



Faculty of Educational Sciences

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Master's Thesis

Young Adult Dystopian Literature

Didactic Benefits of its use in the English
Subject Classroom in Norway

Lektorutdanning i engelsk

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Norsk sammendrag.....	6
Abstract.....	7
1. Introduction.....	8
1.1 Thesis aim and research questions.....	9
1.2 Relevance of the thesis	9
1.3 Outline of the thesis.....	10
2. Methodology	12
2.1 Research strategy.....	12
2.1.1 Literature Review.....	12
2.1.2 Close Reading	14
2.1.3 Justification of the research strategy	14
2.2 Limitations and potential problems.....	15
3. Literature Review	16
3.1 Utopian and dystopian literature.....	16
3.2 Young Adult Dystopian Fiction.....	18
3.2.1 YA dystopian literature as a discourse of hope.....	18
3.2.2 Identifying common themes of YA dystopian fiction	20
3.2.3 Summary of common traits of YA dystopian literature.....	24
3.3 Establishing the popularity of YA dystopian fiction	25
3.4 Didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature	27
3.5 Summary	30
4. Literary analysis.....	32
4.1 Summary of the plot.....	32
4.2 Social organization: conformity	33
4.2.1 Conformity through the abuse of science	34
4.2.2 Conformity through control, technology and power.....	37
4.3 Environmental degradation and technological development.....	41
4.3.1 Technological utopia/dystopia – living in an infantilizing bubble	42
4.3.2 Ecological utopia – unmediated experiences through nature.....	43
4.3.3 Environmental issues	44

4.3.4	Progress v preservation: the ambiguous relationship between technology and nature..	46
4.4	Social and Political Criticism	47
4.4.1	Social criticism – gender inequality, gun regulations and multiculturalism.....	48
4.4.2	Human behavior – violence	52
4.5	“Young Blood, you have changed”: the characterization of female protagonist and heroine Tally	54
4.6	Conclusion	60
5.	Didactic benefits	63
5.1	Understanding and reflecting on society	64
5.1.1	Conformity	64
5.1.2	Environmental Degradation and Technological Development	66
5.2	Identity and Personal Development	69
5.2.1	<i>Bildung</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.2.2	Inspiring girls and young women.....	71
5.3	Developing Basic Skills	73
5.3.1	Reading skills.....	74
5.3.2	Digital skills	75
5.4	Summary	75
6.	Conclusion	77
6.1	Summary of Findings	77
6.2	Further Research	80
7.	Bibliography	81

Norsk sammendrag

Formålet med denne oppgaven er å undersøke hvilke didaktiske fordeler som kan knyttes til bruken av dystopisk ungdomslitteratur i engelskfaget i norsk skole. Mer konkret drøftes hvordan denne sjangeren bidrar til utvikling og styrking av elever i ungdomsalderens evner til kritisk refleksjon og deres forståelse av et moderne samfunn. Dette forbindes også med denne elevgruppens personlig utvikling. I tillegg undersøker denne studien hvordan bruk av dystopisk ungdomslitteratur kan bidra til å utvikle lese- og digitale ferdigheter. Denne oppgaven baserer seg på en spesifikk trilogi av Scott Westerfeld: *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) og *Specials* (2006).

Denne oppgaven tar utgangspunkt i litterær teori som omhandler både klassisk- og ungdomslitteratur innenfor den dystopiske sjangeren. I tillegg gjennomfører denne studien også en litterær analyse av Westerfeld sin *Uglies* trilogi. Funn fra analysen og teorikapitlet blir drøftet i lys av læreplanen, mer bestemt den generelle delen og læreplanen i engelsk, i tillegg til rammeverket for grunnleggende ferdigheter.

Arbeid med dystopisk ungdomslitteratur i engelskfaget kan bidra til å oppnå en rekke læreplanmål. Denne sjangeren har egenskaper som gjør den egnet til arbeid med elever i ungdomsalder innenfor norsk skole. Videre forskning innenfor dette feltet kan bestå av å undersøke konkrete lærestrategier og undervisningsmetoder der bruk av dystopisk ungdomslitteratur undersøkes gjennom empirisk forskning i norsk skole.

Abstract

This thesis examines didactic benefits of young adult (YA) dystopian literature when used in the English subject classroom in Norway. More specifically, the study investigates how working with this genre can develop young adult students' critical thinking skills and their understanding of contemporary society, and how this can influence readers' personal development and self-growth. Moreover, the thesis looks at the students' development of reading and digital skills when working with YA dystopian literature in general, and Scott Westerfeld's trilogy, *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006), in particular.

This study is based on literary theory, mainly traditional and YA dystopian literature, and didactic theory, which is presented in a literature review. The second research method is a close reading of Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy. The findings from both the close reading and the literature review are discussed in relation to the Common Core and English Subject Curricula, as well as the Framework for Basic Skills.

Working with YA dystopia can aid young adults to meet the learning outcomes that are set by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The qualities of this type of literature make it a viable choice for work in the English subject classroom and with young adults. Nevertheless, further research in this field can consist of testing concrete teaching methods and practical classroom applications in the form of empirical research.

1. Introduction

I suspect that young adults crave stories of broken futures because they themselves are uneasily aware that their world is falling apart (Westerfeld, *The Dark Side of Young Adult Fiction: Craving Truth-Telling*, 2012).

Economic, environmental, social, and political troubles are currently causing a grave crisis in our world (Vieira, 2010, p. 21). Traditional dystopian literature describes a way of life that we must strive to avoid by portraying a highly critical image of a futuristic society where negative social and political developments have triumphed (Claeys, 2010, p. 107). However, some argue that dystopia is already upon us, in embryo, and that its development is inescapable at this point (Stableford, 2010, p. 279). Young people also seem to have picked up on this dystopian pessimism, causing a new phenomenon within the dystopian literary field: the increase in popularity of young adult (YA) dystopian fiction.

YA dystopian literature has several characteristics that make it appealing to young adult readers. The genre deals with contemporary political and social concerns that are presented through an exciting plot where the reader is placed close to the action (Basu, Broad & Hintz, 2013, pp. 1-5). Additionally, YA dystopian works feature an adolescent protagonist who is able to reveal the faults and weaknesses of her society and eventually rebel against it (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 9). Young adult readers, who may have noticed the abundance of challenges that our contemporary society faces, can get a sense of hope when reading this type of literature. They might identify with the protagonist that these novels portray and prepare themselves to change a world filled with the wrongdoings of previous generations. In this thesis, I discuss in detail a dystopian trilogy for young adults that can be linked to several of these issues.

Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy (2005-2006) portrays a society where all citizens undergo plastic- and brain-altering surgery to reduce human faults such as violence, envy, jealousy, and conflict. The series aims to warn readers about the dangers of conformity and totalitarianism, the threats of technology's power and to promote the preservation of nature. These novels provide the main primary sources of this thesis. I have chosen this trilogy due to the wide range of themes it addresses. Conformity, environmental degradation and

technological development are topical concerns in contemporary society. I therefore believe that these works can be alluring to young adult readers as they are invited to draw parallels to dystopian elements in their own lives. The appealing qualities of the trilogy can in turn be linked to the didactic benefits that are outlined in section 1.2.

1.1 Thesis aim and research questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore the didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom in Norway by using Scott Westerfeld's works *Uglies* (2005), *Pretties* (2005) and *Specials* (2006). In order to explore this aim fully, the following research questions will be investigated:

1. In what way can working with Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy help develop pupils' critical reflection and promote their understanding of contemporary society, as well as strengthen their personal development and promote self-growth?
2. The use of YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom might have didactic benefits as it can help the learners develop different basic skills. How can YA dystopian fiction in general, and Westerfeld's trilogy in particular, help pupils develop reading and digital skills?

1.2 Relevance of the thesis

The Norwegian Core Curriculum is a general document that applies to students in primary and secondary school and vocational training, as well as adult education. It focuses on promoting values set by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training which will help students develop into autonomous and educated members of society. This document emphasizes seven key aspects of the human being: spirituality, creativity, work-ethic, liberal education, social qualities, environmental awareness and integration into society ("Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway," 2011). The use of YA dystopia in the English subject can be linked to this document as the genre encourages its readers to view society with a critical eye (Hintz & Ostry, 2010, p. 107). It can thus help young people to become independent and critical members of society.

The Framework for Basic Skills is another document developed by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. It applies to all subjects and all types of education. This document stresses the development of five basic skills: oral, reading, writing, digital skills and numeracy (“Framework for Basic Skills”, 2013a). In this thesis, I will link the use of YA dystopian literature to reading and digital skills in particular. Finally, the English Subject Curriculum stresses the importance of the English language in a globalized world; English is treated as a central element in acquiring knowledge as well as becoming a well-functioning and educated part of both an international and Norwegian society (“English Subject Curriculum (ENG1-03),” 2013b). Exposure to English literary texts such as YA dystopian literature can improve pupils’ general language proficiency, and their English language skills. This thesis will demonstrate how integrating YA dystopian fiction in the English subject classroom may enable teachers and pupils to achieve some of the goals expressed in the Common Core and English Subject Curricula, as well as the Framework for Basic Skills.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is structured in six chapters. The current chapter outlines the relevance of dystopian literature for young adults. Furthermore, it examines the overall research aim and research questions of this thesis and explains the role of the different curricula in this investigation. Chapter two contains an overview of the research methods that have been used in this study: qualitative research in the form of a literature review and a close reading of Westerfeld’s *Uglies* trilogy. The third chapter provides literary and didactic theory, and contains evidence that establishes the popularity of the YA dystopian genre. This background is necessary to identify dystopian characteristics in the literary analysis, as well as the tools needed to investigate the didactic benefits linked to the use of these works in the classroom. Chapter four conducts a literary analysis of Westerfeld’s novels *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006). This chapter explores themes that can be found in the novels: conformity, environmental degradation, technological development, political and social criticism and the characterization of the protagonist, all of which can be linked to the YA dystopian genre as a whole. The goal of this chapter is to identify these themes in order to show that they might be relevant and appealing to young adult learners. The YA dystopian

characteristics that are discussed in the literary analysis are then connected to possible didactic benefits in chapter five. Chapter five explores in which way these themes can help pupils develop critical reflection and understanding of their contemporary society. Moreover, the chapter examines the development of identity and the promotion of self-growth in relation to YA dystopian literature. Finally, it investigates how working with YA dystopian literature in the classroom can help develop reading and digital skills. This is done by combining the findings from the literary analysis with didactic theory provided in the literature review in chapter three and the Common Core and English Subject Curricula, as well as the Framework for Basic Skills. The final chapter formulates a conclusion to the research questions as well as the overall research aim. It also discusses the potential for further development of this research.

2. Methodology

The research methods used throughout this thesis consist of qualitative research in the form of a literature review and a close reading of the novels *Uglies* (2005), *Pretties* (2005) and *Specials* (2006) written by Scott Westerfeld. I explain why and how these strategies have been selected and applied. Finally, I discuss possible limitations and problems linked to these research methods.

2.1 Research strategy

My interest in investigating didactic benefits connected to YA dystopian fiction was sparked by my perception that there is an increase in popularity of this literary genre. I believe that working with literature that is engaging to students can facilitate their learning in the English subject. I therefore establish the popularity of YA dystopian fiction among young people. Moreover, I investigate how this genre's treatment of topical themes and issues can increase pupils' understanding of the complexities of contemporary society while developing critical thinking skills. Finally, I consider how YA learners can benefit from working with this literary genre in the English subject classroom with relation to the development of reading and digital skills.

2.1.1 Literature Review

First, I include a literature review to investigate the term “dystopian literature” more closely. Initially, I define the terms utopian and dystopian literature and review sources describing traditional dystopia. The literature review focuses mainly on the work *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* by Gregory Claeys (2010) and aims to provide an overview of typical characteristics of the classical dystopian genre. Then, I review sources written by researchers who focus primarily on YA literature in general and YA dystopian literature in particular. These sources include *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* by Hintz and Ostry (2003), Hayn and Kaplan's (2012) *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* and *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New*

Teenagers by Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013). By combining theory on both traditional and YA dystopian literature, it is possible to discuss the differences and similarities between these genres. These sources are also imperative in relation to the first research objective of this thesis, which aims to find out how YA dystopian literature can promote critical reflection and increase understanding of contemporary society. I identify didactic qualities of both the traditional and YA dystopian genres. Later, I combine these findings with specific traits of Westerfeld's works in order to facilitate the investigation of how YA dystopia can be used to teach young people about society. This aspect will be further elaborated in section 2.1.2 of this chapter.

Secondly, I establish the popularity of YA dystopian literature. The thesis focuses on Norwegian learners of English and the evidence used to establish the popularity of the genre includes Norwegian and American formal literature awards for YA fiction. In Norway, Uprisen has developed a literature prize directed towards reviewing Norwegian teen fiction. In the US, the Young Adult Library Association's (YALSA) Teen's Top Ten List provides an annual overview of the most popular literary works among adolescents and young adults. I investigate trends presented by these awards from the past five years. Additionally, Teen Ink, an online teen literary magazine and website consisting of completely teen-created content provides genuine, informal insights into what young people like to read. All of these sources are employed to investigate my hypothesis: YA dystopian literature is popular among adolescents and young adults. Finally, the sources *Becoming a Reader: The experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* by Appleyard (1991) and *Scary New World* by Green (2008) are reviewed. The former reports what young adult readers find appealing in literature in general, the latter argues why YA dystopian literature in particular might be popular among this audience. These findings are later used to evaluate didactic benefits of the genre in relation to the popularity as well as common traits of dystopia.

Finally, the second research objective aims to find out whether using YA dystopia in the English subject classroom can aid learners to develop their language proficiency. This dissertation focuses on reading and digital skills. The Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills, the English Subject and the Norwegian Core Curricula are used throughout this section to provide an overview of what the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training requires from Norwegian pupils and how these documents can be linked to the use of YA dystopian literature in the classroom. I review findings from Biesta (2002), Hintz and

Ostry (2003) and Basu et al. (2013) to focus on the didactic benefits of YA dystopian fiction in particular. Additionally, I review the work of Gibbons, Dail and Stallworth (2006) and Harmer (2013) to discuss potential advantages of using young adult literature in general.

2.1.2 Close Reading

I carry out a close reading of Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006), which is aimed at a literary analysis of these novels. The characteristics of both traditional and YA dystopian literature outlined in the literature review are linked to themes and elements of the *Uglies* trilogy in particular. In that way, it is possible to view the works in relation to the dystopian genre as a whole and identify ways in which working with these novels can profit YA readers.

The literary analysis considers four central elements in the trilogy: conformity, the relationship between environmental degradation and technological development, social and political criticism and the characterization of the protagonist. Theory on typical traits of both traditional and YA dystopian fiction that is outlined in chapter three is applied to examine specific examples from the *Uglies* trilogy.

2.1.3 Justification of the research strategy

I believe that the combination of a literature review and close reading of Westerfeld's works provides sufficient material to explore the didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature in general, and the *Uglies* trilogy in particular. The literature review serves as the backbone necessary to conduct the close reading of Westerfeld's novels. The findings from both research methods can justify why YA dystopian literature can develop students' understanding of contemporary society and strengthen their critical reflection. These qualities can in turn help them develop their identity and encourage self-growth, turning them into productive members of society. Finally, these findings can show that pupils might develop reading and digital skills by working with YA dystopian literature in the classroom.

2.2 Limitations and potential problems

One of the limitations of these research methods is the lack of empirical evidence. A theoretical approach of didactic and literary theory can only provide assumptions of the transactions that will find place between the pupils and the texts. Although didactic theory and the establishment of the genre's current popularity provide some insight in the interests and needs of pupils in relation to dystopias, they do not provide concrete quantitative evidence of what pupils in Norwegian schools actually experience when working with this type of texts.

The genre seems to be compatible with what the Common Core and English Subject Curricula, as well as the Framework for Basic Skills, expect from these pupils. Nevertheless, these research methods do not include concrete examples of teaching methods or strategies. This study examines why YA dystopian literature is a relevant genre to include in the English subject classroom, but does not offer concrete methods to approach these texts in a practical way.

