're the only two of us who like remember the, like, thing. People want to forget. You can't blame them" (Anderson 90). Violet and Titus hope that their

friends will have learned something from the trauma of this event. However, everyone continues to thoughtlessly party and rely on their feeds as if nothing had happened and nothing has changed. In contrast to *Brave New World* and *The Giver* whose collective histories have been purposely destroyed by the authorities, Daisy and Titus, at least initially, are not interested in learning from their personal and collective histories. Daisy, Titus, and Violet each have gained at least a small amount of wisdom through their experiences whereas many of the general populations like Titus's partying friends have not and will continue to make the same mistakes.

Daisy's feelings are not only common views among the majority in *How I Live Now* but also in American society in recent years over terrorism and impending possibility of war in the Middle East. Rosoff wrote this book as a way to make direct comment about the wrongful complacency of Americans in the face of September 11th, war and terrorism. Rosoff argues that Daisy apathetic point of view is similar to many in the United States saying that,

There's been a lot of criticism over Daisy's casual remark that "seven or 70,000 people died", but it's the way people feel — it doesn't affect People Like Us. Americans have always had this inborn sense that war always happens somewhere else to other people. One of my real goals in the novel was to show how there are no People Like Us anymore ("Interview: Amanda Craig Meets Meg Rosoff").

Rosoff bluntly shows the sense of entitlement citizens, along with Daisy, feel war is a remote subject and it does not happen to “People Like Us.” This mentality shows that many citizens choose to be apathetic and let others deal with these world issues.

Rosoff not only shows the reader Daisy’s detachment she also shows the general population’s own misplaced interests. Whenever Daisy and the cousins go into town they hear many rumors. One in particular in her list stands out: “2. My friend in Chelsea said the looting is terrible and she got the most amazing wide-screen TV” (Rosoff 41). This unnamed citizen does not focus on the fact that people are blatantly stealing because no one is there to stop them, but instead to callously point out the great “bargain” her friend got in the process. This rumor in particular highlights that while adults maybe more concerned than Daisy, they are still looking to pieces of news that serve their own self-interests.

The setting also contributes to Daisy’s sense of insulation and disinterest in the problems of the outside world. Daisy even admits, “It’s May and in the middle of the English countryside. And everyone’s saying It’s the most beautiful May we’ve had in years and Isn’t it ironic? From my point of view this made any doomsday scenario even harder to get my head around” (Rosoff 52). Daisy’s cousins’ farm is set far outside London in the middle of the beautiful spring season. Daisy has difficulty being concerned when darkness and fear seem so remote to the beauty and tranquility that surrounds her. While at first she is disinterested in nature, this beautiful natural setting allows Daisy an escape from the fear that currently exists within the bounds of general society. Daisy’s attention to the natural world as an

escape is similar to Violet's interest in the natural world where she asks, "Is there any moss any where?" (Anderson 229). Violet makes a list of activities she would like to experience and much of this list includes the natural world like swimming in the ocean and going to the mountains. Also, aptly both girls are named after flowers that further emphasize the role of nature as both an escape as well as a choice to take an active role in the world around them. The beauty of the natural setting allows Daisy to avoid taking an active role in the outside world.

Like Violet and Daisy, Guy Montag also makes a conscious choice to leave society and takes refuge away from the cities in the woods by a river as an alternative to the mental and actual destruction that awaits him in the city. The river Montag escapes to is described as a refuge: "It held him comfortably and gave him the time at last, the leisure, to consider this month, this year, and a lifetime of years. He listened to his heart slow. His thoughts stopped rushing with his blood" (Bradbury 140). Montag not only follows the river to escape, but also it gives him the opportunity to collect his thoughts and finally relax. The natural world away from society allows each of these characters the opportunity to escape whether permanently in Montag's case or temporarily in Violet's and Daisy's.

In addition to the beautiful setting making the war and the world seem more remote, the absence of parents or routine further throws Daisy's perspective out of whack. The war has caused "no parents, no teachers, no schedules. There was nowhere to go and nothing to do that would remind us that this sort of thing didn't happen in the Real World. There no longer was any Real World" (Rosoff 46). While

the absence of these bastions of authority might start to hit home the fact that there is a war on it further removes Daisy's mindset from the frightening realities. Further emphasizing Daisy and her cousin's insulation against the harsh realities of the outside world is that as modern conveniences become harder to come by they begin to "play" war and emergency. Without adults to tell them no, they decide to camp out in a barn as a way to hide from the enemy, but in reality their preparations are "in fact the main reason was that it was something to do" (Rosoff 27). Additionally, as they talk about making food found in the woods Daisy says, "But it had the right feel for an emergency" (Rosoff 28). They stay the night in the barn and then go back to the house for showers. At this point in the novel, the war and the real world are still very remote allowing them to play at survival rather than actually having to live it. They again choose to take control of the situation and choose to turn it into a game and in turn find a way to have a modicum of power in a situation where they actually have very little power or control. These actions that may seem like the children are making light of the situation actually can be seen as a coping mechanism to take control of an out of control situation.

