

Identity, Authority and Resistance: A Postmodern Reading of Veronica Roth's Divergent Trilogy and Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary juvenile fiction has increasingly emerged as an important literary space for the exploration of political authority, social control, identity, knowledge, and individual freedom. Dystopian and fantastic narratives written for young readers frequently move beyond the conventional boundaries of children's literature by presenting young protagonists who confront oppressive institutions and question inherited systems of truth. This article comparatively examines Veronica Roth's Divergent trilogy and Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series through the theoretical framework of postmodernism. It argues that the two works represent two distinct but interconnected modes of dystopian imagination. Roth's trilogy develops a realistic or extrapolative dystopia in which recognizable structures of social classification, surveillance, political manipulation, and ideological conformity are projected into a futuristic society. Pullman's trilogy, by contrast, constructs a fantastic dystopia in which parallel universes, dæmons, angels, and supernatural phenomena become instruments for interrogating institutional authority, religious absolutism, and the control of knowledge. Drawing primarily upon Jean-François Lyotard's critique of grand narratives, Michel Foucault's theories of disciplinary power, Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation, and Linda Hutcheon's understanding of postmodern plurality and instability, the article investigates the representation of fragmented identity and contested truth in the two series. It argues that Tris Prior's Divergence and Lyra Belacqua's movement across multiple worlds function as postmodern challenges to systems that seek to impose singular identities and universal explanations. The study concludes that realistic and fantastic dystopias in juvenile fiction perform a significant ideological function by encouraging young readers to question authority, resist fixed categories, and recognize plurality as a necessary condition of freedom.

Keywords: Dystopia, juvenile fiction, postmodernism, Veronica Roth, Philip Pullman, Divergent, His Dark Materials, fragmented identity, fantasy, power, surveillance.

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INTRODUCTION

Juvenile fiction has undergone a remarkable transformation in contemporary literary culture. While earlier conceptions of literature for children and adolescents frequently emphasized moral instruction, adventure, fantasy, and personal development, recent works increasingly engage with complex questions concerning political authority, violence, sexuality, identity, environmental crisis, technological intervention, religious ideology, and social inequality. The young protagonist is no longer represented merely as an individual moving gradually toward acceptance within an established social order. In much contemporary fiction, the adolescent discovers that the social order itself is flawed. The institutions responsible for education, protection, knowledge, and moral authority may become instruments of oppression. Consequently, coming of age is transformed into a process of political and intellectual awakening.

Dystopian fiction has become particularly important within this literary transformation. The dystopian narrative

imagines societies in which the desire for order, security, purity, equality, or progress has developed into an oppressive structure. The dystopian world is therefore rarely chaotic in the ordinary sense. On the contrary, it is often excessively organized. Every individual has a designated place, every body is subjected to regulation, and every form of difference is carefully monitored. The danger of dystopia lies not in the absence of social order but in the absolute extension of order into every dimension of human existence. Veronica Roth's Divergent trilogy consisting of Divergent (2011), Insurgent (2012), and Allegiant (2013) and Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series comprising Northern Lights or The Golden Compass (1995), The Subtle Knife (1997), and The Amber Spyglass (2000) represent two significant but very different developments in contemporary juvenile fiction. Roth constructs a futuristic dystopian Chicago in which society is divided into factions based upon supposedly dominant human virtues. Pullman, meanwhile, creates an expansive

multiverse populated by humans, dæmons, witches, angels, armoured bears, and other fantastic beings. At the level of genre, the two series appear fundamentally different. *Divergent* belongs primarily to dystopian and speculative fiction, whereas *His Dark Materials* belongs to the realm of fantasy. Yet both works are deeply concerned with the same fundamental question: what happens when an institution claims the authority to define who an individual is and what truth means?

The present article argues that Roth's trilogy may be understood as a form of realistic dystopia, while Pullman's series represents a fantastic dystopia. The term "realistic" does not imply that Roth's futuristic Chicago is literally realistic. Rather, its dystopian mechanisms are based upon recognizable tendencies within contemporary society. Social classification, ideological conformity, surveillance, institutional competition, technological manipulation, and the regulation of identity are extended into an extreme future. Pullman's dystopia, by contrast, is fantastic because it displaces political and ideological conflict into imaginary worlds. Yet this fantastic displacement does not make the critique less relevant to reality. On the contrary, fantasy enables Pullman to interrogate authority at a metaphysical level by imagining a universe in which even apparently sacred systems of power can be questioned.

Both writers can therefore be productively examined through postmodern theory. Jean-François Lyotard's influential definition of the postmodern condition as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" offers an especially useful framework for understanding the political structure of these texts. The dystopian institution typically depends upon a metanarrative. It claims to possess a universal explanation for human problems and proposes a single system through which those problems can be resolved. The faction system in *Divergent* claims to have discovered the essential causes of social disorder, while the institutional structures in *His Dark Materials* seek to maintain control by presenting their interpretation of the universe as absolute truth. Both narratives, however, expose the instability of such universal systems.

As Lyotard observes: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." The protagonists of Roth and Pullman embody precisely this incredulity. Tris Prior cannot be reduced to the factional identity imposed upon her, while Lyra Belacqua refuses to accept institutional explanations without questioning their hidden assumptions. Both protagonists emerge as figures of postmodern resistance because they inhabit worlds in which the official explanation of reality gradually reveals its own contradictions.