3. Literature Review

The literature review chapter provides the background that is needed to conduct an investigation of the didactic benefits of using YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom. Firstly, I outline the main characteristics of both utopian and dystopian literature. I choose to include utopian literature in this review as well because there is a strong connection between this genre and the dystopian one, indicating that they both are ambiguous in meaning and interpretation. Secondly, I focus on YA dystopian literature in particular and explore both similarities and significant differences between this genre and traditional dystopian literature by outlining typical characteristics of YA dystopias. Identifying specific traits of this genre is important with regards to finding out why it has become increasingly popular among young adult readers. Establishing this popularity is another important aspect of the thesis. The genre's popular status among a young adult audience can be connected to motivation and questions of identity, which in turn are closely linked to the didactic benefits this genre can provide. Reading YA dystopian literature might improve readers' ability to conduct critical thinking and to motivate pupils who have difficulty reading longer texts. This chapter provides the tools to find out what the *Uglies* trilogy in particular has to offer with regards to didactic benefits.

3.1 Utopian and dystopian literature

Utopian and dystopian literature are challenging genres to define. Hintz and Ostry (2003, pp. 2-4) explain that the term utopia refers to a nonexistent society portrayed as significantly better than the reader's own. Dystopian literature, on the other hand, uses the narrative devices of utopian literature but is pessimistic in its representation of that society (Vieira, 2010, p. 17). Nevertheless, Vieira (2010, p. 7) urges that utopianism does not equal perfection. She also outlines additional characteristics of utopian writing:

Another characteristic is that it is human-centred, not relying on chance or on the intervention of external, divine forces in order to impose order on society. Utopian societies are built by human beings and are meant for them. And it is because utopists very often distrust individuals' capacity to live together, that we very frequently find a rigid set of laws

at the heart of utopian societies – rules that force the individuals to repress their unreliable and unstable nature and put on a more convenient social cloak. (p. 7)

The definition of the notion of utopia presents a paradox. On the one hand, these fictional societies strive towards improvement by focusing on human beings and their needs. On the other hand, individuality and human nature are distrusted and people are expected to adapt to a certain structure or ideology to enjoy the benefits of this system. This can indicate that the utopian ideal is subjective and that this genre has a strong connection to dystopian writing.

The contemporary dystopian genre was created after the atrocities at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a state of destruction and despair, heightened by the First World War, spread around the world (Claeys, 2010, p. 107). According to Claeys (2010, p. 107), its creation describes a movement from Victorian optimism to an age of confusion. He explains that the optimism established during the period of Enlightenment was replaced by the notion that humanity was incapable of restraining its newfound destructive powers. He continues that dystopian literature becomes the twentieth century's expression of the utopian ideal, describing social structures in a negative manner, and reflecting the failures of totalitarian collectivism. This implies that one of the main goals of traditional dystopian literature is to warn the reader and raise political and social awareness. Furthermore, this description of dystopia shows that the relationship between utopia and dystopia is ambiguous. Whether a society is interpreted as utopian or dystopian depends on context, whose perspective the reader is presented with, and on the reader and her horizon of expectations.

Claeys (2010, p. 109) argues that the two best-known examples of dystopian literature are Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). He emphasizes that these works share a common theme:

The quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systematic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control. (p. 109)

The seemingly hopeless situation in which characters of both *Brave New World* (1932) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are placed can be described as another common trait of classic

dystopian literature. It can frighten and warn the reader. Nevertheless, Vieira (2010, p. 17) argues that although the audience of dystopian literature might despair due to the pessimistic presentation of its characters and contemporary challenges, the genre is didactic as it encourages social improvement. She claims that the outcome of a futuristic society depends on moral, and social and civic responsibility and that an element of hope is necessary even in dystopian writing. In YA dystopian literature, hope plays an even more significant role.

3.2 Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

There are both similarities and significant differences between traditional and YA dystopian literature. YA dystopian fiction often deals with the same themes as classic dystopian literature, such as conformity and totalitarianism. However, as the former is targeted at a younger audience, these themes are usually dealt with differently than in traditional dystopian literature. Whereas classic dystopian characters commonly are unable to rebel against the totalitarian regime, YA dystopian protagonists are able to defy the system. Additionally, Kaplan (2012, p. 125) claims that young people are attracted to alternative realities portrayed in YA dystopian fiction, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, which have caused increased attention to violence and terror. He argues that this has led to the fact that adolescent readers are more drawn to fiction where characters inhabit a world that has been turned upside down. This section will explore a couple of traits that characterize YA dystopian fiction in particular.

3.2.1 YA dystopian literature as a discourse of hope

When introduced to YA dystopian literature, young adult readers, who may have noticed the fact that our society faces major challenges, can get a sense of hope. They might identify themselves with the protagonist that these novels portray, and prepare themselves to save our world from the destruction previous generations have caused. The element of hope is more explicit in YA dystopian fiction, separating it from traditional dystopia. Basu et al. (2013) explain the difference between these two genres:

Although more traditional dystopias such as George Orwell's *1984* (1949) were largely "an extrapolation from the present that involved a warning", more recent examples, especially for

young people, are expressly concerned with how to use this warning to create new possibilities for utopian hope within the space of the text. The dystopian worlds are bleak not because they are meant to stand as mere cautionary tales, but because they are designed to display- in sharp relief- the possibility of utopian change even in the darkest of circumstances. (p. 3)

The YA dystopian genre thus seems to be more optimistic than the traditional one. As mentioned in section 3.1, a common theme of traditional dystopian literature is the seemingly hopeless situation the characters find themselves in. Attempts towards individualism and rebellion might be made, but totalitarian power always triumphs. This outcome provides its audience with harsh political or social criticism, as well as a firm warning.

In YA dystopian fiction however, rebellions against the oppressing system are successful. Adolescent protagonists succeed in their task to liberate their society from the strictures of totalitarianism or other dystopian challenges (Basu et al., 2013, p. 6). Examples of such works are The Hunger Games series (2008-2010) by Collins and Roth's Divergent series (2011-2013). The Hunger Games trilogy features protagonist Katniss Everdeen, whose actions lead to a rebellion that ends the brutal tradition of sacrificing twenty-three adolescents for the entertainment of the elite each year. The fall of this government reintroduces prosperity to the rest of the population as they are freed from the dystopian regime. In the Divergent trilogy, protagonist Tris Prior is able to overthrow a government that is focused on maintaining control by dividing society into rigid groups, so-called factions. Each group is committed to a single human quality. Tris' actions lead to the liberation of her people and the end of the faction system. Hope is ever present in YA dystopian fiction. Von Mossner (2013, p. 17) claims that failing to provide the audience with hope would be terribly unethical. YA readers are made aware that there is a chance for utopian change even in the bleakest of dystopian scenarios. YA dystopian author Monica Hughes underlines that "you may lead a child into the darkness, but you must never turn out the light," (Hughes, 2003, p. 156) as she urges that this genre needs to contain hope to make it both appealing and educational for the YA audience.

Both traditional and YA dystopia aim to increase social and political awareness among its readers, in that way instilling a hope that they can avoid the mistakes that are portrayed in

the futuristic, dystopian society. I believe that the explicit element of hope in YA dystopian gives the genre an outspoken didactic quality. The intended audience of these works are adolescents and young adults who often are often compelled to conform in their own lives. These readers balance between childhood and adulthood which implies that their role in civic life is limited by their age and social status. The rebellious characters in the YA dystopian genre can teach YA readers about the challenges in their contemporary society by treating topical themes. This can increase their understanding of political and social issues. At the same time, the successful act of rebellion of these characters can teach readers that they too can be powerful agents in their society and that their opinions and actions are valuable. The element of hope lies in the message that young people do not necessarily have to conform to a set structure or system in their lives. The genre can teach them that they can have a beneficial impact on society and that their knowledge, ideas and actions can create new possibilities for the future.

3.2.2 Identifying common themes of YA dystopian fiction

There is a lot of diversity within the YA dystopian genre. Authors deal with a wide range of issues and choose to address them in different ways. However, Basu et al. (2013, pp. 1-5) identify certain themes which portray central fears and challenges of YA readers' contemporary society, reflected in a dystopian setting. Examples of prominent themes are environmental destruction, post-apocalypse and conformity. Additionally, they argue that one of the overall objectives of dystopian fiction is to frighten and warn the reader by addressing common concerns such as liberty and self-determination, ecological challenges and other types of imminent catastrophe. I have chosen to focus on environmental degradation, conformity, liberty and self-determination. The latter can be closely linked to the portrayal of an adolescent protagonist, which is another central element in YA dystopian literature.

The twenty-first century is filled with environmental challenges. According to the United Nations, climate change is one of the largest trials of our time, adding considerable pressure to human life and to the environment. The organization mentions shifting weather patterns that threaten food production and rising sea levels that increase the risk of flooding to describe the unavoidable impact of climate change on our planet. Finally, they claim that

without drastic action, these impacts will increase the future considerably, as there is already alarming evidence that there has been done irreversible damage to major ecosystems that will have repercussions for many generations to come (United Nations, 2018).

YA dystopias often portray trials of contemporary society in a dystopian setting and environmental degradation is a common theme in this genre. Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 12) report that the pressure on our environment has been reflected in YA dystopian writing since the 1970s. They name novels such as Soutenburg's *Out There* (1971), O'Brien's *Z for Zachariah* (1974), and *Brother in the Land* (1984) by Swindell as examples of typical YA eco-dystopian fiction. Additionally, Von Mossner (2013, p. 71) puts forward examples of recent publication in North America such as *Islands* (2008) by Sackin, *Empty* (2009) by Weyn, and Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* (2010). Recent publications in the UK are also mentioned by Von Mossner (2013, p. 71). These include Thompson's *The White Horse Trick* (2011) and Bretagna's Exodus trilogy (2002-2011). The amount of publications since the 1970s to present day underlines the popularity of eco-dystopian fiction among young adults. The theme of environmental degradation is frequently articulated in our contemporary society. It is therefore possible that this a familiar topic for YA readers. The genre presents scenarios of ecological destruction such as rising sea levels, storms and the end of fossil fuel according to Basu et al. (2013, p. 3) They add that the treatment of this theme can inform readers about the pitfalls of environmental degradation, functioning as cautionary tales, while at the same time provide them with examples of adolescent protagonists who learn to adapt and survive in altered times.

Closely linked to environmental degradation is the representation of technology in YA dystopian literature. It can offer adolescent readers both fear and hope, as YA readers are exposed to both concerns and accomplishments of technological advances (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 11). Furthermore, Ostry (2013, pp. 101-102) argues that technological development is often connected to criticism regarding young adult culture and consumerism, as well as ecological problems. She explains that YA dystopian literature often portrays the complexity of environmental and technological issues, and through this connection can invite adolescent readers to rethink their relationship to both the environment and technology.

Another theme that is frequently explored in YA dystopian literature is conformity. Utopian and dystopian writing address fears, questions, and issues that are engaging to young adults.

As they are increasingly more controlled, conformity is a topical theme within this genre (Hintz & Ostry, 2003 pp. 12-13). Conformity in dystopian writing for young adults is usually reflected by an oppressive system where creativity and individuality are discouraged or suppressed (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 7). According to Basu et al. (2013, pp. 3-4), the depiction of a conformist society is often exaggerated for dramatic effect, as well as the struggle between the adolescent protagonist and an oppressive authority. They argue that novels that deal with this theme attempt to illustrate an appropriate balance between personal freedom and social harmony. This aspect of the conformist theme can be a valuable asset to YA dystopian writing, as YA readers are encouraged to deal with the pressure to conform in their own lives, while at the same time learning to accept certain aspects of society. Moreover, young people can be encouraged to value individuality while at the same time come to terms with their own limitations. Ultimately, an emphasis on conformity can contribute to readers' understanding of social and political structures and increase their awareness, urging them to work towards change.

Conformity is connected to is the theme of liberty and self-determination. According to Basu et al. (2013, pp. 5-6) YA dystopian fiction frequently addresses another popular adolescent theme: escape from the strictures of social convention, which can offer YA readers an enjoyable retreat from their daily lives. Moreover, Basu et al. (2013, p. 7) claim that by emphasizing challenges such as environmental degradation or political friction, adolescent protagonists are able to uncover the failures and wrongdoings of their society and in this way experience an awakening. They add that this can increase their awareness and help them on their journey from childhood to adulthood. It can therefore be argued that this genre contains elements of the coming-of-age novel or the *Bildungsroman*. Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell (2010) define this term as follows:

A German term for a “formation novel” or “novel of education”. A *Bildungsroman* narrates the journey of a young person from adolescence and inexperience to a state of greater self-knowledge. It is a journey of discovery which leads to a more fully formed or mature identity. (p. 331)

Protagonists in YA dystopian fiction are set up to rebel against a dystopian oppressive regime, fight injustice or combat environmental challenges, among other trials. These experiences can function as a catalyst in these characters' coming-of-age process. YA

dystopian novels can in this way portray a development in the characters' personal identity and growth. Additionally, Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 9) argue that dystopia in itself can act as a metaphor for adolescence. They elaborate on this by saying that young adults often discover the faults and weaknesses of their society, and attempt to rebel against it. Novels portraying adolescents who successfully rebel against adult oppressors are common. In the average YA dystopian novel, the adolescent protagonist knows best and this is well received by young adult readers of the genre (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 10). This means that there are certain characteristics of the YA dystopian novel that engage with adolescents in particular. The appealing characteristics of this genre are explored in section 3.3.

YA dystopian fiction often features female protagonists. Fritz (2014) argues that the role of young women in this type of literature has taken a central place:

In contemporary popular culture, however, nowhere is this story about the “future girl” and the “new subjectivity” she models being more explicitly and compellingly told than in YA dystopian fiction for young adults. Female protagonists have taken center stage in YA dystopias as girls who resist the forces of their broken and corrupt societies to create their own identities, shape their own destinies, and transform the worlds in which they live. (p. 17)

In a dystopian society, fictional or real, it seems that girls and young women are encouraged to become active citizens and claim their place in society. It can thus be argued that YA dystopian literature can contain elements of the girl power rhetoric. This is explained by Pomerantz (2008) as a movement which enables girls to assume a variety of identities which allows them to resist dominant expectations of femininity. According to Fritz (2014, p. 18) YA dystopias celebrate the rebellious and defiant characteristics of female protagonists by portraying them as heroines who fight against laws and norms of their dystopian world. Moreover, she describes that the representation of dystopian girl rebellion can be potentially powerful for female readers due to the fact that they offer different definitions of girl power by opposing conventional gender roles and identities. This element of the genre can engage girls and young women in particular and encourage them to take control of their lives by showing that girls are neither too weak or too powerless to achieve something as substantial or significant as social or political change.

What is contradictory in YA dystopian novels is the fact that, even though they function as a discourse of hope, their serious themes also create a distance between the audience and the events portrayed in the novel. On the one hand, Basu et al. (2013) explain that this genre uses several techniques to engage with young readers. Exciting adventures with gripping plots, narrative techniques that place the reader close to the action and engaging dialogue are all used to help the reader understand not only important global concerns, but also themselves and the world around them. Eventually, this might inspire adolescents to take part in social change. On the other hand, Basu et al. (2013) note that the genre's ambitious treatment of serious political and social concerns might not inspire social change at all. They suggest that the YA dystopian themes might be too far-fetched, creating a distance between reader and text. This might cause the novels to be read as flights of fancy rather than a possible future. This means that in order for YA dystopian fiction to function as a discourse of hope and social change, it is crucial that the text engages with the audience on a personal level.

3.2.3 Summary of common traits of YA dystopian literature

A short list of central aspects of YA dystopian fiction can be helpful in the literary analysis of the *Uglies* trilogy in chapter four. These characteristics can be compared to elements of Westerfeld's novels and can facilitate the comparison of these works to the genre as a whole. In sum, YA dystopian literature often:

- Reflects challenges of the reader's contemporary society, functioning as a political or social warning.
- Functions as a discourse of hope by raising political and social awareness of contemporary challenges, in that way encouraging young people that undertaking action can make a difference to society.
- Addresses similar themes as traditional dystopian literature such as environmental degradation, technological development and conformity.
- Contains the theme of liberty and self-determination
- Has an adolescent protagonist who successfully rebels against an oppressive system. The protagonist is often portrayed as a female heroine.
- Contains elements of the *Bildungsroman*.

