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FACTION BEFORE BLOOD: UPROOTEDNESS AND REGROUNDING IN DYSTOPIAN FICTION

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Abstract: *One of the most salient aspects of dystopian societies entails the manipulation of identity parameters by replacing the natural bonds of love and kinship with artificial ties and enforced allegiances to the establishment. This paper examines the strategies employed by various fictional regimes to indoctrinate, brainwash, condition or rewire their inhabitants before pushing (or, alternatively, easing) them into convenient boxes. The analysis will briefly identify the main such mechanisms outlined in texts ranging from the classics (*Brave New World*,* Nineteen Eighty-Four*,* Fahrenheit 451 *and* The Handmaid's Tale*) to perhaps less familiar examples such as E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," Ayn Rand's* Anthem*, Isaac Asimov's* The Naked Sun *and* Foundation and Earth *and Philip K. Dick's* Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? *before focusing on the perpetuation and reconfiguration of the same elements in their young adult narrative descendants: Lois Lowry's* The Giver*, Lauren Oliver's* Delirium *and Veronica Roth's* Divergent *series. Attention will be paid to endeavours ranging from rewriting the past (of select individuals or entire societies) and inventing new social castes and professional categories to the vilification and suppression of emotional manifestations, as well as to the extent to which such texts have succeeded in highlighting existing problems, anticipating future developments and hopefully prompting their readers to reassess their perception of human interaction and identity formation.*

Keywords: *class; community; family; identity; individuality; society; technology*

Even the briefest survey of recent book sales and mediatic responses to literature is sufficient to reveal that dystopian fiction has reached an unprecedented level of popularity, indicative of a "larger need to acknowledge" the considerable "environmental, psychological, and sociological destruction" (Barton 5) wrought by various forms of advancement over centuries but escalating with increasingly alarming speed. With numerous articles commending its prescience and extolling its awareness raising potential, particularly in the aftermath of various U.S. presidential debacles, dystopian imagination appears to have consolidated its status as a highly prophetic vehicle, warning its readers of "terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside" (Baccolini, Moylan 1-2). While most analysts' attention seems to focus on the extent to which the surveillance and manipulation strategies deployed by fictional totalitarian regimes are echoed by the perhaps more discreet yet equally questionable practices of ostensibly democratic governments and of the various other denizens of a vast and intricate political and economic landscape, the functionality of last-generation technology and the wide scope of online social networking have also ensured that family life and other forms of personal interaction are inexorably falling into the patterns set by texts written before IT had progressed past its electromechanical phase.

Emerging as part of the Romantic reaction against "insensitivity to emotions, destruction of deep social bonds" (Weinstein, Weinstein 274) and similar side-effects of modern life, this no longer negligible literary genre appears to have finally caught up with a world in which family life

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has somehow mutated from "a haven of security" into a dystopian nightmare and marriage from a lifelong commitment into an often brief interlude before moving on to other social relationships (Phillipson 54), in which "synthetic, quasi-emotions" trap the self into new forms of bondage (Meštrović xi) and in which online exchanges supplant face-to-face encounters. Decades after their original publication, its key texts are anything but obsolete, continuing to dispense dire warnings of the insidious ways in which "technology would corrode the most valuable aspects of human life even in the hands of the most benevolent leaders" (Stableford 134), rendered particularly ominous by the fact that its fictional worlds often constitute more "direct reflections of our own societal fears" (Barton 7) than of the ones haunting their creators. Given the percentage of parents who find it easier to communicate with (or, indeed, get to know) their offspring via social networks than across the dinner table (London 1), the by now largely forgotten "neo-Luddite assault" (Aldridge 9) in E. M. Forster's 1909 "The Machine Stops" strikes one as considerably more relevant to the "age of the smartphone and a preference for mediated internet chatting over direct personal contact" (Claeys 333) than to early-twentieth-century society. Indeed, while Forster's contemporaries are likely to have found the idea of constantly communing with several thousand people (Forster 3) across the globe yet being disinclined to meet one's own son quite implausible, Vashti's reluctance to leave the confines of her small room and her reliance on "the buttons by which she communicated with her friends" (Forster 7) perfectly mirror the parameters of a world which is "more 'connected' [...] than ever before" (MacKay Demerjian 2) but inhabited by individuals more "preoccupied with quantifying friends and followers" (Livni 1) than spending time with those that actually matter to them:

> "I want you to come and see me."
> Vashti watched his face in the blue plate.
> "But I can see you!" she exclaimed. "What more do you want?"
> "I want to see you not through the Machine," said Kuno. "I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine. [...] The Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind."
> She replied that she could scarcely spare the time for a visit. (Forster 4-5)

In light of the fact that Kuno's "removal to the public nurseries" is followed by a series of actual encounters with his mother, only curtailed when the Machine assigns him "a room on the other side of the earth" (Forster 10), describing "direct human contact" as "a repulsive taboo" (Luckhurst 44) in his world strikes one as an overstatement, possibly prompted by the extent to which this society in which parental duties "cease at the moment of birth" (Forster 10) is likely to have inspired the systematic disruption of family continuity and careful obliteration of all references to "personal heritage or history" (Barton 8) understandably pervading subsequent dystopian scenarios: "It is family that gives us our uniqueness, our separate identity, and our differentiated tribe, regardless of how small it might be. The loss and destruction of the family means to symbolically destroy one's connection to history" (Barton 10). Clearly unconvinced by Durkheim's view of family, nation, and humanity as distinct yet mutually beneficial "phases of our social and moral evolution" (74), entailing no necessary antagonism between one's various loyalties and no implicit need for exclusion, even otherwise vastly different dystopian landscapes are characterised by the same tendency to trample upon the "virtues of the individual and the family" (Barton 5) in the name of development and control.

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Brave New World's marked phobia of traditional family relationships – confirmed by the relegation of words such as "parent" to the category of "smut" (Huxley 19) and the queasiness triggered in equal measure by reminders of the fact that human beings "used to be viviparous" (Huxley 19) and by the values associated with former cultures (Sion 135) preserved in Savage Reservations – stems from a keen awareness that the "genuine intersubjective attachments" (Booker 54) of pre-Fordian societies would render their "Community, Identity, Stability" (Huxley 5) ideals unattainable:

> The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide. […] But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance. […] Everywhere exclusiveness, a narrow channelling of impulse and energy. […] No wonder these poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn't allow them to take things easily, didn't allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy. [...] they were forced to feel strongly. And feeling strongly (and strongly, what was more, in solitude, in hopelessly individual isolation), how could they be stable? (Huxley 33-35)

In order to avert the "appalling dangers" (Huxley 33) attributed in Freudian psychology to the nuclear family and sexual repression (McQuail 36), Huxley's World State has done away with "home, family, culture, and morality," thus abolishing "physical want and suffering" but simultaneously losing love, individuality, as well as "the freedom to think, to criticize" (Sion 133) and to even know the difference personal choices would make in people's lives.

Measures "calculated to make alienation impossible by obliterating individualism" (Stableford 17) are an equally prominent feature of the society envisaged in Ayn Rand's 1937 novella *Anthem*, whose legislation regards "no transgression blacker than to do or think alone" (Rand 10) and whose citizens are banned not only from thinking "words no others think" (Rand 10) but also from experiencing any kind of personal preference, whether that entails favouring certain school subjects over others, considering a future career path before having one prescribed by the "Council of Vocations" (Rand 16) or engaging in friendships, therefore loving "any among men better than the others" (Rand 24). This "oppressive, fraternal-egalitarian social order" (Weinstein, Weinstein 284) in which Equality 7-2521 feels at least as ill at ease as Bernard Marx does in his is rendered considerably more sinister by the realization that not only are romantic attachments excluded, but physical relations entail no element of choice and are "conducted institutionally" (Weinstein, Weinstein 283) for the sole purpose of procreation:

> men may not think of women, save at the Time of Mating. This is the time each spring when all the men older than twenty and all the women older than eighteen are sent for one night to the City Palace of Mating. And each of the men have one of the women assigned to them by the Council of Eugenics. Children are born each winter, but women never see their children and children never know their parents. (Rand 36-37)

Moreover, while institutions such as "the Home of the Infants," hosting "all the children of the City who had been born in the same year" (Rand 13-14), and "the Home of the Students" (Rand 14) appear to fulfil a similar function to the "Infant Nurseries" (Huxley 15) and "State Conditioning Centres" (Huxley 20), their charges are not decanted "as Alphas or Epsilons, future sewage workers or future [...] Directors of Hatcheries" (Huxley 10) and conditioned to love "their unescapable

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social destiny" (Huxley 12) whilst feeling daunted or disgusted by the other castes. They are simply expected to accept that "it is evil to be superior" (Rand 15) to one's brothers, that "all men must be happy" (Rand 41), presumably without the aid of soma, and that it is "a Transgression to speak to men of other Trades" (Rand 35).