Dystopia, Postmodernism, and the Juvenile Subject

The relationship between dystopia and postmodernism becomes particularly significant when the central concern of both forms is considered. Dystopia reveals the consequences of systems that seek to control the future, whereas postmodernism questions the intellectual and

cultural foundations upon which such systems depend. The dystopian state believes in totality. It seeks a coherent social structure in which every individual occupies an intelligible position. Postmodernism, however, emphasizes fragmentation, plurality, discontinuity, and the instability of meaning.

In juvenile dystopian fiction, this conflict frequently becomes part of the protagonist's process of maturation. The young subject begins within a world whose structures initially appear natural. The family, school, government, religion, or other institutions provide explanations of reality. As the narrative develops, however, the protagonist discovers contradictions between official truth and lived experience. The process of growing up therefore becomes inseparable from the process of questioning.

Roberta Seelinger Trites has argued that adolescent literature is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the individual and social power. Adolescence represents a period during which the subject becomes increasingly conscious of the institutions that regulate life. The young person encounters laws, schools, families, gender expectations, economic systems, and cultural norms. In dystopian fiction, these encounters are intensified because social power becomes visible in its most extreme forms.

This is precisely what occurs in both *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials*. Tris and Lyra begin their narratives as young individuals who have not yet fully understood the systems surrounding them. Their journeys are journeys toward knowledge, but knowledge itself proves unstable. What they learn is not simply information. They learn that institutions can lie, that authority can manipulate truth, and that the social world may be organized around narratives designed to preserve power.

The young protagonist consequently becomes a political subject. Childhood and adolescence are not represented merely as stages preceding adulthood. They become alternative positions from which the adult world can be questioned.

Realistic Dystopia and the Fragmentation of Identity in *Divergent*

The society of *Divergent* is founded upon an apparently simple principle: human beings can be classified according to their dominant virtues. The five factions Abnegation, Dauntless, Erudite, Amity, and Candor represent selflessness, bravery, intelligence, peace, and honesty respectively. The system appears to offer a solution to social conflict. If individuals cultivate particular virtues and organize themselves into communities devoted to those virtues, society can supposedly achieve stability. Yet the apparent rationality of this system conceals its fundamental violence. Human beings are complex, contradictory, and capable of occupying multiple ethical positions, whereas the faction system transforms this complexity into a rigid social structure in which the individual is expected to belong to only one category. What

initially appears to be a system designed to preserve harmony thus becomes a mechanism through which human identity is simplified, regulated, and controlled.

The ideological force of the system is powerfully expressed through the recurring principle, "Faction before blood." The statement is significant because it reveals the extent to which institutional belonging has replaced personal identity. Even family relationships are subordinated to the ideological structure of the faction, suggesting that the political system does not merely organize public life but penetrates the most intimate areas of human existence. Loyalty to one's biological family is expected to become secondary to loyalty to an institution. In this way, Roth demonstrates how dystopian power operates by reorganizing emotional relationships and transforming personal identity into a form of ideological obedience.

Tris Prior's *Divergence* becomes dangerous because she embodies the failure of this classificatory system. She cannot be reduced to one defining characteristic, nor can her personality be contained within the ideological boundaries of a single faction. She possesses qualities associated with multiple factions, and her existence consequently reveals that the categories through which society understands itself are artificial constructions rather than natural truths. This idea is captured in the warning associated with Tris's identity: "What makes you different makes you dangerous." The significance of this statement extends beyond the immediate plot. Difference becomes dangerous whenever a political system depends upon predictability and uniformity. The dystopian institution requires its citizens to be intelligible according to established categories. Once the subject exceeds those categories, the system begins to lose its ability to define and therefore control that subject.

Tris's *Divergence* can consequently be understood as a metaphor for postmodern subjectivity. Postmodern identity resists singular definition because the self is shaped by multiple experiences, relationships, cultural structures, memories, and competing desires. There is no single characteristic that can completely explain an individual. The attempt to identify a person through one fixed category therefore becomes a form of ideological simplification. Tris represents a subject whose identity is fragmented, plural, and contradictory, and it is precisely this complexity that makes her threatening to a society founded upon rigid classification. Her *Divergence* demonstrates that human identity cannot be permanently contained within a stable social label.

Roth's dystopia is realistic in the sense that this process of categorization resembles recognizable structures within contemporary society. Modern individuals are constantly classified according to gender, nationality, profession, class, race, religion, educational status, and economic position, while contemporary digital technologies increasingly collect and organize individuals through systems of data and information. Such classifications may

serve practical and administrative purposes, but they become dangerous when they are treated as complete definitions of human identity. Roth therefore exaggerates an existing social tendency rather than creating an entirely unimaginable future. Her futuristic Chicago does not emerge from nowhere; instead, it represents a world in which classification has become total, where the complexity of human existence has been sacrificed in favour of institutional order, and where the individual's greatest act of resistance lies in refusing to become only one thing.