3.3 Establishing the popularity of YA dystopian fiction

In recent years, young adult dystopian fiction has become an increasingly important literary genre. This is reflected in both formal and informal book reviews, internationally and in Norway. During the past five years, Uprisen, a Norwegian literature prize developed directly to review Norwegian teen fiction, has nominated and awarded several dystopian works. The jury consists of lower secondary students from year nine and ten. Winners of the prize include dystopias like *I morgen er alt mørkt* (2014) by Sigbjørn Mostue, and *Dystopia III* (2011) by Terje Torkildsen (Foreningen !les, 2017). In the USA, the Young Adult Library Association (YALSA) Teen's Top Ten List has contained a number of dystopian works during the last five years. Examples of dystopian works in the Teen's Top Ten List are Marie Lu's *Legend* (2011) and *The Young Elites* (2014), *Illuminae* (2015) by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff, and Veronica Roth's Divergent trilogy (2011-2013) (The Young Adult Library Association, 2017). Additionally, Teen Ink, an online teen literary magazine and website consisting of completely teen-created content, offers an informal overview of which books are popular among young adult readers today. The section "Hot New Releases" displays several YA dystopian works in its top ten. As of April 2018, *Midnight City* (2012) by J. Barton Mitchel, *Eve and Adam* (2012) by Michael Grant and Katherine Applegate, and *Crewel* (2012) by Gennifer Albin are among the novels that are considered popular on this forum (Teen Ink, 2018). I believe these examples illustrate that there is an increase in the popularity of YA dystopian fiction. The next section will explore how elements of this genre can be linked to its increase in popularity among young adult readers.

Both Green (2008) and Kaplan (2012) report that the "wave" of YA dystopia began with the success of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008). In 2008, novelist John Green described the huge increase of dystopian literature for young adults in an article of the *New York times Sunday Book Review* called "Scary New World". With the publication of more than a dozen dystopian young adult novels in recent years, he observed that YA dystopias had become the "Next Big Thing". In his article, Green (2008) explored reasons why this genre was becoming increasingly popular by using Suzanne Collins' bestseller series *The Hunger Games*:

[...] the considerable strength of the novel comes in Collins' convincingly detailed world-building and her memorably complex and fascinating heroine. In fact, by not calling attention to itself, the text disappears in the way a good font does: nothing stands between Katniss and the reader, between Panem and America. This makes for an exhilarating narrative and a future we can fear and believe in, but it also allows us to see the similarities between Katniss's world and ours.

The work offers an intimacy between the reader and the characters. There are similarities between the fictional society of Panem, and the reader's own world, in Green's case, America. The parallel between Panem and America is apparent in the novel. In *The Hunger Games* (2008) the reader is informed that Panem is in fact a post-apocalyptic America, it lies on the same geographical location. Thus, finding similarities and imagining a possible catastrophic future might not be that hard for the reader. Appleyard (1991, p. 100) adds that adolescents are drawn to a literary work when they are able to identify with the characters. This is in line with what Green (2008) has claimed regarding the intimacy between the work and the reader. However, Green (2008) describes the reader in general, whereas Appleyard (1991) considers the adolescent reader in particular.

We know what made John Green (2008) like *The Hunger Games* (2008) but what are the characteristics of literature that adolescents like? Appleyard (1991, pp. 100-101) claims that literature which portrays themes such as sex, death, sin and prejudice is attractive to young adult readers. Additionally, he argues that YA literature does not neatly separate good and evil as is the case in children's literature; In the YA genres, good and evil are intertwined with the confused and ever-changing emotions of the protagonists of these texts. There are several factors that cause a text to engage with adolescent readers. Appleyard (1991, p. 100) presents three types of responses that adolescents give when asked why they read particular stories. Firstly, they experience involvement with the novel and identify themselves with the characters. Secondly, they describe the element of reality of the text. Finally, young adult readers say that a good novel makes them think. He explains that these factors are interconnected. The adolescent reader identifies with characters in the text and experiences involvement with the characters' lives. This helps them reflect upon their own lives and the world they are living in. At the same time, Appleyard (1991, p. 107) claims that young adult readers usually like stories because of the element of reality. These readers like certain stories because they are considered "true" or "normal". Initially, this claim seems to

be contradictory to the increasing popularity of the YA dystopian genre, as dystopian fiction is not "true to life". However, dystopias are a reflection of global concerns. They portray a world that the reader might be facing if the challenges that the real world is faced with are not resolved. Dystopias thus have an element of reality, as they aim to convey political or social criticism. As adolescent readers like stories that make them reflect, this genre might give readers the opportunity to reflect on these serious themes and develop critical thinking skills.

In sum, young adult readers seek identification, realism and reflection when reading stories, and this is exactly what the popular YA dystopian novels provide. A good story therefore needs to engage with the reader on a personal level, as well as convey both frightening and warning themes that make them reflect upon their own situation. In these works, the narrator's distance to the characters is intimate. Despite the gloomy themes of the genre, no buffer stands between them. The combination of these elements is what makes the genre so popular.

3.4 Didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature

The characteristics of both traditional and YA dystopian literature are compatible with the goals set by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Firstly, the Common Core Curriculum focuses on promoting knowledge and values that should underlie all teaching (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). Secondly, the English Subject Curriculum emphasizes learning outcomes that are related to culture, society and literature in the English speaking world and in Norway (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2013b). Thirdly, the Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills provides an overview of five basic skills that Norwegian pupils are expected to develop in the course of their education (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2013a). In this thesis, I focus on reading and digital skills. These three documents, together with the findings from the previous sections in this literature review, will be used to examine how integrating YA dystopian literature in the English subject can promote the development of various didactic benefits that are in accordance with the goals set by the Norwegian government.

As YA dystopian fiction is closely related to children's literature, Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 7) describe it as an "inherently pedagogical genre", it contains lessons the reader can learn from. Moreover, Basu et al. (2013, p. 5) state that the genre has two main objectives: education and escape. The former seeks to engage its adolescent audience with politics and society; readers are treated as idealists and are urged to deal with challenges our world faces today by increasing social and political awareness. The latter offers young people a break from their quotidian experience as these literary works portray adolescent characters that are able to break free from an oppressive, adult system. These qualities can contribute to teaching young people how to deal with the demands of contemporary society, as well as inspire them to initiate social change. In this way, they can help shape society and attempt to improve the wrongdoings of past generations.

In addition to preparing young adults for the challenges that await them as adults, including solving problems of the twenty-first century, YA dystopian literature can help teach YA readers about themselves. Hintz and Ostry (2003, pp. 9-10) claim that dystopian literature contains elements of *Bildung*. There is a certain duality linked to this term as it can be both educational and political. For the scope of this thesis, I will focus on the educational aspect. According to Biesta (2002, p. 378) the notion of *Bildung* was initially defined in terms of the *contents of Bildung*: an educated person that holds a distinct set of ideas, values and knowledge. During the period of Enlightenment, *Bildung* was also linked to a person's autonomy, his role in society and his ability to make his own judgements (Biesta, 2002, p. 378). At this point in history, ideas about women's autonomy and ability to become independent citizens in society were still overlooked. However, the current perception of *Bildung* promotes a general education that *every* person should engage in and concentrates on self-determination, freedom, emancipation, autonomy, rationality and independence (Biesta, 2002, p. 379). As discussed in section 3.2.2, powerful female protagonists are strongly represented in contemporary YA dystopian literature. The element of *Bildung* can therefore be relevant to readers of all genders when looking at the didactic possibilities of this genre. The element of *Bildung* in YA dystopian literature is also in accordance with the Norwegian Core Curriculum, as it states that schools should promote values like intellectual freedom, tolerance and equal rights (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011). Working with this type of genre might provide adolescents with the motivation they need to create their own ideas in a society where new knowledge, technology and problem solving skills are constantly required.

“Utopian literature encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action” claim Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 7). As outlined in section 3.1, there is a strong connection between the utopian and dystopian genre. Certain characteristics of utopian literature also apply to dystopian fiction. The latter is equally critical of contemporary society and in that way also urges its audience to consider the issues and challenges that it addresses. Exposing YA readers to this type of literature can strengthen their critical reflection by allowing them to draw parallels between their contemporary society and the dystopian one presented in these works.

YA dystopian fiction can also teach its audience about central values in our society. Hintz and Ostry (2003, pp. 8-9) explain that YA dystopian fiction often depicts extreme cases of class inequality, social injustice, conformity or totalitarianism. They suggest that encountering these challenges in literature might help young people consider the nature of justice, democracy and liberty. It challenges them to consider the value of each individual and might inspire them to battle social inequality and question oppressive regimes in their own world. Given the pedagogical qualities of this genre with regards to critical reflection, integrating this type of literature in the English subject classroom can be beneficial. According to the values that the Norwegian Core Curriculum promotes, which were mentioned previously in this section, it seems that the Norwegian government aims to inspire future generations to work towards social equality and attempt to find solutions to decrease social injustice. Moreover, the English Subject Curriculum requires pupils to discuss and reflect upon English literary texts from English speaking countries (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2013b, p. 9). This implies that YA dystopian literature can be used to achieve competence aims from the general Curriculum and the English Subject Curriculum.

In a didactic perspective, integrating YA dystopias into the classroom does not merely benefit young learners by developing their critical thinking skills or their understanding about central values in our society. The contemporary popular status and appealing qualities, which are discussed in section 3.4, may be beneficial for developing students’ readings skills because it might make them motivated to read more. Harmer (2013, p. 83) encourages teachers who work with adolescents to provoke student engagement by using teaching material that is both relevant and involving. Moreover, he argues that these learners should

be exposed to texts and situations that inspire them to use their own thoughts and experiences. Support of this is found with Gibbons, Dail and Stallworth (2006, p. 53) who report that integrating young adult literature in secondary classrooms can help improve pupils' reading skills and encourage young people to read more, which can in turn help them become more proficient readers. Young adult literature in general is directly aimed at young readers, and the language is adapted to their abilities. It can therefore aid readers who are struggling to read at their grade level. Research by Gibbon et al. (2006, p. 57) shows that young adult literature benefits struggling and reluctant readers. They add that practicing reading is proven to be the best way of improving literary skills and reading proficiency. The narrative of young adult literature connects with the reader on a more intimate level and can therefore provide enjoyment of reading, motivating them to read on and in that way strengthen their reading skills.

Reading skills are included in the Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills. This document defines reading as a way to create meaning from texts in the widest sense (Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research, 2013a, p. 8). Additionally, the English Subject Curriculum offers a range of different texts for teachers to use in the classroom. Examples of these texts include illustrations, graphs, symbols, and other modes of expression. Finally, it states that reading involves engaging with texts, comprehending and applying what is read and reflecting on this (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013b, p. 9). The English Subject Curriculum is flexible with regards to what kinds of texts can be used to develop pupils' reading skills. In relation to YA dystopias' popularity among YA readers, I believe integrating this genre in the classroom can be a sensible choice.

3.5 Summary

The study of relevant previous research and literature on traditional and YA dystopian fiction shows that this genre is both diverse and complex. It offers various benefits when introduced to Norwegian learners of the English subject. First, the contrast between classical and YA dystopian fiction is marked by the elements of hope. Traditional dystopias primarily seek to frighten and warn the reader, although readers are encouraged to avoid the outcome depicted in these works. YA dystopias also aim to warn the reader, but the element of hope is more explicit. Serious themes such as the dangers of environmental degradation,

technological development, consumerism and conformity challenges are mixed with gripping plots and exciting adventures and characters. These elements contribute to the popularity the genre has seen in recent years. Young adult readers are attracted to the intimate narration of exciting dystopian settings and identify with or might even strive to become like the heroic teenage protagonists in these novels. Popularity is therefore closely linked to the didactic benefits this genre has to offer. Reader motivation connected to the popularity plays an important role in improving reading skills. Additionally, YA dystopian fiction can teach young adult readers about themselves and strengthen their identity. Moreover, the genre offers a chance to reflect on dystopian themes and develop pupils' critical thinking skills. Ultimately, the YA dystopian genre is a great way to inspire young people to face the challenges the twenty-first century will offer in a sustainable, responsible manner.

4. Literary analysis

In this chapter I conduct a literary analysis of Westerfeld's novels *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006). The aim of this chapter is to identify typical traits of the dystopian genre within these novels, the objective of which is to show that these novels can be useful and appealing to pupils in the English subject classroom. I have chosen to focus on what I believe to be central themes and/or elements in these novels: conformity, environmental degradation and technological development, social and political criticism, and the characterization of protagonist Tally Youngblood. Passages of the novels are combined with theory on both traditional and YA dystopian fiction to fully explore the dystopian characteristics of the *Uglies* trilogy.

4.1 Summary of the plot

This section includes a brief summary of the novels *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006). I believe that an overview of the plot can provide an increased understanding of the examples that are used throughout the literary analysis.

The first novel of Westerfeld's trilogy is *Uglies* (2005a). The reader is introduced to fifteen-year-old protagonist Tally Youngblood and the dystopian world she inhabits. The society depicted in the novel is built on the norms of beauty. Citizens are therefore divided into categories; littlies, uglies and pretties. These labels also help enforce people's social status in this community. At age sixteen, all citizens are subjected to extensive plastic surgery, making everyone equally physically appealing. Tally, an ugly, is eager to undergo the surgery. Her plans are disturbed by her encounter with Shay, another ugly who is determined to escape this society. Tally is pressured by the city authorities, Special Circumstances, to bring back Shay. This leads her to the discovery of the government's real motives for the operation: altering their brains and turning them into obedient subjects.

In the second novel, *Pretties* (2005b), the reader is introduced to the protagonist anew; Tally has surrendered herself to the authorities and has undergone the operation. It becomes clear that both her body and mind have undergone changes. This novel focuses on Tally's

attempts to cure the alterations done to her brain. The feeling she strives to find is described as being “bubbly”. This is a state of mind that is equivalent to being clear-headed and free from the brain lesions inflicted by the operation. In the meantime, Tally meets Zane, the leader of a rebellious group of pretties. Together they explore methods to become bubbly, such as finding adrenaline kicks and excitement. Motivated to remain clear-headed, they escape the city with a large group of pretties. However, Tally and Zane are recaptured by the authorities and forced back to the city.

In the last novel, *Specials* (2006), protagonist Tally is turned into a special. She is part of Special Circumstances; an underground government created to control and contain the rest of the population. Tally’s search to become bubbly is replaced by a desire to be icy, which is equivalent to being stripped of all unnecessary emotions. As the rebellious community outside the city grows stronger, the authorities’ grip on Tally increases. Yet, Tally manages to free herself once more and causes the oppressive system to fall. Soon the city is freed from brain altering operations. At the end of the third novel, Tally sets out on a new mission: protecting the environment as a new world without brain-altering surgeries is expanding.

4.2 Social organization: conformity

The first major dystopian theme I will discuss is conformity. According to Basu et al. (2013, pp. 1-5) YA dystopian literature tends to reflect concerns of its own contemporary society into a dystopian one: conformity is one of these concerns. Furthermore, they suggest that conformity is often exaggerated within this genre to create a dramatic effect. In the *Uglies* trilogy there is an emphasis on social organization. As the social system of this dystopian society is described, it gradually becomes apparent that one of the main goals of the authorities in these novels is to obtain conformity. As the plot progresses, the reader is introduced to increasingly extreme methods to acquire conformity. This section is therefore divided into two different subordinate sections. Firstly, I explore how conformity is achieved through the abuse of science. Then, I investigate examples in the novel indicating that conformity is achieved by the abuse of power, technology, and control.

4.2.1 Conformity through the abuse of science

In *Uglies* (2005a), the reader is introduced to a society that is built on universal beauty standards. Whenever the social organization of the novel's society is described, the fact that authorities are controlling and monitoring their citizens becomes more apparent. Protagonist Tally often mentions her interface ring; a device that assures her safety in the city, and keeps records of her whereabouts. Additionally, there are so-called minders who make sure that citizens, mainly teenagers, or uglies, keep out of trouble, suggesting that the population of this fictional society is highly monitored and has little privacy. The extent of control in *Uglies* (2005a) is illustrated by Dr. Cable, the character representing the city's authorities in the series: "This city is a paradise, Tally. It feeds you, educates you, keeps you safe. It makes you pretty." (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 106). This explanation can indicate that the government's goal is to achieve conformity through contentment. By keeping the population satisfied, the government can avoid citizens asking questions or leaving the city. Yet, keeping its population content is not the only method the authorities use to keep citizens in line.

The main method to achieve conformity is through mind-altering surgeries. The population is indoctrinated with ideas about universal traits of beauty. The city's ideology is explained early on in *Uglies* (2005a):

At school, they explained how it affected you. It didn't matter if you knew about evolution or not – it worked anyway. On everyone. There was a certain kind of beauty, a prettiness that everyone could see. Big eyes and full lips like a kid's; smooth, clear skin; symmetrical features; and a thousand other little clues [...] It was biology, they said at school. (2005a, p.17)

This explanation suggests that citizens are fed this ideology early on in their lives, as they teach it at school. The population is made to believe that by making everyone equally attractive, social equality can be achieved. Furthermore, they are told that this equality has put an end to violence, war and conflict.