However, it becomes clear after the family is removed from the idyllic family farm that their choice of ignorance is not always so blissful. For the first half of the novel, Daisy and her new family are able to ignore the state of the outside world by enjoying the lack of adults. Eventually, each is affected by the war and the "enemy." For example, Piper and Daisy are separated from the rest of their family, they are forced to give up their home as quarters for troops, and eventually are forced to flee.

Reviewer Geraldine Bedell argues that underneath Daisy's sarcastic narrative, "Its lack of punctuation, its muddled tenses, its breezy tone conceals an absolutely stricken state" ("Observer Review"). Daisy is at first complacent and apathetic, but eventually her feigned disinterest is there only to hide the horrible things that she and her cousins are forced to endure.

Their insulation and intentional lack of awareness allows them to believe they are invincible to the casualties of war. Daisy even foreshadows, "Given how things turned out you might wonder why we didn't make more of a scene about staying together but at the time we figured we could survive a week or two apart" (Rosoff 71). They think they will only be "rehoused" or separated temporarily. Daisy even says, "I'd say that the magic we were trusting to keep us safe from the outside world suddenly seemed too fragile to protect us forever" (Rosoff 60). As Daisy writes, she has an understanding that they feel as though the outside world has no way into their lovely English countryside existence.

The reader and Daisy are forced to reckon with reality in an instant when two men are brutally murdered by the enemy guards right in front of her. One of the army men in charge bluntly states, "In case anyone needed reminding This is a war" (Rosoff 104). One of the men is shot for harassing the checkpoint guards not realizing the gravity of the situation. Until this moment, Daisy continually tries to forget that "This is a war." Her disinterest not only shows her nature as a self-absorbed teenager but also serves as a coping mechanism. Witnessing a murder forces her to come face to face with harsh realities. This instant along with her and Piper's

harrowing journey through the wilderness along with seeing the ravages of war on Edmond, changes Daisy by the end into an active and compassionate citizen, unlike Titus from *Feed* who ends the novel as an easily manipulated and emotionally stunted young adult.

Both Titus and Daisy are only awakened to the harsh realities of the world when world events hit so close to home that they can no longer ignore them. However, while Daisy is changed for the better into a more aware and compassionate individual, Titus remains mostly unchanged being too conditioned by the feed to think for himself. Both novels follow in the footsteps of *Fahrenheit 451*, where whole populations choose to be apathetic and choose not to take an active role in the world and in turn those in authority whether that is the government or in Titus's case the corporations begin to make their choices for them.

Conclusion: Connections Between the Canon and the Contemporary

Brave New World, *Fahrenheit 451*, and even the comparatively new young adult text *The Giver* have been widely written about, studied, and taught in schools. However, the newer young adult works *Feed*, *The Uglies*, and *How I Live Now* should not be discounted for their lack of critique or study. These works have already begun to contribute to the tradition of dystopian literature as well as, like the earlier texts, work as extended metaphors and as critique of aspects of our own culture. These texts, while aimed at a new generation of young people, continue the tradition of dystopian literature which not only entertains readers but also warns influential young adults about the importance of choosing activism over apathy as well as the importance of thinking critically. This shift from adult characters to teens is significant because young readers will easily relate to the protagonists and will be able to influence how they view the world at a very vulnerable and impressionable time of life. These canonical texts and their successors share not only the general goals of creating dystopian worlds that share some of the trends from the time they were written in, they also share a general warning to the reader of what could happen in the future. What can be drawn from each of these dystopian societies is that if we are not thoughtful and diligent we can end up like them. While many of these societies have those in power pulling the strings, they only become this way through a complacent and compliant populace where people are no longer interested in making choices of their own.

The manipulation and misuse of history, consumption, and technology are factors in each of these works to keep citizens in line and under control. These issues also in turn assist in keeping average people from thinking about the state of their own society. The feed technology implanted in Americans' heads throughout *Feed* along with the corporation-funded and run "Schools" condition and keep the populace from thinking for themselves. While the corporations have control, many people allow it to continue because it makes their lives easier and more convenient. Similarly, throughout *Uglies* and *The Giver* so many choices are made for them that they cease to make any deep decisions for themselves.

The use of technology, consumption, and genetic conditioning have been touched on as ways these works convey how citizens are kept from making choices on their own. These texts also make significant points about the use of language in either giving average people the ability to express themselves or the lack of precision of language in turn hindering expression. Other themes such as the elimination of ethnic diversity in works like *The Uglies* or *The Giver* are also significant in showing how the elimination of difference can eliminate individual thought. These issues could be jumping off points for further study of these texts.

These works, whether a part of the larger canon or apart of their contemporary successors, are so often aimed at high school students in order to impress upon young people at this impressionable stage of life the importance of continuing to think, question, and make decisions for themselves. The move to adolescent protagonists not only helps young people to engage with the themes of the texts but also allows

young people to engage with important and sometimes even troubling issues in their own world today. Each of these novels describes a world where people are no longer to make decisions for themselves and the consequences when individual choice and autonomy no longer exist. Whether through the atrophy of thought that comes from apathy or by oppression of thought that comes by force, these works show the reader the dangers of not only present day trends but also the dangers of ignorance and apathy of the regular citizen. These works urge readers to question, to think, to read, and to become like Violet or Clarisse, who are catalysts for change and activism and not like the uninformed Mildreds of society.

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