Surveillance, Discipline, and the Production of Identity

Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power provides an important framework for understanding the mechanisms through which Roth's dystopian society operates. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault demonstrates that modern power is not exercised exclusively through visible physical violence or direct political coercion. Instead, power operates through more subtle mechanisms such as surveillance, examination, normalization, training, and self-regulation. Individuals gradually internalize the expectations of the institutions within which they live and begin to discipline themselves accordingly. Foucault's analysis is particularly relevant to *Divergent*, where the faction system does not depend entirely upon force to maintain social order. Rather, it produces individuals who willingly regulate their own behaviour according to the ideological expectations associated with their factions.

The faction system disciplines its citizens by establishing particular behavioural, physical, and moral expectations. Every faction possesses its own recognizable style of dress, manner of speech, physical practices, social customs, and ethical code. To belong to Dauntless, an individual must continually demonstrate courage, physical strength, and fearlessness, while a member of Abnegation is expected to perform humility and selflessness by minimizing personal desire and avoiding excessive attention to the self. Identity, therefore, is not simply something that an individual possesses internally. It must be repeatedly demonstrated in everyday life. The subject does not simply possess a factional identity; the subject must continually enact that identity. Through this repetitive process, institutional ideology becomes embodied in gestures, appearance, language, and behaviour.

It is at this point that Roth's dystopia acquires a distinctly postmodern dimension. The continuous performance of identity gradually threatens to replace the complexity of identity itself. The social sign becomes more important than the individual behind it. A person is recognized as Dauntless because that person behaves, dresses, speaks, and acts in ways that are socially associated with Dauntlessness. Similarly, an individual becomes recognizable as Abnegation through the performance of selflessness. The representation of identity consequently acquires its own authority. What matters is not necessarily what the individual experiences internally but whether the

individual successfully produces the visible signs required by the social system.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation can be applied to this process. In a society dominated by simulation, signs do not simply represent an existing reality; they increasingly participate in constructing and even replacing reality. The distinction between the real and its representation gradually becomes unstable. The faction system creates a similar condition by transforming complex human beings into recognizable social signs. Human complexity is replaced by factional representation, and the individual becomes identifiable through a limited set of institutional symbols. The Dauntless citizen must signify bravery, while the Abnegation citizen must signify selflessness. These signs eventually become more socially meaningful than the contradictory and unstable human experiences that exist beneath them.

Tris becomes a threat precisely because she cannot become a perfect simulation. She cannot completely perform one identity because her personality exceeds the boundaries established by the faction system. Her Divergence produces a gap between the social representation of the self and the lived complexity of the individual. She may perform the characteristics associated with Dauntless, yet she also possesses qualities connected to Abnegation and Erudite. Her identity cannot be successfully translated into a single institutional sign. This inability to become entirely intelligible threatens the logic of the dystopian system, because a structure based upon classification requires individuals to remain predictable. Tris's existence demonstrates that the categories themselves are incapable of representing the full complexity of human subjectivity. The same process of disciplinary power is visible in the technological mechanisms of control that appear throughout the trilogy. The body becomes subject to testing, training, surveillance, and manipulation. Through aptitude tests, initiation procedures, simulations, and technologically mediated forms of control, the body itself becomes a site upon which political power operates. Power enters the individual not only from outside but also through the production of self-discipline. Citizens learn to monitor themselves according to factional expectations, and social conformity becomes increasingly internalized. The effectiveness of the system therefore depends upon the willingness of individuals to participate in their own regulation.

Foucault's observation that modern disciplinary power operates through the production of "docile bodies" is particularly relevant in this context. The ideal citizen is not simply one who obeys because of an immediate threat of punishment. A more effective form of power produces an individual who has internalized the system so completely that self-regulation appears natural. The disciplined subject becomes both the object and agent of power, monitoring personal behaviour while reproducing the values of the institution. Roth's factional society functions through

precisely such a mechanism, as citizens learn to define themselves through the categories created by the social order and voluntarily participate in the maintenance of those categories.

Tris's resistance, therefore, begins with a refusal or perhaps an inability to become entirely intelligible within the existing structure. Her Divergence prevents the complete internalization of a singular identity and exposes the limitations of the disciplinary system. She cannot be transformed into a perfectly predictable body, a completely stable social sign, or a docile subject who willingly accepts the identity assigned to her. In this sense, her resistance is not initially a conventional political rebellion. It begins at the level of identity itself. By existing as more than one thing, Tris destabilizes a society that depends upon the belief that every individual can be known, classified, disciplined, and controlled.

Fantastic Dystopia and the Crisis of Absolute Truth in His Dark Materials

While Veronica Roth constructs her dystopian critique through social realism and futuristic extrapolation, Philip Pullman employs fantasy as a powerful instrument for interrogating structures of authority, knowledge, and ideological control. At first glance, His Dark Materials appears to be located far from the recognizable world of political dystopia. Its narrative is populated by dæmons, armoured bears, witches, angels, ghosts, parallel universes, and mysterious substances such as Dust. These fantastic elements initially seem to distance the trilogy from political or social reality. However, the fantastic structure performs a significant critical function. By displacing political, religious, and philosophical conflicts into imagined worlds, Pullman creates an imaginative space in which established forms of authority can be questioned more radically. Fantasy, in this sense, does not represent an escape from reality; rather, it becomes an alternative method of representing reality and exposing the ideological structures that often remain invisible within ordinary social life.