All the challenges humanity struggles with in the reader's contemporary society seem to be cut away during the operation. Crag Hill (2012, p. 100) adds that this beauty and security create an unsettling uniformity in their society. In *Uglies* (2005a), Tally is living in the

Smoke, the rebellious community outside the city. Here, she discovers the truth behind the operation. Former city surgeons Az and Maddy inform Tally that city governments in this dystopian world depend on mind-altering operations to achieve uniformity. The ideology about beauty leading to equality and peace is a lie:

“I found that there were complications from the anesthetic used in the operation. Tiny lesions in the brain” [...] “And the lesions weren’t cancerous, because they didn’t spread. Almost everyone had them, and they were always in exactly the same place” [...] “Maybe it’s not so complicated. Maybe the reason war and all that other stuff went away is that there are no controversies, no disagreements, no people demanding change. Just masses of smiling pretties, and a few people left to run things” [...] “Becoming pretty doesn’t just change the way you look,” she said. “No,” David said. “It changes the way you think.” (2005a, pp. 263-268)

This passage is crucial in *Uglies* (2005a). City authorities are willing to use extreme measures to control the population. All citizens are turned into happy, obedient subjects, made too ignorant to rebel against their government. The revelation is also a turning point for Tally, she distances herself completely from the life she once had in the city.

Many YA dystopian novels feature a sudden or gradual awakening to truth (Basu et al. 2013, p. 4). This then leads to the protagonist’s rebellion to achieve freedom from the oppressive regime. In *Uglies* (2005a), this revelation causes Tally to do just that. She chooses to disobey Dr. Cable and stay in the Smoke. Nevertheless, before discovering the truth, Tally, like most other uglies, was under the impression that the ideology taught by her city was true. This suggests that technological devices and biological modifications to the brain are not the only methods used to achieve conformity within their population.

The operation turning people into obedient citizens is set at age sixteen, implying that younger citizens need to be controlled in a different manner. As a way to control rebellious teenagers, they are given low self-esteem. This society is so focused on appearances that teenagers cannot wait to undergo the operation themselves. Moreover, adolescents are trained to find each other’s flaws, and give each other nicknames emphasizing those flaws:

In the last week, Tally had learned that Shay only used her ugly nickname as a putdown. Shay insisted they call each other by their real names most of the time, which Tally quickly had gotten used to. She liked it, actually. Nobody but Sol and Ellie – her parents- and few stuck-up teachers had ever called her “Tally” before. (2005a, p. 36)

Adolescents are encouraged to give each other nicknames such as Squint, Nose and Skinny, not only as a putdown, but on a regular basis. By making adolescents more self-conscious, their urge to become beautiful increases. In this way authorities can achieve conformity and avoid adolescents rebelling against the system: Citizens depend on the operation. Thus, science is used to biologically alter citizens’ brains, and additionally children and teenagers are indoctrinated causing them to want the operation. This method forces almost the entire population into submission. I would argue that the society in *Uglies* (2005a) therefore has similarities to the social system described in Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932). Claeys (2010, p. 115) explains that Huxley’s novel portrays a society where children are raised by using common behavioral manipulation, a society where there is no need for mass brutality. Furthermore, he describes that this society has been restrained by science and turned into what Huxley described as “a really efficient totalitarian state” (Claeys, 2010, p. 115). Both novels portray a dystopian society where contentment in addition to science is used to obtain conformity.

Yet, not all teenagers can be manipulated by lowered self-esteem. There are several characters in *Uglies* (2005a) who challenge Tally on the city’s ideology, forcing her to reflect on the ideas fed by the city government. One of these characters is Shay, who often acts as the voice of reason when it comes to the idea of universal beauty and the effect it has on the population:

“But it’s a trick Tally. You’ve only seen pretty faces your whole life. Your parents, your teachers, everyone over sixteen. But you weren’t born expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly.” (2005a, p. 82)

In the beginning of *Uglies* (2005a), Tally is still too indoctrinated to take Shay’s ideas seriously. Statements like the one above are usually rejected by Tally and lead to discussions or fights between these characters. Yet, as Tally learns more about city authorities and the

way they control the population, she becomes more critical and is inspired to rebel against the system. This affects the government's approach to maintain conformity.

Protagonist Tally is subjected to several mind-altering surgeries throughout the *Uglies* trilogy. As she becomes more critical towards the social system, the authorities become more ruthless in altering her mind and body. Every time Tally's mind and body are changed, the society depicted in the novels starts to show more similarities to a totalitarian regime, which is defined by Claeys (2010, p. 119) as "the desire for complete control over the hearts and bodies, minds and souls, of the citizens of the nation". The complete control over Tally's heart, mind, body and soul is especially apparent in *Specials* (2006):

"Rest assured, you are not under observation because of any of your actions, Tally We're more concerned with certain morphological violations." [...] "Tally, your body has been constructed around a reinforced ceramic skeleton. Your fingernails and teeth have been weaponized, your muscles and reflex centers significantly augmented." [...] "There are also certain structures in your higher cortex apparently artificial, which seemed designed to change your behavior. Tally, do you ever suffer from sudden flashes of anger or euphoria, countersocial impulses, or feelings of superiority?" (pp. 252-253)

The description of the protagonist suggests that Tally's body has been weaponized to serve her city and the ideology they want to protect. The abuse of science reaches a peak in *Specials* (2006): Whereas Tally manages to cure herself fairly quickly from the pretty operation in *Pretties* (2005b), she struggles to do so after the second operation described above. It seems like the authorities' lack of control on the entire population grows in accordance with the control exercised on protagonist Tally as an individual.

4.2.2 Conformity through control, technology and power

In *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006) the theme of conformity seems to have shifted, it has become more extreme: The goal no longer seems to be control through contentment but merely control. The novels thus show Orwellian traits as parallels can be drawn to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Claeys (2010) describes Orwell's representation of dystopia in his novel as follows:

Orwell's dystopian world-state is blunt, stark and pitiless. Consent rests upon punishment and fear rather than the manipulation of pleasure. Conformity is instilled by routine practice rather than eugenic conditioning; the abuse of science is Huxley's great theme, that of power, Orwell's. [...] Less secure, the regime has to work harder to maintain order. (p. 118)

Throughout the trilogy, Westerfeld's portrayal of this dystopian society becomes more bleak and brutal and the authorities' pursuit of power becomes more apparent. The abuse of science which is initially used as a method to contain the population also develops into a tool to gain more power. These are elements that make the works highly dystopian. Moreover, rebellion plays a central role in the last two novels of the *Uglies* trilogy. Not only does protagonist Tally become increasingly critical of her society, the rebels and runaways forming the New Smoke also pose a threat to the authorities. As the authorities feel threatened conformity is achieved in more extreme ways. Their urge to remain in control is manifested in several aspects of the novels, turning the social system into a totalitarian regime.

In *Pretties* (2005b) characters are more heavily monitored with the intention to keep them in line. After Special Circumstances catches characters Tally and Zane climbing a transmission tower without any safety measures, their level of surveillance increases. Their interface rings, devices designed by the city to monitor all citizens, are replaced by interface cuffs. These cuffs are more advanced as they work both inside the smart buildings of the city and outside, implying that the characters are subject to constant observation. Moreover, the cuffs seem impossible to remove; Tally even describes them as manacles with an invisible chain (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 103). This metaphor illustrates the level of surveillance these characters are subjected to: They are being held prisoner inside their own city.

The technological imprisonment of the characters Tally and Zane takes an even more extreme form after the pair manages to escape the city in *Pretties* (2005b). Shortly after Tally's arrival in the New Smoke, an alarm goes off: Special Circumstances are on their way. It appears city doctors have implanted a tracker to the bone under one of Zane's teeth while he was unconscious in the hospital. It is attached directly to the bone and impossible to remove (Westerfeld, 2005b, pp. 346-354). Implanting a tracking device inside of an unknowing citizen is an example of how this government uses technology to keep its citizens from leaving the city. The reader is introduced to a different side of this government, one

that is prepared to be ruthless in order to keep its population contained within city limits. The usage of surveillance technology in *Pretties* (2005b) is similar to one of the features Claeys (2010, p. 119) puts forward to describe a totalitarian system: “a technological basis to centralized power, e.g., especially through the use of the media and surveillance techniques”. This parallel to a totalitarian regime indicates that contentment no longer is the way to obtain conformity, the characters are being watched and kept under control by the use of highly advanced technology.

An Orwellian feature mentioned by Claeys (2010, p. 118) is the theme of centralized power. In the *Uglies* trilogy, the demonstration of power is often shown during the dialogues between Tally and Dr. Cable. On the one hand, Dr. Cable is able to prove to Tally that the authorities, Special Circumstances, are in control. On the other hand, these conversations offer important insights to the reader about the social system portrayed in the novels. One such passage is when Dr. Cable discovers that Tally has been able to cure her mind from the brain lesions in *Pretties* (2005b): “Cable nodded. ‘And now it turns out you have more of a brain than I gave you credit for. You resist conditioning very well.’ ‘*Conditioning*. That’s what you call it?’ Tally swore” (p. 130). The fact that Dr. Cable reveals secret information to Tally can be interpreted as a demonstration of power. Her goal is to intimidate Tally and convince her to stop sabotaging the authorities. Additionally, this passage is particularly interesting because the term “conditioning” is used. As the government portrayed in these novels have achieved control over the majority of the population by exposing them to eugenic conditioning, this term can be linked to the totalitarianism that is one of Huxley’s great themes.

Special Circumstances and Dr. Cable can be seen as the equivalent of the secret police of this society, another feature of a totalitarian state as described by Claeys (2010, p. 119). Additionally, Claeys (2010, p. 119) explains that in a totalitarian regime, there often is “a totalist philosophy or ideology which demands absolute loyalty and sacrifice, and the absolute submission of the citizen to the party/state”. The emphasis on ideology and the demand of loyalty towards it can be illustrated by another encounter between Dr. Cable and protagonist Tally in *Pretties* (2005b):

“Because someone has to keep things under under control, Tally”

“That’s not what I meant. What I want to know is, why do you do it to pretties? Why change their brains?”

[...] Dr. Cable nodded. “We are under control, Tally, because of the operation. Left alone, human beings are a plague. They multiply relentlessly, consuming every resource, destroying everything they touch. Without the operation, human beings always become Rusties.” (p. 133)

Dr. Cable justifies the operation and the necessity of this system’s secret police. This ideology explains that humanity cannot change unless people are biologically modified. Based on this logic, the human race can only avoid repeating the mistakes of the Rusties, the reader’s own generation, by altering the minds of the entire population, leaving control to a select group of people like the character of Dr. Cable to control the masses. There is a lack of trust in humanity and people’s ability to co-exist. This mistrust encourages city authorities to increase control over its citizens by brainwashing them with their ideology universal beauty.

As the rebellion against the city’s regime becomes more powerful, the authorities’ urge to demand loyalty to this ideology becomes more explicit. It becomes more important for Special Circumstances to show the rebels that they are still in charge and have the power to implant trackers, overhear conversations and even inflict physical pain as they have done with Zane in *Pretties* (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 360). These actions reveal the merciless and brutal character of the city authorities. This is parallel to one common theme of the traditional dystopian genre; a totalitarian state which demands total obedience from its citizens, where individualism might be attempted but fails eventually (Claeys, 2010, p. 109). Ultimately, the demonstration of power as a collective controlling organ, Special Circumstances, develops in Dr. Cable’s personal desire to obtain complete control.

When threatened by another city, Diego, Dr. Cable is willing to start a war, something that has been eradicated for centuries. Shay outlines this for Tally in *Specials* (2006):

“She doesn’t want to demolish Diego. She wants to remake it. Turn it into another city just like ours: strict and controlled, *everyone* a bubblehead.”

“When things start to fall apart,” Shay said, “she’ll be here to take over.” (p. 288)

This information suggests that Dr. Cable can have different motives: controlling different cities and gaining more power. Furthermore, Dr. Cable reveals to Tally that she has attacked the city of Diego as there are “political disputes” between the two cities (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 254). Diego is described as more liberal and has helped the rebellion considerably throughout the years (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 336-337). Taking out an enemy can thus be seen as a strategic move in Dr. Cable’s search for power. There are two things I would like to point out here. Firstly, the fact that the character of Shay points out Dr. Cable’s motives helps both the protagonist and the reader to be more critical. Secondly, another parallel can be drawn between Dr. Cable’s actions and a feature of a totalitarian regime: “the willingness to destroy large numbers of domestic ‘enemies’ in the name of the goals of the regime” (Claeys (2010, p. 119). Thus, there are several aspects of the *Uglies* trilogy that can be linked to the description of a totalitarian regime in addition to both elements from Orwell and Huxley. I therefore believe that the conformity theme in the trilogy makes these works highly dystopian.

4.3 Environmental degradation and technological development

Towards the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, anxieties regarding global warming as a result of pollution caused by the emission of carbon dioxide, humanity’s lack of moral restraint as well as lack of engagement to make drastic changes has played an important role in dystopian literature (Stableford, 2010, pp. 276-278). The *Uglies* trilogy reflects some of these challenges as Westerfeld focuses on environmental degradation and two problematic aspects regarding this theme: technology and consumerism. To challenge adolescent readers, the author presents both a technological utopia and an ecological utopia (Ostry, 2013, p. 101). This section investigates the theme of environmental degradation by analyzing these two types of utopia. Furthermore, it explores criticism directed towards the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. Finally, this section looks at the dualistic relationship between technology and the environment.

4.3.1 Technological utopia/dystopia – living in an infantilizing bubble

The society described in the *Uglies* trilogy portrays a technological paradise in which all citizens are able to acquire almost everything from the government. Clothes, technological gadgets such as hoverboards, and bungee-jackets are examples of articles that come out of the wall (Westerfeld, *Uglies*, 2005a). The luxury of being able to acquire almost everything you wish for at any given time can be seen as the ultimate form of consumerism. Ostry (2013, p. 102) describes this type of society as a technological utopia reflecting popular youth culture. These cyber-worlds are based on constant developments which lead to a continuous supply of advanced goods and services. Additionally, Ostry (2013, p. 102) argues that this world can also be described as a dystopia rather than utopia, more specifically a young dystopia as its faults are present in young popular culture. She continues by explaining that young popular culture's emphasis on constant entertainment, consumerism and technological advancements can hinder civic engagement in matters such as environmental degradation.

Uglies (2005a) portrays a society where contact with nature is absent, Tally explicitly states that everything her population has been taught about nature seems more useful in the wilderness, for example astronomy (Westerfeld, 2005a, pp. 71-72). Moreover, when Shay takes Tally to the Rusty Ruins, a city built by the reader's own and previous generations that is preserved by the novel's authorities to teach children about history, it becomes clear that urban citizens are spoiled and oblivious to the world around their city:

Tally figured that Shay was right about one thing: Being in the city all the time made everything fake, in a way. Like the buildings and the bridges held up by hoverstruts, or jumping off a rooftop with a bungee jacket on, nothing was quite real there. She was glad Shay had taken her out to the ruins. If nothing else, the mess left by the Rusties proved that things could go terribly wrong if you weren't careful. (2005a, p.74)

After the visit to the ruins Tally realizes that the population of her city is living in a bubble. They are pampered and depend on the city's luxuries, eventually causing them to become obedient citizens lacking civic engagement. Ostry (2013, p. 102) compares this situation to parents who shield their children from atrocities, challenges and problems. The city

authorities are keeping their citizens in a state of dependence to make them ignorant of the ugly truth that is behind their technological paradise: the brain-altering surgeries directed by a select group of power-hungry officials discussed in the previous section on conformity. By criticizing the technological dependence and consumerism of the characters, Westerfeld's novels may inspire YA readers to reflect on how technology keeps them from considering major challenges such as environmental degradation in their own contemporary society.

4.3.2 Ecological utopia – unmediated experiences through nature

In *Uglies* (2005a) protagonist Tally is able to escape the strictures of the dystopian city and travel to the Smoke. During her journey, she is introduced to nature in a way that is new and different to her. Passages of her encounter with nature either describe it as dangerous and “more real” than life in the city, or emphasize the beauty of nature. Ostry (2013, p. 102) describes this relationship with nature as an ecological utopia; it forces the protagonist to “escape the infantilizing control of the city and grow up” (Ostry, 2013, p. 102).