The central conflict of His Dark Materials concerns the control of knowledge. The Magisterium represents an institutional structure that seeks to determine what may be believed, investigated, questioned, and known. Its authority extends beyond conventional political control because it also seeks epistemological power the power to regulate the production and interpretation of truth itself. The institution is not satisfied merely with controlling the actions of individuals; it attempts to control the intellectual conditions through which individuals understand the world. Knowledge consequently becomes dangerous whenever it exceeds institutional boundaries. Scientific inquiry, intellectual curiosity, and alternative interpretations are treated as potential threats because they may reveal contradictions within the dominant ideological structure.

The dystopian nature of the Magisterium becomes particularly evident through this fear of independent

knowledge. A system that claims absolute authority cannot easily tolerate competing interpretations of reality. Pullman's narrative therefore transforms the conflict between authority and freedom into a struggle over knowledge itself. The opposition is not simply between good and evil in a conventional moral sense. Rather, it is a conflict between plural knowledge and monopolized truth, between intellectual curiosity and institutional certainty, and between the freedom to interpret and the demand to believe. The Magisterium represents the desire to establish a single authorized explanation of the universe, whereas Lyra's journey gradually exposes the limitations and contradictions of any system that claims exclusive ownership over truth.

The fantastic device of multiple worlds intensifies this challenge to ideological authority. The existence of parallel universes immediately destabilizes the assumption that there is only one possible reality through which all human experience can be understood. If reality consists of many worlds, then no single perspective can claim complete authority over existence. Each universe possesses its own history, geography, social structures, forms of knowledge, and conditions of experience. What appears natural in one world may be absent in another, while truths that seem universal from one perspective become partial when viewed from elsewhere. The multiverse therefore functions as a powerful postmodern metaphor for plurality.

The existence of parallel worlds consequently challenges the possibility of a single, complete metanarrative. Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarratives becomes especially relevant in this context because Pullman's fictional universe repeatedly undermines total explanations. The idea that one institution, religion, or philosophical system can provide a final account of reality becomes increasingly impossible once reality itself is revealed to be multiple. The boundaries of knowledge are continually expanded as Lyra and other characters encounter worlds that challenge everything they previously believed.

Lyra's journey consequently becomes a movement through plurality. As she travels beyond the familiar boundaries of her own world, she gradually learns that reality cannot be confined to the categories, beliefs, and explanations that initially shaped her understanding. Her intellectual development is inseparable from her physical movement across worlds. Every new universe destabilizes an earlier assumption, and every encounter with difference expands the possibilities through which reality may be interpreted. This process represents a profoundly postmodern experience because it replaces the search for a single, absolute truth with an awareness of multiple and sometimes competing perspectives.

Truth, within this framework, becomes perspectival, contextual, and relational. This does not necessarily mean that all interpretations possess equal validity; rather, it means that knowledge cannot be separated entirely from

the conditions through which it is produced and understood. Pullman's fantastic dystopia therefore challenges the authoritarian belief that truth can be permanently possessed by a single institution. By constructing a universe composed of multiple worlds and competing forms of knowledge, His Dark Materials transforms fantasy into a powerful critique of ideological absolutism. The fantastic becomes political precisely because it enables readers to imagine that the world they know is not the only possible world, and that the truths presented by authority may always be questioned, reinterpreted, and transformed.

Lyra Belacqua and the Politics of Knowing

Lyra Belacqua is one of the most significant examples of the postmodern juvenile protagonist because her power emerges not from obedience, inherited privilege, or physical strength, but from curiosity, imagination, and an increasing capacity for independent interpretation. Unlike the conventional child protagonist who gradually learns to accept the knowledge offered by adults, Lyra repeatedly questions the explanations presented to her by parents, scholars, religious authorities, and political institutions. She observes the world around her, interprets situations according to her own experience, and frequently disobeys when obedience conflicts with her developing understanding of truth. Her intellectual journey is therefore inseparable from her physical adventures across multiple worlds. As she encounters unfamiliar societies, alternative forms of knowledge, and conflicting interpretations of reality, she gradually learns that no authority can automatically claim possession of absolute truth.

Her relationship with the alethiometer is particularly important in understanding this development. The instrument is capable of revealing truth, but it does not function as a simple machine that delivers objective information without any involvement from its user. Lyra must learn to read and interpret its symbols, and this process requires concentration, intuition, experience, and an openness to meanings that cannot always be reduced to conventional forms of rational knowledge. The alethiometer therefore represents a distinctive relationship between the subject and truth. Knowledge requires engagement, truth must be interpreted, and meaning does not arrive in a completely transparent or self-evident form. Lyra's ability to use the alethiometer consequently distinguishes her from institutions that attempt to possess and control knowledge through fixed doctrines and official interpretations.

This process reflects a central postmodern understanding of language and meaning. The individual does not encounter reality in an entirely direct or unmediated manner. Knowledge is shaped through signs, narratives, symbols, cultural assumptions, and processes of interpretation. Meaning is therefore not simply transmitted from an authoritative source to a passive receiver. The subject actively participates in the construction and

understanding of meaning. Lyra's relationship with the alethiometer dramatizes this process because the truth it offers becomes meaningful only through her interpretative engagement. She must learn to recognize patterns, connect symbols, and respond to meanings that cannot always be explained through institutional rules. Knowledge, in Pullman's fictional universe, is consequently presented as an active relationship rather than a passive act of receiving information.