In the wilderness, Tally is exposed to several dangerous situations that underline the escape of her shielded urban life. She quickly learns that actions in nature can have dangerous consequences, and that there are no technological gadgets that can protect her from harm. Simultaneously, Tally grows to appreciate this escape:

Forgetting the troubles was easy in the Smoke. Life was much more intense than in the city. She bathed in a river so cold that she had to jump in screaming, and she ate food pulled from the fire hot enough to burn her tongue, which city food never did. Of course, she missed shampoo that didn't sting her eyes, and flush toilets [...] But however blistered her hands became, Tally felt stronger than ever before. (2005a, pp. 229-230)

The restrictions that urban life impose on its citizens are removed in the Smoke, the community of rebels living in the wilderness outside the city. Goods and services are not given, but earned by hard work. The runaways are no longer pampered and protected, and thus given a chance to mature. This development also brings the ability to appreciate nature:

The physical beauty of the Smoke also cleared her mind of worries. Every day seemed to change the mountain, the sky, and the surrounding valleys, making them spectacular in a

completely new way. Nature, at least, didn't need an operation to be beautiful. (2005a, p. 230)

This passage presents a paradox. Tally's new-found appreciation of nature tells her that it is beautiful. Yet, the population of the dystopian cities are made to believe that humanity, which also is a part of nature, needs an operation to become beautiful. The population is programmed to preserve nature, but they are kept away from it at the same time. I believe that this lack of contact with nature can prevent them from drawing parallels between the beauty of nature and the beauty standards forced on them by the authorities. Eventually, this might also keep the population from rebelling against the system that is controlling them.

4.3.3 Environmental issues

The majority of the population in the *Uglies* trilogy is programmed by both ideology and mind-altering surgeries to preserve nature and the environment. There is a strong emphasis in both *Uglies* (2005a) and *Pretties* (2005b) on the environmental wrongdoings of previous generations, Rusties. The Rusties represent the generation of the reader and the challenges of our contemporary world are frequently used to exemplify the fact that the readers are in desperate need of change. This can be linked to Stableford's (2010, p. 277) description of ecology in dystopian literature as he claims that dystopian works of the twenty-first century focus on the individual's role in the process of global warming. He continues by explaining that it is common to describe habits such as driving cars and cheap air travel as sinful. These are actions that make up a person's carbon footprint, highlighting the individual guilt of every human being.

In the *Uglies* trilogy, Westerfeld uses both examples of industrial practices and personal endeavors that have damaged the environment greatly in our contemporary society. As a way to communicate this to the reader, Ostry (2013, p. 107) argues that characters in the novels consider past generations as immoral and ignorant in their treatment of nature and inventions and the ways of life of previous generations are mocked. In *Uglies* (2005a) Tally is shocked by the fact that the runaways cut down trees for heat and furniture, and that David wears clothes made of dead animal skins (Westerfeld, 2005a, pp. 195-213). Moreover, she acts horrified when she learns about printed newspapers (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 343), a common

practice in the reader's contemporary society. In *Pretties* (2005b), a detailed description of the ruins outside of Tally's city reveals several weaknesses of the reader's own contemporary society with relation to nature:

In the last days of Rusty civilization, an artificial plague had spread across the world. It didn't infect human beings or animals, just petroleum, reproducing itself in the gas tanks of groundcars and jet aircraft, slowly making the infected oil unstable. Plague-transformed petroleum burst into flame when it came into contact with oxygen, and the oily smoke from the sudden fires spread the bacterial spores on the wind, into more gas tanks, more oil fields, until it had reached every Rusty machine across the globe. The Rusties really hadn't liked walking, it turned out. Even after they'd figured out what the plague was doing, panicked citizens still jumped into their funny, rubber-wheeled groundcars, thinking to escape into the wild [...] Whoever had engineered the plague had definitely understood the Rusties' weakness. (pp. 316-317)

This passage is significant as readers might be inspired to draw parallels between the Rusties described in the novels and the wrongdoings of their own generation, allowing them to interpret this passage as direct criticism towards the treatment of the environment in their society and the challenges the world faces as a result of that.

Whereas the message to stop environmental degradation is rather clear in the novels, the solution to these challenges is not. The most apparent answer, according to the authorities in the novel, is to subject the entire population to brain-altering surgery, a dystopian solution in my opinion. Nevertheless, the novels also emphasize civic responsibility as a solution for environmental issues. In the third novel, the society that is portrayed has undergone a revolution and is introduced to "The New System", where people are no longer brainwashed by mind-altering surgeries. An entire city called Diego has joined the rebellion started by the member of the Smoke (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 216-217) and the system is slowly spreading to the rest of the globe, even reaching Tally's city. The rebellion seems to work as a catalyst for discussion regarding the operation, beauty standards and expansion of the cities into the wild (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 344-345). After two hundred years of "leaving nature alone" (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 259), people are expanding and are no longer obeying the strict rules that saved the environment, clear-cutting trees is the most prominent example used in *Specials* (2006) to emphasize this change. Tally is worried about the effects the revolution will have on nature, and realizes that freedom of thought has a price. It seems like Dr.

Cable's warning in *Pretties* (2005b) about people turning into Rusties is becoming a reality as Diego and other cities are expanding. Human flaws such as greed and selfishness are cut away during the operation, together with a scary ideology and history lessons about the mistakes of the past, the population is programmed to leave nature alone. However, without the operation, flaws that caused previous generations to exploit and destroy nature remain. Travelling through the Rusty Ruins (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 363-365), protagonist Tally is reminded of the wrongdoings of the past. It is therefore crucial to her to preserve the environment and make this clear to the rest of the population.

The element of responsibility that is communicated in the works can encourage readers to reflect upon environmental issues in their own world, rather than just leave them with a pessimistic representation of the future. The treatment of these issues in the novels indicates that future generations have the chance to do better by combining knowledge about the nature with technological development. In this way, the *Uglies* trilogy can call on the reader's moral, social and civic responsibility and urge them to take care of the environment as well as each other.

4.3.4 Progress v preservation: the ambiguous relationship between technology and nature

As previously discussed, the characters of these novels have a problematic relationship to nature: they lack contact with it. However, they seem to understand the faults of the previous generations and what went wrong with the environment, creating an ambiguous relationship between the characters, nature, and technology. According to Ostry (2013, p. 108), this binary is complicated further by the role of the protagonist, Tally. This is especially the case in the third novel *Specials* (2006) where Tally's body has been through drastic changes; it is filled with technological gadgets such as "chips in her hands catching the slightest vibrations" (2006, pp. 29-31), "new monofilament-sheathed muscles" (2006, p. 1) and "internal software" (2006, p. 216). These alterations give the impression that Tally is almost turned into a technological tool herself, which to some extent can be argued to be the case.

One of the tasks of the Cutters, a select group of specials that Tally is part of, is to protect the environment. Tally takes this task very seriously. These Specials are designed to survive in

the wilderness (2006, p. 345), and combining these qualities with the technological gadgets built into Tally's body give her the opportunity to perform her duties. Ostry (2013, p. 108) argues that this element of the novel suggests that technology can and must be used to serve nature, and that technology, ironically, can protect the environment from the wrongdoings of technological development. Moreover, she claims that this duality can invite readers to re-evaluate their attitude towards nature and technology, and through these processes mature as well. As in the novel, contact with nature can promote unmediated experiences that help the reader develop as a person, and ultimately inspire them to appreciate nature more. Finally, the treatment of environmental degradation as a theme can promote technological development which can help future generations to live in equilibrium with nature.

4.4 Social and Political Criticism

One of the goals of both traditional and YA dystopian literature is to convey a warning to the reader in order to incite political or social change or raise awareness to certain challenges in the reader's own society. Though dystopian works might seem to provide the reader with a bleak image of the future, they expect a positive reaction from the reader according to Vieira (2010):

On the one hand, the readers are led to realize that all human beings have (and will always have) flaws, and so social improvement – rather than individual improvement – is the only way to ensure social and political happiness; on the other hand, the readers are to understand that the depicted future is not a reality but only a possibility that they have to learn to avoid. (p. 17)

Although the fate of the characters in classic dystopian literature often seems bleak and hopeless, one goal of the author is to encourage the reader to reflect upon the challenges presented in the work and how these challenges can be solved. YA dystopian literature seems more optimistic as the protagonist usually finds a way to overthrow the oppressing authorities; the element of hope becomes more apparent. The lifestyle and failures of the reader's own and previous generations, labeled as Rusties, are in the *Uglies* trilogy used as the most prominent tool to convey criticism. This section explores how these novels can be read as a medium to express social and political criticism. I will investigate concerns

surrounding the themes of gender inequality, firearm legislation, multiculturalism and violence linked to human nature.

4.4.1 Social criticism – gender inequality, gun regulations and multiculturalism

The social criticism in *Pretties* (2005b) becomes apparent when protagonist Tally discovers a reservation in the wilderness. This is a community of men, women and children who, by the city authorities, are contained to a limited area in the wild. The sole purpose of their existence seems to be providing study material to city scientists, the most important of which is to provide insights on human behavior to an anthropologist. His findings are then used to develop and improve the mind-altering surgery that has eradicated flaws such as greed, violence and conflict in the population of the pretty-cities. By placing protagonist Tally in this reservation, Westerfeld is able to address some universal challenges of humanity. This is in accordance with Claeys (2010, p. 107) who claims that authors of dystopian fiction often project challenges of their own society into the society that is portrayed in their work, as they are highly critical of the societies that they represent.

One of the first issues that the *Uglies* trilogy deals with is gender roles and gender inequality. These remain topical issues in contemporary society and present a major barrier to human development. According to the United Nations, women and girls are frequently discriminated against in areas such as health, education, political representation, and the labor market (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). This implies that girls and women have not yet gained gender equality, which in turn has a negative impact on women's development and freedom of choice (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

In *Pretties* (2005b), Tally reacts strongly to the gender roles in the wilderness reservation. Women and girls keep in the background and do hard physical labor without any help from the male villagers (Westerfeld, 2005, pp. 263-264). Tally reflects on this situation by linking it back to ancient customs:

Tally dimly remembered learning in school about the pre-Rusty custom of assigning different tasks to men and women. And it was usually women who got the crappy jobs, she recalled.

Even some Rusties had doggedly clung to that little trick. The thought gave Tally a queasy feeling in her stomach, and she hoped similar rules didn't apply to gods. (2005b, pp. 263-264)

In the novel, pre-Rusties are described as people “who existed before high technology” (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 272). There is analogy between this reservation and a pre-Rusty, less-developed society that emphasizes the fact that treating women as inferior is done by less civilized human beings. However, Tally continues by stating that “even some Rusties had doggedly clung to that little trick” (2005b, p. 264), referring to the reader's own generation. I would argue that this passage therefore is highly critical towards the author's own society: he describes gender inequality as customs linked to ancient, uncivilized societies before mentioning that these customs are kept alive in his contemporary society as well.

Westerfeld's representation of gender inequality in the novels can invite young adult readers, both male and female, to reflect upon these issues in their own lives. In this way, the trilogy encourages critical thinking and urges them to re-evaluate the status of girls and women in their own contemporary society, as well as in different cultures throughout the rest of the world. The issue of female empowerment, including social and political agency, is especially well represented in these works. This will be further outlined in section 4.5, which deals with the characterization of the female protagonist, Tally Youngblood.

The issues that the author addresses are often expressed through subtle, brief observations of the characters and can be read as valuable pieces of criticism. In *Specials* (2006), characters Tally and Shay break into the city's armory and discover all kinds of ancient weapons designed by the author's generation. Tally's reflections when finding a rifle can be linked to the discussion about firearm legislation in the US today: “The weapon was designed to make any average person into a killing machine, and life and death seemed like a lot to risk on the slip of some random's finger” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 111). Tally's body and mind as a Special are designed for combat, she is trained to handle weapons, so encountering firearms that were accessible for the general public seems to have an impact on her. She is surprised that people without special training can decide over life and death. Moreover, Tally's statement might be directed towards the reader, encouraging them to reflect on issues such as gun violence and gun regulation. This piece of criticism is especially relevant today. As I am writing this thesis, another mass school shooting found place in an American high school.

Seventeen people, both students and teachers, were killed by a former student. The incident is the eighth deadliest mass shooting in modern US history and described one of the worst school massacres ever (Laughland, Luscombe, & Yuhas, 2018). This shows that criticism aimed at gun regulations still is highly relevant in our contemporary society and a topic that YA readers can discuss in school.

Another topic that is addressed in the *Uglies* trilogy is multiculturalism. In *Specials* (2006), the revolution counteracting the brain altering operation has expanded significantly. This new community of rebels is called The New Smoke, and has gained the support of an entire city: Diego. Upon entering the new city, one of the first things Tally notices is the variety of skin colors the people of Diego have:

Whole cliques wore the same skin color, or shared similar faces, like families used to before the operation. It reminded Tally uncomfortably of how people grouped themselves back in pre-Rusty days, into tribes and clans and so-called races who all looked more or less alike, and made a big point of hating anyone who didn't look like them. But everyone seemed to be getting along so far. (2006, p. 227)

Firstly, a range of different skin colors is a novelty for Tally, suggesting that the operation in the cities has homogenized race. It seems like making everyone equally physically appealing can prevent people from dividing each other into categories, races and tribes, which in our contemporary society and in history has led to conflict, inequality and injustice. Secondly, Tally's observation can address the reader directly, encouraging them to reflect upon multiculturalism in their own society. Additionally, Tally seems to react stronger to darker skin tones (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 221-223), suggesting that she is not familiar with people who have "skin so dark it was almost black" (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 221). Tally's reaction might suggest that the society in which she is raised represents a white future. This passage can therefore be read not only as critical towards racial issues in society but to white supremacy in particular. However, Couzelis (2013, pp. 131-132) argues that Westerfeld maintains "the hegemonic status of pretending that race does not exist" by presenting a monochromatic future where racial problems have been solved by replacing different skin colours with whiteness. She continues by saying that "these texts do not challenge contemporary ideologies concerning race [...] they reproduce subject positions that reinforce white privilege" (Couzelis, 2013, p. 141). The works can be used to discuss problems

surrounding this issue by discussing why whiteness has become the norm in this futuristic society, and how this can be linked to experiences and prejudice from the readers' every day lives.

The development of whiteness in this futuristic society is also emphasized by symbolism. On her first journey in *Uglies* (2005a), protagonist Tally discovers beautiful white orchids that have been genetically manipulated in the past and now threaten to destroy all other flora in the area. Rangers are sent to destroy these flowers in order for other species to be able to grow. They explain to her that these flowers are rapidly spreading and becoming a monoculture: "That is what monoculture means: Everything the same" (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 182). The encounter between Tally and the rangers might not be that significant for the character or her journey, but the white orchids are an important symbol in the novels nevertheless. There is a parallel between the beautiful, yet dangerous, orchids and the people in the city. In both cases, nature is altered resulting in a form of sameness in this dystopian society. White flowers are created by science and threaten all other species. The white ideal of beauty instilled in the citizens of this society has already accomplished this. Whiteness is the norm, and other races have been homogenized.

The orchids are a recurring symbol in the novels. Tally notices them on one of her journeys in *Specials* (2006) as well. On her way to the city of Diego, she sees a helicopter that she associates with the naturalist rangers from the other city who attempts to remove the orchids from the environment. This time around, Tally describes the flowers as "white weeds" and an "engineered plague that the Rusties had left behind" (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 204-205). This indicates that her connotation of the flowers has become significantly more negative. The disturbing events which Tally has witnessed throughout the series have increased her understanding of the real motives of the authorities and her society as a whole. She is critical towards the genetic intervention on certain species in nature, hence the negative connotation of the flowers. The use of symbolism can in that way urge readers to reflect upon humanity's mediation in nature, but also shed light on issues surrounding white supremacy in their own world. This criticism emphasizes the value of diversity in different areas of human life.

Finally, the novels raise questions surrounding human rights with relation to background and culture. In *Specials* (2006) Tally has become a special and her body has endured a range of adaptations, as discussed in the section above. She is captured by the Diego city authorities,

who expose her to a full-body examination. They then describe her body as a series of “morphological violations” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 252). This description emphasizes that Tally might have been used as a weapon in the political disputes between her city and Diego. What is more, her discussion with the Diego city officials reveals a different side of war, namely the complications of being a refugee:

“I’m afraid, Tally, that you cannot be allowed to go free. Because of your body modifications, you meet our criteria for a dangerous weapon. And dangerous weapons are illegal in Diego.”

Tally stopped her crying act, her jaw dropping open. “You mean, I’m *illegal*?” she cried. “How can a *person* be illegal?” (2006, p. 255)

Early on in the novels, it is explained that the cities usually have little or no contact with each other. However, the revolution has sent a lot of people on the run and has caused a huge flow of refugees to come to Diego. As a policy, Diego chooses to protect itself and its own population by screening certain refugees such as Tally. Tally’s special features make her a threat to the general safety in Diego, causing them to label Tally as illegal. Contemplating the possibility that a person can be illegal can encourage the reader to think about this as well. This issue can be linked to issues surrounding illegal immigration in the reader’s contemporary society.