Lyra's development can therefore be understood as an education in critical consciousness. At the beginning of her journey, she possesses curiosity but lacks a complete understanding of the political and ideological structures surrounding her. As the narrative progresses, however, she gradually discovers that authority and truth are not identical. An institution may claim to represent truth while simultaneously concealing information, suppressing inquiry, or controlling the conditions through which knowledge is produced. The Magisterium's authority depends precisely upon the assumption that its interpretation of reality must not be questioned. Lyra's intellectual development becomes politically significant because she learns to separate the appearance of authority from the validity of truth.

This distinction lies at the centre of Pullman's fantastic dystopia. The oppressive institution does not maintain power solely through physical force. It also controls narratives, regulates knowledge, and determines which questions may legitimately be asked. Under such conditions, intellectual curiosity itself becomes a form of resistance. Lyra becomes dangerous not primarily because she possesses military strength or political authority, but because she develops the capacity to interpret the world independently. Her refusal to accept inherited explanations without question gradually transforms her into a threat to systems that depend upon obedience and ideological certainty.

The most significant threat to authoritarian power is therefore not simply open rebellion; it is critical knowledge. A political system can often suppress individual acts of resistance through violence, punishment, or surveillance, but it becomes increasingly vulnerable when individuals begin to question the narratives through which that system justifies itself. Lyra's journey demonstrates that freedom begins with the ability to ask questions that authority would prefer to leave unanswered. Her curiosity gradually develops into a critical consciousness capable of distinguishing between institutional claims and lived reality. In this sense, Pullman transforms the juvenile protagonist into an epistemological rebel. Lyra resists not only by acting against oppressive structures but also by learning how to interpret the world beyond the limits imposed by those structures.

Dæmons and the Fragmented Self

Pullman's concept of the dæmon provides one of the most sophisticated representations of subjectivity in

contemporary juvenile fantasy. Every human being in Lyra's world possesses a dæmon, an external manifestation of the self that exists in the form of an animal. The dæmon is neither simply a companion nor an independent creature. It represents an inseparable dimension of the individual's consciousness and identity. Through this imaginative device, Pullman makes the inner life of the subject visible and audible. Thoughts, doubts, desires, fears, and moral conflicts that might ordinarily remain within the mind are externalized through dialogue between the human being and the dæmon.

The concept of the dæmon consequently challenges the conventional idea of the autonomous and unified individual. The self is literally divided and externalized, yet this division does not represent psychological weakness or incompleteness. Instead, it represents dialogue. Lyra constantly speaks with Pantalaimon, and their relationship demonstrates that consciousness is not presented as a single, uninterrupted voice. They argue, question one another, express different opinions, and respond differently to situations. Pantalaimon may criticize Lyra's decisions or express anxieties that she initially attempts to ignore, while Lyra may resist his advice and act according to her own impulses. The self, therefore, becomes relational. The individual is never entirely alone because identity is represented as an internal conversation made visible through the relationship between human and dæmon.

From a postmodern perspective, the dæmon can be interpreted as an imaginative representation of fragmented subjectivity. Postmodern theories of identity frequently challenge the idea that the self is a unified and stable essence existing independently of language, culture, relationships, and social experience. Instead, the subject is understood as complex, divided, and composed of multiple voices and positions. Pullman's dæmons give narrative form to this complexity. Through Pantalaimon, Lyra's consciousness becomes dialogic. Her identity is not expressed through a single, unquestionable voice but through negotiation, disagreement, hesitation, and reflection. The dæmon therefore represents the multiplicity that already exists within the individual.

The fluidity of the dæmon during childhood further reinforces this interpretation of identity. Before reaching maturity, a child's dæmon can change its form, moving from one animal shape to another. This capacity for transformation represents the openness and instability of childhood identity. The self remains open to possibility and has not yet become permanently fixed within a particular form. The changing dæmon becomes a powerful metaphor for becoming, suggesting that identity is not something completely possessed from birth but something that develops through experience, relationships, knowledge, and choice. Childhood, in Pullman's fantasy, is therefore associated with fluidity rather than limitation.

This fluidity offers an important contrast to the faction system in *Divergent*. Roth's dystopian society seeks to

reduce identity to one stable and recognizable category. Every individual must eventually belong to a faction, and that faction is expected to provide a dominant explanation of the person's character and social identity. Pullman's fantasy, however, represents identity as multiple, relational, and capable of transformation. The changing forms of the *dæmon* challenge the possibility of a singular and permanent definition of the self. Where Roth's dystopian system insists that the individual must become one thing, Pullman's imaginative universe suggests that the self contains a multiplicity of possibilities.

In both texts, therefore, fixed identity becomes a central problem, although the two writers approach this problem through very different narrative strategies. Tris resists the reduction of the self into faction because her *Divergence* reveals that she cannot be contained within a single institutional category. Lyra's world, on the other hand, demonstrates through the existence of *dæmons* that the self has always been divided, dialogic, and relational. Tris's resistance exposes the limitations of an externally imposed identity, whereas Pullman's *dæmonic* structure reveals the internal multiplicity of subjectivity itself.

The two works consequently arrive at a similar postmodern conclusion through different literary forms. Roth employs dystopian social organization to demonstrate the violence of rigid classification, while Pullman employs fantasy to represent the complexity and plurality of consciousness. In both narratives, identity cannot be understood as singular, complete, or permanently stable. The individual is shaped through movement, contradiction, dialogue, and transformation. Whether represented through Tris's *Divergence* or Lyra's relationship with Pantalaimon, the self ultimately exceeds the categories through which institutions attempt to define it. Identity, therefore, is not singular; it remains multiple, relational, and continually open to reinterpretation.

Grand Narratives, Ideology, and Resistance

The most important point of connection between *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials* lies in their shared critique of total systems of explanation. Although the two series differ significantly in genre, setting, and narrative method, both construct fictional worlds dominated by institutions that attempt to explain reality through a single, comprehensive ideological framework. These systems depend upon what Jean-François Lyotard identifies as grand narratives, or metanarratives large explanatory structures that claim to provide a universal understanding of human existence, social order, morality, and truth. The postmodern condition, according to Lyotard, is characterized by an increasing distrust of such universal explanations. This theoretical position becomes particularly useful in reading Roth and Pullman because the conflicts within both series emerge from the gradual collapse of institutional narratives that initially appear complete, rational, and unquestionable. The faction system in *Divergent* provides a clear example of such a grand narrative. It explains social conflict by

identifying particular human weaknesses and proposes that social stability can be achieved by organizing individuals according to specific virtues. The fundamental assumption behind the faction system is that the complexity of human society can be managed if every individual is encouraged to cultivate one dominant ethical characteristic. Abnegation represents selflessness, Dauntless courage, Erudite intelligence, Amity peacefulness, and Candor honesty. The system therefore offers what appears to be a complete explanation of the human condition. Social disorder is attributed to particular moral failures, and the solution is presented as a rational division of society. However, the apparent coherence of this structure depends upon the suppression of human complexity. Individuals who embody multiple characteristics become problematic because they expose the inadequacy of the categories upon which the entire system is founded.

The Magisterium in *His Dark Materials* similarly depends upon a grand narrative, although its ideological structure is more explicitly concerned with knowledge, belief, and cosmological authority. It presents itself as a guardian of truth and attempts to regulate knowledge according to a centralized system of interpretation. Its authority depends upon the belief that reality can be understood through a single ideological framework and that alternative interpretations represent threats rather than possibilities. Like the faction system, the Magisterium transforms complexity into a controlled structure of meaning. It seeks unity where there is plurality and certainty where there is ambiguity. The institution's power therefore depends not merely upon its ability to govern behaviour but upon its capacity to define the intellectual boundaries within which behaviour and knowledge may be understood.

Both institutions, consequently, believe in unity, fear contradiction, and attempt to control difference. Their ideological structures cannot easily accommodate ambiguity because ambiguity exposes the limits of their authority. A system that claims to possess a complete explanation of reality becomes vulnerable when individuals or experiences emerge that cannot be explained according to its established categories. Difference is therefore transformed into a threat. The faction system fears *Divergence* because it reveals that human identity exceeds institutional classification, while the Magisterium fears independent inquiry because it reveals that knowledge cannot be permanently monopolized by authority.

The protagonists challenge these structures precisely because they embody plurality. Tris is *Divergent* because she cannot be reduced to a single factional identity. Her existence demonstrates that the individual can contain qualities that the political system attempts to separate. She represents contradiction within a society that depends upon ideological purity. Lyra, similarly, becomes dangerous because she refuses to remain within a single interpretation of reality. Her curiosity, movement across different worlds,

and capacity to interpret the alethiometer enable her to encounter forms of knowledge that exceed institutional authority. While Tris challenges the classification of identity, Lyra challenges the classification of truth.

Their resistance is therefore epistemological as well as political. Neither protagonist simply fights against an oppressive ruler in a conventional struggle for political power. Their deeper resistance involves questioning the intellectual structures that make oppression possible. They gradually discover that systems of power do not maintain themselves through physical force alone. They also depend upon narratives, categories, explanations, and beliefs. Individuals become easier to control when they accept the language through which authority defines reality. Consequently, resistance requires more than the overthrow of political leaders; it requires the ability to question the concepts and categories through which power presents itself as natural and legitimate.

This distinction is crucial because a revolution that merely replaces one ruler with another may leave the ideological structure of oppression unchanged. Political transformation without intellectual transformation can reproduce the very structures it claims to overthrow. Roth and Pullman therefore suggest that genuine freedom requires a more radical form of change. The subject must learn to question the categories through which authority defines identity, truth, morality, and reality. Tris must recognize that factional identity is not a natural fact, while Lyra must recognize that institutional authority does not automatically possess exclusive access to truth. Their journeys demonstrate that liberation begins when the individual becomes capable of separating lived experience from the official narratives through which that experience has been interpreted.

The destruction or rejection of the grand narrative, however, does not automatically create certainty or provide an alternative universal truth. This is where the postmodern significance of both series becomes particularly important. Postmodern freedom is frequently accompanied by ambiguity. Once the single, universal explanation disappears, the individual is confronted with plurality, contradiction, and uncertainty. The collapse of institutional certainty may be liberating, but it also requires responsibility. The subject can no longer depend entirely upon an external authority to determine what identity means or what truth should be believed.