4.4.2 Human behavior – violence

Westerfeld not only concentrates on challenges that his own society faces, he addresses universal challenges as well. One example is violence as a part of human nature. On Tally’s journey with Andrew, the local holy-man of the primitive community, to the border of the reservation in *Pretties* (2005b), they encounter members of a different tribe. Andrew is determined to kill one of them to revenge the death of his father. Protagonist Tally is confronted with a different aspect of human nature, one that is absent in the society she grew up in. The realization that the mind-altering operation might be a good solution to end violence puts Tally in a disheartened mood:

Then she remembered Dr. Cable's words. *Humanity is a cancer, and we are the cure.* Violence was what the cities had been built to end, and part of what the operation switched off in pretties' brains. The whole world that Tally had grown up in was a firebreak against this awful cycle. But here was the natural state of the species, right in front of her. In running from the city, perhaps *this* was what Tally was running toward [...] Tally remembered again her conversation with Dr. Cable, who had claimed that human beings always rediscovered war, always became Rusties in the end – the species was a planetary plague, whether they knew what a planet was or not. So what was the cure for that, except the operation? Maybe the Specials had the right idea. (2005b, pp. 278-289)

Tally reflects on the fact that without an operation, humanity returns to a violent and destructive existence. Her non-violent upbringing in the city seems to make her encounter with the raw violence from the reservation quite confronting. This experience in combination with the information Dr. Cable has given her about the operation and how it can end violence causes her to have doubts about leaving the city and refusing to undergo the operation.

The emphasis on the way this social system has eradicated violence is closely linked to utopian works' description of social organization. Vieira (2010, p. 7) explains that utopian societies often rest on a set of strict rules as a result of utopists' distrust of human nature and the ability to live together peacefully. She adds that social conventions and rules are put there to repress the unreliable and unstable human nature of the individual. In the *Uglies* trilogy, the measures to contain humanity's flaws are more extreme, as authorities have to biologically alter their population. However, there are significant similarities between social organization in these novels and Vieira's (2010) representation of utopian societies. This indicates that there is a thin line between utopian and dystopian societies. Tally is starting to regret her decision to live in the wild herself. She has experienced what humanity can look like if they do not undergo the operation and might be frightened that history will repeat itself as more people refuse the operation. Her vision has changed from seeing her city as a dystopian society to considering whether it might provide the cure against flaws in human nature.

Social criticism in the trilogy is often combined with subtle elements of hope. Firstly, when protagonist Tally asks Andrew about the scientists who visit the reservation in *Pretties*

(2005b), she discovers that Special Circumstances interferes with the lives of the people inside the reservation as well (Westerfeld, 2005b, pp. 281-283). Initially, Tally attributed the violent behavior of the people inside the reservation to what Dr. Cable had told her about human nature. However, learning that both scientists from the city and the authorities affect the lives of the people inside the experimental reservation can indicate that the violent behavior is encouraged in order to provide enough material to perfect the mind-altering operation. Secondly, Tally notices that there are significant differences between her and the people inside the reservation. Not only does she behave differently, her knowledge on matters like the environment and technology is excessive in comparison to that of the primitive villagers (Westerfeld, 2005b, pp. 290-291). Tally, who at this point had lost faith in humanity and its ability to live together peacefully without a brain-altering operation, becomes increasingly optimistic. The citizens living inside the cities have been warned about the challenges and mistakes of previous generations who caused near environmental destruction, as well as political and social chaos. Moreover, technological advances have helped them solve a lot of the environmental challenges people in the reader's contemporary society face. These developments enable them to live in equilibrium with the environment. By noticing the differences between her generation and the people in the reservation, I believe Tally feels more hopeful about a future without an operation. She understands that knowledge about the environment, the dangers and benefits of technology and flaws in human nature is invaluable. Whereas city authorities mistrusted people and their ability to live together peacefully without their intervention, Tally is able to restore her faith in humanity. In this way, the trilogy can also work as a discourse of hope for young adult readers. The works emphasize the importance of political, social and environmental awareness when creating a sustainable future. Young people can become hopeful that they will be able to avoid the mistakes of previous generations and build a future that enables them to work towards solutions for the challenges they face while accommodating their own needs in a more humane world.

4.5 “Young Blood, you have changed”: the characterization of female protagonist and heroine Tally

One of the most central elements of the *Uglies* trilogy is the characterization of the protagonist, Tally Youngblood. She is represented as a powerful female heroine, which can

be seen as a typical trait of YA dystopian literature. According to Fritz (2014, p. 17), female protagonists have taken a central role in YA dystopian fiction, young female characters are portrayed as the ideal new citizens as they aim to reform the dystopian systems of their societies in their goal to create a new identity and a better world. In the *Uglies* trilogy, the characterization of protagonist Tally is dominated by her coming-of-age process, she journeys from childhood to adulthood, eventually becoming a powerful social and political agent in her community. The novels can therefore be inspired by the *Bildungsroman*, which is defined in section 3.2.2 of the literary review. Basu et al. (2013, p. 7) claim that elements of the classic *Bildungsroman* can be found in YA dystopian literature by emphasizing that the dystopian challenges faced by the protagonist can force them to mature. In the novels, protagonist Tally is faced with several challenges. This section will explore the effects of these challenges on the character's coming-of-age process. I will look at her journeys through the wilderness, the realization that the society in which she lives is seriously flawed and the various alterations her mind and body are exposed to.

Throughout the trilogy, Tally undertakes a series of journeys through the wilderness. Contact with nature seems to act as a catalyst in the character's maturing process as she evolves from a shallow, ignorant adolescent in *Uglies* (2005a) to a strong female heroine and activist at the end of *Specials* (2006). Fritz (2014, p. 21) describes that each of the novels in the trilogy start with a new version of the protagonist as Tally's mind and body undergo radical modifications throughout the series. Describing her as "silly, shallow and gorgeous" in *Pretties* (2005b) and "ruthless, arrogant and weaponized" in *Specials* (2006), Fritz (2014, p. 21) argues that the real empowered, independent Tally is ever present beneath these altered façades.

During the reader's initial encounter with the protagonist, Tally is an ugly, the novel's representation of an adolescent. In part one of *Uglies* (2005a), Tally is still indoctrinated by the system's ideology about beauty. Her status as an ugly makes her feel insignificant; being an ugly is the same as being nothing in her society (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 7). Then, in part two of *Uglies* (2005a), Tally sets out on her first journey through the wilderness and descriptions of nature and the characterization of Tally seem to intertwine. As outlined in the section regarding the ecological utopia, the journey teaches Tally that life in the wilderness is more genuine than life in the city and mistakes have serious consequences (Westerfeld,

2005a, p. 150). Tally's journey liberates her from the infantilizing state her government keeps her in, as is implied by Shay:

“That’s the problem with the cities, Tally. Everyone’s a kid, pampered and dependent and pretty. Just like they say in school: Big-eyed means vulnerable. Well, like you once told me, you have to grow up sometime”

Tally nodded. “I know what you mean, how the uglies here are more grown up. You can see it in their faces” (2005a, p. 226)

Life in the Smoke has not only changed the protagonist, but all other characters who have managed to escape from the city: Contact with nature seems to restore their independence and increase personal growth. Tally's liberation and maturing process is also indicated in her perception of nature: “Tally had spent the last four years staring at the skyline of New Pretty Town, thinking it was the most beautiful sight in the world, but she didn't think so anymore” (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 209). This statement might indicate that Tally not only has learned to appreciate nature, but is learning to view her own society more critically as well. Moreover, Fritz (2014, p. 20) argues that at the end of the first novel, Tally has evolved from a passive and manipulated subject to a “social and political self”. The journey portrayed in *Uglies* (2005a) therefore offers the first step in the protagonist's coming-of-age process: she journeys from a state of ignorant childhood to a more reflective and evolved state.

Whereas Tally was determined to make trouble for the authorities at the end of the first novel, her attitude towards rebellion has changed completely when the reader is reintroduced to the protagonist in *Pretties* (2005b). The effects of the mind-altering surgery are apparent: Tally cannot quite think back to her time in the Smoke, she believes Special Circumstances has rescued her and brought her home (Westerfeld, 2005b, pp. 18-23). Her different mindset indicates that the city authorities have tampered with her memories and as a result, her identity as well. Although her encounter with Dr. Cable in *Pretties* (2005b) indicates that Tally might be capable of curing herself from the brain lesions as she keeps findings ways to stay “bubbly” in the city (Westerfeld, 2005b, pp. 129-132), her second journey alone through the wilderness shows how contact with nature seems to liberate Tally's mind from the mental imprisonment inflicted on her by the authorities:

Starvation might have been useful for getting off the cuffs and staying bubbly, but her cuff was gone, and Tally now had the whole of the wild, dangerous and cold, to keep her bubbly. [...] *Alone*, Tally kept reminding herself. No one else was out here. [...] All her Smokey knowledge seemed to have come back, with no scraps of pretty-mindedness remaining after the escape. Now that she was out of the city, the cure had settled over Tally's mind for good. (2005b, pp. 247-251)

In *Pretties* (2005b), nature is portrayed as an even more powerful tool in the protagonist's coming-of-age process, given that Tally's mind has been actively altered by the authorities to purposely control her. Additionally, the realization that she is alone might enhance her feeling of independence: the stimuli surrounding her in the wilderness in combination with Tally's strong personality allow her to penetrate the pretty-haze. Day, Green-Barteet and Montz (2014, pp. 3-4) argue that YA dystopias often represent female protagonists who claim their identities and occupy the role of an active agent rather than passive bystander, thus redefining what it means to be a young woman. Moreover, they claim that this representation "contradicts the common perception that girls are too young or too powerless to question the limitations placed upon them, much less to rebel and, in turn, fuel larger rebellions" (Day et al., 2014, p. 4). Tally's ability to cure herself (2005b, pp. 334-335) emphasizes her role as a rebellious female protagonist, as liberating herself from the brain lesions is the ultimate way to prove to the authorities that she cannot be controlled. Moreover, her strong personality and exceptional resourcefulness seem to allow the other characters to hope and work towards freedom as is implied by David at the end of *Specials* (2006) when he states that Tally's ability to cure herself has played a crucial role in the revolution (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 319-321).

In *Specials* (2006) the reader is once more introduced to a new version of the protagonist, a special Tally with qualities that can be traced back to another operation and are outlined below:

The Cutters were a brand-new part of Special Circumstances, but Tally's operation had taken the longest. She'd done a lot of very average things in her past, and it had taken a while for the doctors to strip away all the built-up guilt and shame. Random leftover emotions could leave your brain muddled, which wasn't very special. Power came from icy clarity, from knowing exactly what you were, from cutting. (p. 10)

This passage emphasizes the strong grip authorities have on Tally at this point. Typical human emotions such as guilt and shame have been stripped away and are replaced by an “icy” feeling, which is equivalent to a feeling of arrogance and superiority. These new feelings are essential in Tally’s purpose of serving her city and protecting the environment. Moreover, Tally’s body has significantly changed, turning her into a weaponized version of herself: “But Tally had been *made* for this – or remade anyway – built for tracking down the city’s enemies and bringing them to justice. For saving the wild from destruction” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 125). The word *made* is written in italics. This can indicate that city authorities use Tally and her body as a tool, an object that serves them rather than a human being with emotions and a will of her own. The fact that her body is adapted to survive in the wilderness, along with her experience from her previous journeys seems to make the journey portrayed in part two of *Specials* (2006) easier on a physical level but more challenging mentally: “traveling alone gave Tally a lot of time to think, and she spent most of it wondering if she really was the self-centered monster Shay had described” (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 183-184). This statement might be the first indication that contact with nature once more is able to influence Tally’s state of mind, she is able to reflect upon her personality and guilt, qualities that supposedly were removed during the special operation. What is more, this journey, especially being alone, seems to keep her from considering herself as special:

Out here alone, she felt herself changing again. Somehow the wild made her feel less special [...] Among the Cutters, Tally had always felt special. But now that she was alone in the wild, her perfect vision only made her feel minuscule. In all its glorious detail, the natural world seemed big enough to swallow her. The distant group of runaways weren’t impressed or terrorized by her wolflike face and razor fingernails. How could they be when they never even glimpsed her? She was invisible, and outcast fading away (2006, pp. 184-185)

Tally’s feelings of superiority, arrogance and ruthlessness are gradually removed during her trip. She is tracking her former friends and boyfriend Zane, but must remain invisible, causing her to start feeling invisible as well. Furthermore, Tally seems to reflect upon the significance of her special status in the wilderness. Without the confirmation of others, and in relation to the vast superiority of nature, her status as a specially modified human seems irrelevant. Finally, towards the end of this journey Tally is described as “psycho Tally alone inside her sneak suit, detached and invisible” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 197). The use of the sneak suit might be a symbol that reflects Tally’s state of mind during this journey. Her

sneak suit lets her blend into her surroundings in the wild, as she already questions her special status, this suit makes her invisible in more ways than one. I believe that these reflections are central in the protagonist's coming-of-age process, as she learns to assess the consequences of her actions, her place in the world and her identity.

Tally's final journey in *Specials* (2006) signifies the completion of her coming-of-age process. During her time in Diego, Tally is informed that there is a cure for being a special, implying that the city authorities have manipulated her brain. When forced to take the cure, Tally is so determined to resist that she throws herself from a cliff to escape without any real safety measures (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 236-241). Tally's refusal can underline the extent to which the city authorities control her mind. On the other hand, it might also indicate that Tally is starting to take control over her own body and mind: she is the one who decides whether she wants to be "cured". This feeling is enhanced by the attack on Diego by Special Circumstances, the people for whom she works. Tally is starting to question their authority as she considers whether she does have a serious brain alteration that can and should be cured. She even states that "seeing what her own city had done had somehow made her feel less special, at least for now" (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 290-291). This can be seen as Tally's first significant step towards rewiring her own brain in the third novel. When she sets out on her final journey, nature seems once more to work as a powerful tool in the protagonist's coming-of-age process:

She reached the edge of Diego long before the sun began to rise, when the orange sky was just becoming radiant overhead, like an immense vessel emptying its light down upon the wild. The world's beauty hurt like razors, and Tally knew she'd never have to cut herself again. (2006, p. 308)

This passage shows that Tally has finally succeeded in liberating herself from the city authorities as she has overcome an extremely powerful brain alteration through the mere power of her mind. At the same time, I believe this passage represents the contrast between the artificial city and the sobering, real qualities nature has to offer. The fact that Tally has been able to fully cure herself is then illustrated when she mourns Zane's death and she is able to cry (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 259). Sorrow and grief are human emotions, and tears are a bodily function that is a result of such emotions. The fact that Tally is able to cry might emphasize that she no longer is a tool of Special Circumstances and that she is able to have

natural human reactions again. She states that “I don’t need to be cured [...] From now on, no one rewires my mind but me” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 371), suggesting that Tally’s character has finally taken on the role of powerful, independent female heroine.

This role is heightened by Tally’s plan “to save the world” (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 368), a plan that is outlined in her manifesto at the end of the novel where she outlines that she aims to protect the environment from humanity’s new-found freedom, warning them to be cautious of the failures of the previous generations. I believe that the reason Tally is so protective of the environment is because of her personal relationship with it. Nature has helped her become the strong, empowered character she is and that might be the reason why she feels so protective of it. Additionally, Fritz (2014, p. 21) argues that her manifesto reveals that Tally has become an agent for social and political change and that:

Throughout the series, then, Tally’s engagement with the world around her and her own perceptions of herself reflect many of the values found in girl power rhetoric, particularly those regarding the girl’s ability to produce her own knowledge regarding her personal identity and her lived experience of the world. (2014, p. 21)

At the end of the third novel Tally’s coming-of-age process seems to have transformed her into an empowered female heroine who seems to excel at everything she sets her mind to. Finally, Tally’s transformation can also inspire young readers, showing them that they have the ability to liberate themselves from the strict norms society has placed upon them, encouraging to think critically and encouraging self-development and growth.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored four central aspects of Westerfeld’s *Uglies* trilogy. Firstly, a major theme of the series is conformity, which is a trait of both traditional and YA dystopian fiction. The emphasis on social organization can help both characters and readers realize that the society portrayed in the novels is flawed and highly dystopian. Authorities abuse science, technology and power to exercise control over its population and obtain conformity. It is therefore possible to draw parallels between the novels and Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which are arguably two of the most prominent examples of traditional dystopian literature.