This is one of the most significant lessons offered by both *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials*. Freedom does not mean discovering a final and unquestionable truth that can replace the old system. Rather, freedom involves developing the capacity to think critically, interpret experience independently, and remain open to plurality without surrendering unquestioningly to those who claim exclusive possession of truth. Tris and Lyra therefore represent a distinctly postmodern form of resistance. Their ultimate significance lies not simply in their opposition to

particular institutions but in their refusal to accept that any institution should possess the unquestionable authority to define the limits of identity or reality.

The Realistic and the Fantastic as Postmodern Strategies

The difference between Veronica Roth and Philip Pullman is therefore not simply a difference between realism and fantasy. Rather, it represents two distinct but closely related methods of dystopian representation. Both writers are concerned with authority, identity, knowledge, and social control, but they approach these concerns through different imaginative strategies. Roth constructs her dystopian world by extending recognizable tendencies within contemporary society into an imagined future, whereas Pullman displaces political and ideological conflicts into fantastic worlds in order to expose the structures of authority from a different perspective. The distinction between their works consequently lies less in their thematic concerns than in the narrative methods through which those concerns are represented.

Roth's realistic dystopia asks what might happen if contemporary systems of categorization, surveillance, ideological conformity, and social regulation were intensified. The society of *Divergent* may be futuristic, but its central mechanisms of control remain recognizable. Individuals are categorized, their behaviour is regulated, and social identity is organized according to institutional expectations. Roth exaggerates these tendencies until they become the organizing principles of an entire society. Her dystopian strategy operates through extrapolation: existing structures are extended into the future in order to reveal their possible consequences. The faction system therefore becomes a distorted reflection of the contemporary desire to classify, measure, identify, and regulate individuals according to established social categories.

Pullman's fantastic dystopia, by contrast, asks what might become visible if the structures of reality themselves were reimagined. Rather than projecting the present directly into the future, *His Dark Materials* creates alternative universes populated by *dæmons*, witches, angels, armoured bears, and other fantastic beings. This imaginative displacement enables Pullman to explore questions concerning religious authority, knowledge, consciousness, freedom, and political control without remaining confined to the familiar structures of the ordinary world. The fantastic becomes a means of defamiliarization. By making reality strange, Pullman enables the reader to recognize ideological structures that might otherwise appear natural or inevitable. The first method, therefore, operates primarily through extrapolation, while the second operates through imaginative displacement. Yet both strategies ultimately expose the artificial nature of systems that present themselves as inevitable. The faction system appears natural to those who live within it because its categories organize everyday existence. Citizens are born into particular social environments, trained to recognize

factional values, and expected to understand themselves through the categories provided by the system. Because the faction structure is embedded within ordinary life, its artificiality is initially concealed. Similarly, the Magisterium derives much of its power from the assumption that its interpretation of reality is unquestionable. Its authority depends upon the transformation of one particular ideological perspective into an apparently universal truth.

Postmodern fiction destabilizes this sense of inevitability. It reveals that social institutions, identities, narratives, and systems of knowledge are constructed rather than naturally given. The categories through which individuals understand themselves are not necessarily permanent or universal. They have been historically, politically, and culturally produced. What has been constructed can therefore be questioned, and what can be questioned can also be changed. This movement from acceptance to critical awareness forms one of the central political functions of both *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials*. Tris gradually recognizes that factional identity does not represent an absolute truth about human nature, while Lyra discovers that institutional authority cannot permanently determine the limits of knowledge and reality.

This process is particularly significant within juvenile fiction because the implied reader occupies a position that is comparable, in certain respects, to that of the protagonists. The young reader is also in the process of encountering and negotiating systems of authority. Family, school, religion, government, media, and other cultural institutions participate in shaping the individual's understanding of identity and reality. Juvenile fiction can therefore become a space in which the reader learns not simply to receive social knowledge but to examine the conditions under which that knowledge is produced. The dystopian narrative encourages the reader to ask whether systems of authority are genuinely neutral or whether they serve particular ideological interests.

Dystopian fiction, in this sense, teaches the reader to question the social world by imagining its structures in intensified forms. Fantasy performs a related function by demonstrating that reality itself may be imagined differently. If another world can be constructed in literature, then the existing world can also be understood as one possible arrangement rather than the only possible reality. The fantastic therefore expands the boundaries of political and intellectual imagination. It encourages the reader to recognize that institutions which appear permanent may be historically contingent and that social arrangements which appear natural may, in fact, be subject to transformation.

Together, realistic and fantastic dystopia create what may be described as a pedagogy of critical imagination. They do not simply present young readers with fictional worlds to escape into; they encourage them to return to their own world with a heightened awareness of power, identity, and

ideological control. Roth's extrapolative dystopia asks readers to recognize the dangers that may emerge when existing structures are intensified, while Pullman's fantastic multiverse invites them to imagine realities beyond the boundaries of established authority. Through these different narrative strategies, both writers transform juvenile fiction into a space of critical possibility, where questioning becomes an intellectual practice and imagination becomes a means of understanding that the world, like the stories through which it is interpreted, can always be imagined otherwise.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* demonstrates that contemporary juvenile fiction has become a significant literary space for the postmodern interrogation of identity, power, knowledge, and authority. Although Roth and Pullman employ radically different fictional worlds and narrative strategies, their works are connected by a shared distrust of systems that attempt to impose singular identities and absolute truths. Both series construct worlds in which institutional power depends upon classification, ideological conformity, and the regulation of knowledge. Their young protagonists become significant not simply because they resist political oppression but because they gradually learn to question the intellectual structures through which oppression is justified and maintained.

Roth constructs a realistic dystopia through the extrapolation of recognizable social mechanisms. Her faction-divided Chicago transforms the human tendency toward classification into a total political system in which social identity determines the conditions of individual existence. By organizing society according to supposedly dominant virtues, the faction system reduces the complexity of human personality to a limited number of institutional categories. Tris Prior's *Divergence* consequently becomes a powerful metaphor for fragmented, plural, and postmodern identity. She becomes dangerous because she demonstrates that the individual cannot be completely explained by a single institutional category. Her existence exposes the artificiality of a system that depends upon the belief that every human being can be classified, predicted, and controlled.

Pullman, meanwhile, constructs a fantastic dystopia in which supernatural worlds become imaginative spaces for challenging ideological and epistemological authority. The plurality of universes in *His Dark Materials* undermines the possibility of a single, complete, and absolute reality, while Lyra's journey demonstrates the importance of curiosity, interpretation, and intellectual independence. Through the alethiometer, the existence of multiple worlds, and the dialogic relationship between human beings and their *dæmons*, Pullman repeatedly challenges the assumption that knowledge can be possessed exclusively by any single institution. Lyra's development demonstrates that

intellectual maturity does not consist merely in accepting the explanations provided by authority. Rather, it involves learning how to interpret, question, compare, and critically evaluate the narratives through which reality is understood. Both series therefore embody the postmodern rejection of metanarratives. As Jean-François Lyotard famously formulates the postmodern condition, "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." This concept provides a productive framework for understanding the journeys of both Tris and Lyra. They become literary embodiments of such incredulity because they gradually learn to question the systems into which they were born. Neither protagonist initially possesses a complete understanding of the structures that control her world, but both discover that official narratives contain contradictions and exclusions. They come to recognize that identity is more complex than institutional classification and that truth cannot simply be received from authority as an unquestionable and permanent reality.

The distinction between realistic and fantastic dystopia should therefore not be understood as a simple division between reality and imagination. Roth's futuristic dystopia reflects and intensifies recognizable contemporary structures of surveillance, categorization, ideological conformity, and institutional control. Pullman's fantastic multiverse, although populated by supernatural beings and impossible worlds, similarly reflects struggles concerning religious authority, intellectual freedom, consciousness, and the political control of knowledge. Realism and fantasy function as different forms of critical representation. One extrapolates from existing social structures, while the other displaces those structures into imaginative worlds. Yet both strategies enable readers to recognize that systems which appear natural or inevitable are, in fact, historically and ideologically constructed.

Both texts ultimately perform a similar cultural function. They teach the young subject to question. They transform difference from a weakness or social threat into a potential source of resistance. They reject the reduction of human identity into fixed and permanent categories, and they imagine freedom not as obedience to a perfect social system but as the continuing ability to question systems that claim perfection. In *Divergent*, the refusal to fit completely within an established category becomes politically dangerous because it exposes the limitations of the factional order. In *His Dark Materials*, the refusal to accept a single authorized interpretation of reality becomes equally dangerous because it threatens the epistemological authority of the Magisterium.

The postmodern juvenile protagonist is therefore neither a passive child who simply accepts the values of the adult world nor a conventional hero whose primary task is to restore an existing social order. Tris and Lyra become figures of epistemological resistance. Their journeys demonstrate that growing up may involve not the unquestioning acceptance of inherited truths but the

recognition that truth itself is mediated through institutions, narratives, language, symbols, and relations of power. Maturity, in this context, is closely connected with the development of critical consciousness. The young subject becomes politically significant at the moment when she begins to distinguish between what authority claims and what experience, inquiry, and interpretation reveal.

The realistic dystopia of *Divergent* and the fantastic dystopia of *His Dark Materials* converge at this crucial point. Both suggest that one of the greatest dangers to human freedom begins when a society believes that identity can be completely classified and reality can be completely explained. Total systems require closure, predictability, and obedience, whereas both Tris and Lyra remain significant precisely because they resist closure. Tris exceeds the categories through which her society attempts to define her, while Lyra moves continually beyond the boundaries of the knowledge authorized by her world. Their resistance emerges from an openness to plurality.

In this sense, the two series offer an important postmodern vision of juvenile fiction. They demonstrate that literature written for young readers can engage seriously with complex questions concerning ideology, subjectivity, authority, and the production of knowledge. More importantly, they suggest that imagination itself can become a form of critical education. By presenting worlds in which systems of power appear total but ultimately reveal their own limitations, Roth and Pullman encourage readers to recognize the possibility of questioning the structures that shape their own lives. The future, therefore, does not belong to the institution that claims to know everything or to the system that believes it has discovered the final definition of identity and truth. It belongs, rather, to the subject who continues to question, interpret, imagine, and remain open to the plurality of human experience.

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