The theme of conformity can be linked to this chapter's second theme: environmental degradation and technological development. Characters of this society are informed about the pitfalls and wrongdoings of previous generations which ultimately led to the near destruction of the world. The population living in the cities in this new world is therefore contained to an urban living area. Citizens are distracted and contented within this technological utopia. The infantilizing bubble in which these people live thus serves two purposes. Firstly, the lack of contact with nature prevents citizens from harming the environment. Secondly, the pampered and dependent state in which these people exist allows the government to achieve another level of conformity. Furthermore, the treatment of this theme allows the author to convey criticism of the way the reader's generation handles challenges concerning the environment. The characters in the novels often portray the reader's generation as immoral and ignorant with respect to nature, as well as providing concrete examples of their wrongdoings against the environment. This suggests that the works are highly critical of the society that they reflect, which is another characteristic of the dystopian genre. The environmental issues are emphasized in all three works, but Westerfeld also addresses other topics and challenges of his contemporary society. Gender inequality, gun regulations, multiculturalism and concerns related to human nature are some of the issues that are addressed throughout the trilogy. The most common way in which such issues are addressed is through observations and reflections made by the protagonist: Tally Youngblood. Tally's character plays a central role and her journey is connected to the themes that are previously mentioned in one way or another.

The third central aspect relates to the characterization of Tally. Tally's character is initially presented as a passive obedient product of the society in which she was raised. One of the most central elements of her characterization is her coming-of-age process, the novels thus contain traits of the *Bildungsroman*. Tally's tricky and rebellious personality is fueled along the way by her encounters with different characters, each of them stimulating Tally to become more critical of the world around her and the truths she is fed by the city authorities. Discovering the dystopian system that is hidden inside the pretty-minded city seems to be beneficial for Tally's journey from childhood to adulthood. However, what is most effective in the protagonist's growth process is her contact with nature. Throughout the series, Tally is forced to undertake several journeys throughout the wilderness. This contact with nature proves to be an antidote for the dependency she has developed throughout her life in the

technological, urban surroundings of the city. At the same time that Tally becomes more critical and defiant towards her city government, the methods to obtain conformity seem to become stricter and more extreme. Tally's body and mind undergo several severe changes as city authorities struggle to maintain control over this character. As a result, each novel presents the reader with a different version of Tally, and each journey this character undertakes becomes beneficial in a different way. When Special Circumstances attempt to control Tally by abusing science and using technology, nature seems to push back, working harder to reveal the qualities that are embedded in Tally's subconscious all along. At the end of the third novel, Tally has proven that she is a strong, female heroine who has managed to liberate herself from the strictures her society had imposed on her. Finally, she has developed from a passive bystander to an active political and social agent. I believe that with this transformation Tally's character represents the embodiment of the girl power rhetoric, proving that young girls can be powerful, independent advocates for their society.

5. Didactic benefits

The English Subject Curriculum states that pupils should be able to reflect upon different ways of living in Great Britain, the US, other English-speaking countries as well as Norway by the end of year ten. They should also be able to read and reflect upon a variety of different English literary texts from different English-speaking countries (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2013b, p. 9). Additionally, the Norwegian Core Curriculum aims to increase pupils' understanding and reflection about society as it states that students in all types of education should be encouraged to learn about intellectual freedom and tolerance, democratic ideals and human equality. Furthermore, it states that schools should promote an increased awareness of society and assist them in their personal development (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2011, p. 2). Finally, the Framework for Basic Skills stresses the development of reading and digital skills, these can assist students in their journey towards autonomy and productivity in society (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2013a).

Integrating YA dystopian fiction into the English subject classroom can be beneficial when promoting these learning outcomes. According to Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 1), YA dystopia is a highly didactic genre that can provide YA readers with an understanding of social organization and an opportunity to develop political reflection. Furthermore, they claim that YA dystopian works can teach adolescents about governance, the possibility of improving society, the role of the individual and the limitations of freedom. Finally, YA dystopian fiction can be used as a catalyst to introduce pupils to activism and enhance student learning and social awareness (Stover, Bach & Carver, 2017, pp. 175-176) Expressing concerns regarding these issues can lead YA readers to notice issues in their own community as well. Hintz and Ostry (2003, pp. 8-9) point out that encountering social and political issues in fiction can help adolescent readers consider the value of justice and democracy. Thus, engaging pupils in social activism can give them hope that their actions can contribute to rectifying the wrongdoings of previous generations and inspire them to better in the future. In this way, YA dystopian can function as a discourse of hope.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how using YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom in Norway can teach pupils about society, strengthen their identity and self-growth, as well as how its usage can develop basic skills. All of these didactic benefits are discussed in relation to the Norwegian Core Curriculum, the English Subject Curriculum and the Framework for Basic Skills.

5.1 Understanding and reflecting on society

YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom can be used to teach adolescents about society, as Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 7) claim that utopian and dystopian fiction provide an opportunity for children and young adults to learn about social organization. Moreover, they explain that dystopian fiction has a long tradition of encouraging readers to be critical of their contemporary society and the challenges it faces. Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 7) therefore argue that this genre can urge YA readers to view their society with a more critical eye. In the *Uglies* trilogy, Westerfeld addresses themes such as conformity, environmental degradation and technological development. This section explores how these themes can be used to develop young people's ability to reflect upon the struggles of the twenty-first century, as well as increase their understanding of the social, political and environmental aspects of contemporary society. These learning outcomes are discussed in light of parts of the Norwegian Core Curriculum. The points that I choose to focus on are the promotion of values such as equality, democracy and freedom, increasing social awareness, introducing advantages and disadvantages of technological development in relation to environmental issues.

5.1.1 Conformity

There is a strong emphasis on social structures and political systems in both traditional and YA dystopian literature. The level of conformity in YA dystopias presents the audience with a bleak and pessimistic image of society. Hintz and Ostry (2003, pp. 8-9) claim that the depiction of extreme cases of conformity in these works can help adolescent readers to consider these challenges and thus develop an understanding of social arrangements in their contemporary society. As YA dystopian literature often portrays an extrapolation of the readers' own world, dystopian works usually contain a warning that is supposed to frighten

or alarm the reader while allowing them to draw parallels between the fictional world and their own society. In that way, they can be inspired to find out more about certain political and social challenges. Eventually, this can help them gain an increased level of awareness and encourage them to avoid the mistakes that are presented within these dystopian works. The depiction of conformity in this genre can therefore also promote political and social change. As a result, YA dystopian literature contains an element of hope. There typically is a rebellious adolescent protagonist who reveals shortcomings and faults of living in a dystopian, conformist society. These characters typically defy this system. Usually, a combination of individuality and cooperation triumphs and causes the conformist government to fall. Individuality and cooperation are values that are often emphasized clearly within the genre. Increased knowledge and understanding regarding these matters can ultimately help pupils to relieve the pressure to conform in their own lives, teaching them not to be ashamed of how they may differ from the norm.

In the *Uglies* trilogy, conformity is one of the main themes. Its presentation in the novels can function as a warning to the reader and might even inspire YA readers to undertake political action. Characters David and Zane often help explain social mechanisms and encourage Tally to liberate herself from the strict grip of her government. In *Uglies* (2005a, p. 216), David explains to Tally that the seemingly strong social organization in her city only exists because of the officials who force their citizens into conformity through ideology and mind-altering operations. Once people start to question the authority of the government, the whole system might crumble. After Tally's mind-altering surgery in *Pretties* (2005b), Zane's character functions as another voice of reason as he urges Tally to be critical by problematizing their situation and the power of the government. Finally, in the last novel, *Specials* (2006, pp. 319-320), Tally has managed to overcome two major brain-altering surgeries by thinking her way out of it. David explains to her that her ability to change and free herself from the authorities' powerful grip has been inspiring for the revolution that was necessary to overthrow the government. The conversations between Tally and David, and Tally and Zane, as well as collaboration and trust between Tally and these male characters, can show YA readers that social and political awareness can be powerful qualities when striving towards change.

The Norwegian Core Curriculum (2011) underlines the importance of promoting values such as intellectual freedom, democratic ideals and human equality in school. Additionally, it states that:

Education must be based on the view that all persons are created equal and that human dignity is inviolable. It should confirm the belief that everyone is unique, that each can nourish his own growth and that individual distinctions enrich and enliven our world. (p. 9)

The universal beauty standards that are forced on the citizens in the *Uglies*-society discourage individuality and unique beauty. Additionally, the brain-altering surgeries force all people to conform and hinder freedom of speech and thought. Protagonist Tally's struggle throughout this trilogy can teach pupils about the value of human equality, individuality, intellectual freedom and democracy. Together with a developed understanding of the social and political situation in contemporary society, pupils can increase their level of critical reflection. This implies that the trilogy's message is in accordance with the learning outcomes stated in the Common Core Curriculum with regards to the promotion of important democratic and humanistic values, which are deemed central in Norwegian contemporary society.

5.1.2 Environmental Degradation and Technological Development

Ecological and technological issues are topical in our contemporary society. Themes regarding these challenges can often be found in YA dystopian fiction. Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 12) report that a large amount of YA dystopian works reflect environmental challenges, claiming that these works can function as cautionary tales that can warn YA readers to take care of the Earth and each other. The representation of technological development in YA dystopian literature can be more ambiguous. On the one hand, these advances reflect the dangers of popular youth culture, which involve consumerism and the need for technological progress and plentitude (Ostry, 2013, p. 102), and might encourage YA readers to reflect upon the consequences of constant development. On the other hand, Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 11) explain that the depiction of technology in dystopian writing can inform YA readers about both the dangers and advantages of technological advances. They add that the duality of this relationship can help YA readers develop their

understanding of what it means to be a human in the twenty-first century. The treatment of these themes in the novels is interconnected and can provide learners with a better understanding of technology and its relation to current environmental problems.

Both environmental degradation and technological development are central themes in the *Uglies* trilogy. They are reflected in the novels through the presentation of environmental issues such as pollution (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 329) and the clear-cutting of trees (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 236). The readers' own generation is largely blamed for these environmental problems. I therefore believe that these difficulties are highly relatable for YA readers. The novels allow them to detect these issues in their own society and can in that way increase their environmental awareness.

The literary analysis discussed the presentations of two types of utopia in the novels: technological and ecological. By presenting these two scenarios in the novel, Ostry (2013, pp. 101-102) argues that YA readers are encouraged to evaluate their relationship to both technology and nature and in that way mature as well. The ecological utopia is in the trilogy presented through the protagonist's contact with nature. This acts as a powerful tool in her coming-of-age process. She becomes more mature and develops a better understanding and appreciation of nature. All these factors help her become an active agent in the protection and preservation of the environment at the end of *Specials* (2006). In that way, the works show that consideration of nature and the wrongdoings of previous and current generations can be beneficial for a person's personal growth and development.

Working with this theme in class can increase YA readers' understanding of environmental issues. This is in accordance with the Norwegian Core Curriculum, as it states that schools should promote ecological understanding and international co-responsibility (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011, p. 2). Additionally, YA dystopias dealing with environmental degradation can strengthen pupils' appreciation of nature. The Norwegian Core Curriculum stresses that education should support the relationship between understanding and experiencing nature. Moreover, it states that Norwegian schools should instill in their students the joy of nature and outdoor life (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011, p. 38). Working with the environmental aspect of the novels in the English subject classroom can therefore be accommodating to achieve these goals.

While the portrayal of an ecological utopia encourages the reader to develop environmental awareness, the technological utopia has a more ambiguous function. Technology plays an important role in these works. The flaws of the Rusties, an analogy for the readers' own society, and their misuse of destructive technology are emphasized frequently. At the same time, it is apparent that the citizens described in the novels are living in equilibrium with nature because of technology.

A concrete example of one of the pitfalls of technology provided by the trilogy is the characters' use of traditional forms of literacy. In *Uglies* (2005a) and *Pretties* (2005b) characters Tally and Shay, as well as other members of the Smoke, use handwritten notes and magazines to escape the technological surveillance of the authorities. These methods of communication allow them to experience freedom of speech and thought, and play a central role in the characters' liberation. Additionally, the preservation of old magazines helps reveal previous "rusty" beauty standards. These standards include diversity and individual beauty, characteristics that the government is trying to avoid. In order for the authorities to maintain conformity, the population needs to be indoctrinated with a universal idea of beauty. This ideology enables the authorities to submit its citizens to the mind-altering operation that keeps them in control. This implies that old popular magazines, another form of traditional literacy, aids the characters to reveal the motives of the authorities which in turn contributes to the revolution. This aspect of the novel can encourage young people to consider the powerful role of technology in their own lives.

The Norwegian Core Curriculum describes that pupils should be introduced to the benefits and possible pitfalls of technological progression as part of their general education. It stresses that technological development can be used to facilitate life with regards to labor, class differences and social conflict. At the same, the Curriculum warns that a lack of control or abuse of technology can lead to the depletion or destruction of the Earth (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2011, pp. 17-18). Furthermore, the duality between technological development and the preservation of nature is stressed: pupils should be made aware of the consequences of their living-habits and the interplay between social organization, technology and nature (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training , 2011, pp. 35-38). Drawing attention to the ambiguous relationship between ecology and technology in the novels can therefore be linked directly to the Norwegian Core Curriculum. Nevertheless, the society portrayed in the novels is dystopian, and the technological

advances it portrays are not always beneficial for its population. I believe that when this aspect is emphasized in class, pupils might gain an increased understanding of the complexities of technological development and its role society.

5.2 Identity and Personal Development

YA dystopian fiction can encourage young people to learn more about themselves and their identity, as well as promote self-growth. This section examines the correlation between pupils' understanding of society, critical thinking skills, and their personal development. This is further linked to the notion of *Bildung* and the role of young female protagonists, both of which can be found in contemporary YA dystopian literature. Furthermore, the Norwegian Core Curriculum stresses that both primary and secondary school pupils should be encouraged to become independent individuals (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011, p. 2). This part of the Curriculum will be linked to the effects of YA dystopian literature on readers' personal growth and development.

5.2.1 *Bildung*

It is possible that the *Bildung* element can be a denominator to promote the use of YA dystopian fiction in the classroom. According to Biesta (2002, p. 378), the educational aspect of *Bildung* is used to describe the cultivation of a person's humanity, and it is linked to qualities that constitute an educated human being. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these qualities are based on values that are deemed important in a typical society, culture, and time-period. These factors determine how an educated person is defined. In the case of the Norwegian educational system in 2018, intellectual and personal freedom, democracy, human equality, environmental awareness, and technological responsibility are often emphasized, as outlined in section 5.1. Simultaneously, Biesta (2002, p. 378) adds that *Bildung* also defines a person's capability of making her own choices with the knowledge, ideas and values she possesses. This gives a person a certain level of personal freedom and independency, allowing her to participate in civic life.

The characterization of protagonist Tally Youngblood in the *Uglies* trilogy can promote YA readers' personal growth and increase their independency. The discussion in the literary

analysis in section 4.5 indicates that her character is able to mature with the help of David, Zane, and Shay, as well as her contact with nature. As a result, Tally gradually becomes an active social, political and environmental agent. Although subjected to several mind-altering surgeries in *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006), Tally is able to free herself from the brainwashing effects of these operations. She discovers the extent of control she and the rest of the population are subjected to, as well as finding out which methods the government uses to obtain this level of conformity. Eventually, Tally's ability to liberate her mind and body from the strictures of her society functions as an example for the rest of the population and helps incite a revolution (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 319-320). The knowledge that Tally acquires throughout the trilogy enables her to make choices that benefit herself and the rest of the population. Simultaneously, she gains increasingly more personal and intellectual freedom that help her grow as an individual. Tally's ability to liberate herself can also set an example for YA readers to become more independent thinkers, as well as contemplate what they deem valuable in their own lives.

The *Bildung* aspect of Westerfeld's works can give YA readers the inspiration they need to develop their own sense of identity, and in that way discover their role in the world. According to the Norwegian Core Curriculum, general education in primary and secondary school should be broad so that pupils can become useful and independent individuals in their private lives and in society (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011, p. 2). The characterization of Tally in relation to the notion of *Bildung* can help pupils reflect upon important ideals in their contemporary society, and in that way help them to become valuable and autonomous members of their community.

It might, however, be equally important to stress that there are no black and white solutions to the challenges which the characters of these dystopian works face. One of the goals of YA dystopia seems to be teaching adolescents to accept limitations rather than encourage anarchy and rebellion against the system. In this way, young people can learn from the faults of previous generations and strive to be better than them.

In *Pretties* (2005b) even rebellious protagonist Tally reflects upon the brain-altering surgeries inflicted on the population. She contemplates whether this might be a valid solution to humanity's destructive nature after all (Westerfeld, 2005b, p. 289). Her assessment can communicate to YA readers that there might not be a perfect solution to the

faults and challenges of their world either. Furthermore, as the revolution spreads in *Specials* (2006), Tally starts to understand that there is a price to pay when people are given freedom of thought and speech. She realizes that people's freedom has disadvantages in relation to nature (Westerfeld, 2006, p. 365).

The dilemmas that the protagonist faces can inspire young people to evaluate the consequences of their actions, as well as teach them about the complexities of the challenges they will be faced with in the twenty-first century. As the Norwegian Core Curriculum states that pupils in primary and secondary school should be taught to take responsibility for their own benefit and growth while being considerate to others (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011, p. 33), working with YA dystopian literature can aid pupils to mature and teach them to be respectful and tolerant towards others. This can help them to become more mature.

5.2.2 Inspiring girls and young women

YA dystopias often feature female protagonists who can inspire girls and young women in particular to understand their role in society and develop their personal identity. Day et al. (2014) focus on the role of young women in this genre and argue that:

[...] young women in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century dystopian fiction embody liminality, straddling the lines of childhood and adulthood, of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity. They may also be understood as representations of contradictions, of strength and weakness, of resistance and acquiescence, and perhaps especially, of hope and despair. (p. 4)

The role of the female protagonist in YA dystopian literature can invite young female readers to explore their own identity by presenting them with contradictions in the characters they portray. However, these readers are encouraged to become more autonomous individuals as Day et al. (2014, pp. 3-4) argue that the contemporary YA dystopian genre represents female protagonists who claim their identities and occupy the role of an active agent, they seek to live life on their own terms and in that way contradict the perception that girls are too young or too powerless to rebel against a society that places limitations on them. Simultaneously, this representation of female characters can expose male readers to the

complexities of living in a gendered society. While female protagonists can empower female readers, social change and the journey towards gender equality can only be realized if both female and male readers are aware of the challenges and disadvantages that gender inequality presents in our contemporary society.

The representation of female protagonists in YA dystopian literature can teach young people a girl power rhetoric. The term “girl power” is complex and its meaning has gone through changes since it was originally developed as a slogan by the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s (Fritz, 2014, p. 18). This thesis uses the term to refer to the original meaning of the term as a political concept that highlights girls’ collective strength and the “socio-political empowerment of girls and young women and their capacity for self-determination” (Fritz, 2014, p. 19). Simultaneously, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009, p. 20) define girl power as the personal power of individual girls in their pursuit of an unlimited, gender equality-orientated future.

The girl power rhetoric displayed in YA dystopian fiction is linked to the role of female protagonists. The portrayal of these empowered characters is closely linked to Pomerantz’ description of girl power that allows these female characters to demonstrate their social and political agency. She defines them as:

Powerful “bitches” with social clout, wild exhibitions with unlimited sexual power, overachieving perfectionists who are exceptional at everything they attempt to do, butt-kicking babes who embody masculine strength while still remaining feminine, and unconventional rebels who resist dominant expectations of femininity through alternative lifestyles. (pp. 159-160)

Girl power is thus explored in YA dystopian by placing female protagonist in a dystopian setting which they successfully rebel against. This rebellion can strengthen the belief that girls and young women can achieve whatever they want to be. These women are not limited by social and political structures and are able to assume an identity that they seem fitting.

The notion of girl power allows girls and young women to embody a role in society that empowers them, without dictating what it means to be “a girl”. This can be one of the reasons why the characterization of the female protagonist in the novels is filled with the

contradictions that Day et al. (2014) describe. Firstly, Tally demonstrates her intelligence, independence and resourcefulness throughout the series by undertaking numerous journeys through the wilderness. As discussed in section 4.5 of the literary analysis, these help her to mature. However, she often receives help from others, which in turn can reflect her own limitations. Secondly, during one of her journeys in *Specials* (2006) she shows that even though she is able to survive on her own, she craves human contact and the support of her friends (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 183-200). This shows that there is a balance between individuality and dependency. Thirdly, Tally understands the necessity of self-sacrifice for the greater good. In *Uglies* (2005a) she is willing to turn herself in to the government in an attempt to save humanity (Westerfeld, 2005a, p. 425). Finally, in *Specials* (2006), Tally is able to adopt the role of female heroine by questioning the limitations put on her by society. She is able to use that freedom to take responsibility for others and the Earth (Westerfeld, 2006, pp. 368-372). She becomes an active agent for the causes she believes in.

The Norwegian Core Curriculum does not emphasize the personal development and self-growth for young women in particular. However, as it states that schools should promote human equality (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011), I believe that working with this aspect of the novels can be beneficial for young female and male readers. Common conceptions of gender roles and the division between boys and girls, men and women, are still highly topical in contemporary society. Reading YA dystopian novels that encourage young people to take charge of their identity and free themselves from the limitations put on them by society can be connected to the stimulation of human equality. I therefore believe this is a central aspect of the *Uglies* trilogy and YA dystopian in general with relation to the Norwegian Core Curriculum.

5.3 Developing Basic Skills

The use of YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom can be linked to the development of basic skills. Firstly, this section examines how exposing students to literary texts in general can increase their language ability and reading proficiency. Secondly, it investigates how the portrayal of environmental issues in relation to technological advances can help pupils to consider the advantages and possible pitfalls of the digitalized world. This

can aid them in the development of their digital skills. The importance of acquiring these skills is reflected in the Framework for Basic Skills.

5.3.1 Reading skills

Introducing YA dystopian literature into the English subject classroom can be beneficial to promote the development of pupils' reading skills. The Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills defines reading as a way to create meaning in the broadest sense (Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research, 2013a, p. 8). Reading as a basic skill is in this document described as a way to give insight in other people's experience, opinion and knowledge, independent of time and place. The ability to read can therefore ensure lifelong learning and participation in civic life. According to this document, reading includes engaging in texts, comprehending, applying what is read and reflecting on this (Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research, 2013a, p. 8).

According to Gibbons et al. (2006, pp. 53-55) integrating young adult literature into the English classroom in secondary school can improve students' reading proficiency as its language is adapted to their abilities. Additionally, they claim that this can help both struggling and reluctant readers to build literacy skills (Gibbons et al., 2006, p. 57). Due to the popular status of YA dystopian, as discussed in section 3.3 of the literature review, I believe the use of this genre can be especially useful.

Appleyard (2010, p. 100) reports that young adult readers value an element of reality in literature. This can encourage them to read more. Moreover, Westerfeld (2012) explains that part of the appeal of YA dystopian fiction can be attributed to the fact that this genre is highly critical of contemporary society and that young people crave stories of broken futures as they understand that the world they will inherit is both depleted and damaged. He adds that YA dystopian fiction reflects the truth of this world and that this is appealing to adolescent readers who want to read something "that isn't a lie" (Westerfeld, 2012). Finally, Appleyard (2010, p. 100) claims that young people are often drawn to literature that encourages them to be critical. These qualities can all be linked to the YA dystopian genre.

The Uglies trilogy is critical of the contemporary society of the readers as it addresses issues regarding for example social organization, environmental degradation, and technological development. Although serious and complex themes, YA readers seem to appreciate the element of truth that lies within them, and can thus be encouraged to read more.

5.3.2 Digital skills

Working with YA dystopian literature can help pupils improve their digital skills. The Uglies trilogy presents readers with both benefits and pitfalls of an increasingly digitalized world. In *Uglies* (2005a) and *Pretties* (2005b), characters Tally and Shay, as well as other members of the rebellious community use traditional forms of communication such as handwritten letters and magazines to escape the technological surveillance of the authorities. The Uglies trilogy portrays an ambiguous relationship between nature and technology as protagonist Tally discovers that she needs both types of knowledge to improve the world she lives in. Working with this aspect of the novels can encourage pupils to develop their digital skills in a responsible way.

Digital skills are in the Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills described as the ability to use digital tools, media and resources efficiently and responsibly. Additionally, the framework stresses the importance of digital skills in relation to active participation in working life and a constantly changing society in need of technological development (Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research, 2013a, p. 12). The relationship between environmental challenges and the effects of living in a digitalized world can teach pupils about the dangers and possibilities of technology. This connection can encourage them to work on their digital skills and establish themselves in our rapidly developing world.

5.4 Summary

The discussion in this chapter shows that the YA dystopian genre in general, and the Uglies trilogy in particular, can offer a number of didactic possibilities for young adult students in Norway. By drawing attention to topical issues and challenges, this genre invites readers to consider these problems in their own lives and society as a whole. The Uglies trilogy

presents readers with concrete examples of shortcomings, faults and mistakes with regards to conformity, environmental degradation and technological development. As a result, the treatment of these themes can increase pupils' social, political, and environmental understanding, and awareness. Additionally, the representation of technological development in Westerfeld's works can encourage pupils to find responsible ways of dealing with these advances which in turn can help them develop digital skills.

Increased attention to problematic aspects of contemporary society can also strengthen adolescent readers' identity. This can be attributed to the *Bildung* aspect of the YA dystopian genre which is linked to the readers' personal development and self-growth. In the *Uglies* trilogy, this development is promoted in a number of ways. As mentioned, the treatment of current themes can increase the readers' understanding of society and in turn help them to become more educated and reflective. Additionally, readers can identify with or strive to become more like protagonist Tally Youngblood by aiming to become more independent, social or politically active in their own lives. Finally, Tally's role as a strong female protagonist can teach adolescent readers, male and female, about the complexities of living in a gendered society while at the same time empowering young girls to take charge of their identity. These qualities can ultimately help pupils become more reflective and independent members of society.

The critical nature of the YA dystopian genre in general, as discussed in this thesis, is appealing to young people, which can be linked to the genre's popular status. This popularity can in turn increase students' reader motivation. When pupils are exposed to more texts and read more, they can become more proficient readers and increase their reading skills. YA dystopia in the English subject can therefore be used to meet the different learning outcomes listed in the Common Core and English Subject Curricula, as well as the Framework for Basic Skills.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom in Norway, exemplified through a close reading of Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005a), *Pretties* (2005b) and *Specials* (2006). The specific research questions are:

1. In what way can working with Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy help develop pupils' critical reflection and promote their understanding of contemporary society, as well as strengthen their personal development and promote self-growth?
2. The use of YA dystopian literature in the English subject classroom might have didactic benefits as it can help the learners develop different basic skills. How can YA dystopian fiction in general, and Westerfeld's trilogy in particular, help pupils develop reading and digital skills?

First, this chapter revisits the aims listed above, summarizes the findings of this research and offers conclusions based on the findings. The final section discusses possibilities for further research in terms of how to develop this study.

6.1 Summary of Findings

The literature review shows that traditional and YA dystopian literature are highly pedagogical genres by outlining their specific characteristics. Dystopian writing is pessimistic in its representation of society. Although human-centered, dystopian authorities distrust people's ability to live together peacefully. This leads to a rigid set of laws that repress humanity's unreliable and unstable nature. Utopian writing shares this portrayal of society, however, a utopian society is deemed better than the readers' own. These similarities suggest that utopian and dystopian literature are closely linked. Whether a society is interpreted as utopian or dystopian thus depends on context, and the perspectives of both the author and the reader.

The ambiguous qualities of dystopian literature can be further linked to the treatment of social and political themes within the genre. The themes that are addressed in dystopias can be open for interpretation. Although the goal of dystopian literature is to frighten and warn the reader by exaggerating faults and shortcomings of contemporary society, it does not offer concrete solutions to these problems. On the one hand, this obscurity can teach readers about the fact that there are no black and white answers in real life. This can encourage them to accept limitations within society as well as themselves. On the other hand, the message of this type of literature is clear: it urges the audience to avoid the mistakes made by this dystopian society, calling on their moral, social and civic responsibility to create a better future. This makes dystopian literature highly didactic.

The close reading of Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy has looked at the treatment of conformity, environmental degradation in relation to technological development, gender inequality and the violent aspects of human nature in particular. These issues are both relevant and relatable to young people and can spark an interest to learn more. This can lead to an increased understanding of contemporary society and the challenges it faces. Additionally, it can teach them more about themselves and their role in society. As young people become aware of certain faults and shortcomings of social organization, humanity's effect on nature, and the dangers and benefits of technological advances, they become more educated and knowledgeable.

Westerfeld's works portray a complex and ambiguous relationship between nature and technology, which can invite young people to take responsibility for the environment, but also for the future. They are made aware of the need for people with competent digital skills and a thorough understanding of new technology. The element of technology can therefore strengthen pupils' digital skills. Responsible use of digital skills is equally important in contemporary society, both in relation to the fact that our world is rapidly digitalizing and issues regarding the environment and conformity.

Increased awareness and strengthened reflective abilities can contribute to the *Bildung* of these readers. Moreover, the treatment of the previously mentioned themes can instill moralistic, humanistic and democratic values in adolescent readers. These qualities can aid young adults to form an educated opinion on political and social structures and policies. It

can encourage them to become less conformist while at the same time take responsibility for other and contribute to society in a productive way. Moreover, the *Bildung* aspect of YA dystopian fiction can help them understand the value of individuality in relation to that of the community. Finally, YA dystopias can invite young people to evaluate their own strengths and limitations. These qualities are usually embedded in the adolescent protagonists that these novels portray.

The didactic qualities of the YA dystopian literature can also be linked to the element of hope, which functions as a common thread through this thesis, and dystopian literature as a whole. Whereas hope is present in traditional dystopian literature, it is more explicitly communicated in the YA dystopian genre. The element of hope is represented through several aspects in dystopian literary works.

Firstly, hope for a better future is typically symbolized through the actions of a rebellious adolescent protagonist who is able to liberate her society from a strict and rigid dystopian regime. Secondly, the treatment of serious, current themes, political and social criticism can be intriguing for YA readers. This can encourage them to learn more about these issues and expand their understanding of society and the challenges it faces. As young people gain increased awareness of the world around them, they can be inspired to undertake political and social action. Ultimately, YA dystopian fiction not only has the ability to teach young people about society, but can also instill a feeling of hope within these readers that their generation can do better in the future. This makes the genre both appealing and educational for adolescent readers.

In the *Uglies* trilogy, the reader is given hope by protagonist Tally Youngblood. She is the embodiment of girl power, as she claims her identity by becoming a social and political agent, an advocate and protector of the environment, and a liberator of people. Her role as a powerful female protagonist also offers other didactic possibilities to YA students.

Tally's actions in the *Uglies* trilogy show that young women have the ability to be powerful heroines. This representation breaks with common conceptions of the female gender. At the same time, female and male readers are introduced to the complexities and challenges of living in a gendered society. Furthermore, readers can identify with her character and might resist the urge to conform in their own lives as she teaches readers that adolescents can be

political and social agents, and that their opinion is valuable. Young people might therefore be inspired to take charge of their own identity and consider their role in society. In that way, working with the *Uglies* trilogy can assist pupils in strengthen their personal development and self-growth, guiding them on their journey from childhood to adulthood.

Young people are attracted to literature that contains an element of realism, something that makes them think. Due to the universal and topical nature of its themes, YA dystopian can be an appealing genre for this audience. This is reflected in the increase in popularity YA dystopian writing has seen during the last decade. Furthermore, the genre has qualities that make it accessible for young people. Language adapted to adolescent readers is combined with intriguing themes and gripping plots. These traits can invite pupils to read more and improve their general language ability as well as their reading skills. The English Subject Curriculum has a broad understanding of what types of texts can be used and YA dystopia is a viable choice to increase the development of reading skills among young adult students. T Finally, the development of these basic skills plays a role in the *Bildung* of young people as well. Reading is invaluable in society: it provides an entrance to public life and allows life-long learning.

The didactic possibilities of working with YA dystopian literature that are outlined in this thesis show that the genre is highly relevant to the Common Core and English Subject Curricula. It can thus function as a discourse of hope, not only for the young adults who read it, but for teachers and policy makers who seek to prepare them to take on the challenges of adulthood and life in the twenty-first century.

6.2 Further Research

This thesis shows that YA dystopian literature can be a valuable tool when teaching young adult students. However, it does not show the possible effectiveness of this use, the limitations of this thesis are outlined in section 2.2 of the methodology chapter. I therefore suggest that further research can consist of finding concrete strategies of teaching this genre in the English subject classroom and finding effective teaching methods and practical classroom applications to work with the different topics that YA dystopias have to offer.

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