The sociopolitical strategies employed by the Party in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, particularly those binding sexual relationships to traditional marriage, might seem located at the opposite end of the spectrum from the "antifamily stance" of the dystopian governments discussed above, yet ultimately stem from a similar recognition of the dangers of "private emotional attachments," averted by repurposing the family unit as an "extension of the Thought Police" (Booker 75) and a particularly efficient instrument of control:

> With those children, he thought, that wretched woman must lead a life of terror. Another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy. […] All their ferocity was turned outwards, against the enemies of the State, against foreigners, traitors, saboteurs, thought-criminals. It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. (Orwell 26-27)

Cognisant of the extent to which totalitarian rule depends on the skilful "manipulation of instincts and emotions" (Horan 70), the Party employs a name representing a "direct appeal to the sentiment of family loyalty" for its leader and "systematically undermines the solidarity of the family" (Orwell 225) by turning its members against one another in preparation for a future when the "unfortunate necessity" (Barton 10) of this particular social institution has been entirely eliminated:

> We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. The sex instinct will be eradicated. Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card. […] There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. (Orwell 280)

The eventual success of all such endeavours appears to be a foregone conclusion given the profusion of small victories against the once sacred familial and romantic bonds outlined in the text, from Tom Parsons' denunciation as a thought-criminal by his seven-year-old daughter to Winston's renouncement of Julia, not to mention his vaguely recalled but no less deplorable treatment of his mother and younger sister, rendered considerably more disquieting by the fact that these particular breaches of loyalty precede the brain-washing and torture ostensibly to blame for his adult betrayal.

The decision makers of *Fahrenheit 451*'s futuristic United States achieve quite similar results by means of an unexpected but nevertheless effective fusion of strict law enforcement and punishments at least as ruthless as those practised in Orwell's Oceania and hedonistic lures reminiscent of Huxley's World State. The intended level of detachment and mental rewiring appears to have been reached in the case of Montag's wife Mildred, the embodiment of "every form of self-narcotization available in this society" (Eller, Touponce 94) as well as the ultimate epitome of Plato's cave dweller, so engrossed in her shadow "family" (Connor 85) that she has lost all recollection of her personal history and channeled her limited emotional resources towards an ersatz clan of television entertainers rather than her flesh-and-blood husband:

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> Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just one wall but, so far, three! And expensive, too! And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls [...] He had taken to calling them relatives from the very first. "How's Uncle Louis today?" "Who?" "And Aunt Maude?" (Bradbury 59-60)

Confirmations of how seamlessly Mildred has managed to turn Montag's ironic labels into her new reality range from her disinclination to dwell too much on their forgotten past – "Funny, how funny, not to remember where or when you met your husband or wife. […] It doesn't matter" (Bradbury 58) – and her refusal to "turn the parlour off" for the sake of her ailing husband – "'That's my family.' 'Will you turn it off for a sick man?' 'I'll turn it down'" (Bradbury 65) – to the true reason behind her initial reluctance to raise the alarm: "my 'family' is people. […] if Captain Beatty knew about those books […] He might come and burn the house and the 'family.' That's awful!" (Bradbury 95).

A healthy home environment entailing not merely the presence of tangible relatives rather than two-dimensional reflections but also manifestations of what the government considers "the wrong kind of social life" (Bradbury 83) in the form of "sitting around, talking" (Bradbury 17) is what enables Clarisse to resist "being shaped by the mass media" (Eller, Touponce 94), but also singles her out as a textbook example of what needs to be changed or eradicated for state ideology to prevail:

> Clarisse McClellan? We've a record on her family. We've watched them carefully. Heredity and environment are funny things. [...] The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That's why we've lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we're almost snatching them from the cradle. [...] The girl? She was a time bomb. The family had been feeding her subconscious, I'm sure, from what I saw of her school record. She didn't want to know *how* a thing was done, but *why*. (Bradbury 79)

Far from merely recycling the almost infallible formula employed by the fictional regimes of his precursors, Ray Bradbury's arsonist dystopia also manages to capture the destructive potential of their two chief endeavours (erasing or rewriting history and dissolving or redefining kinship) by means of the compelling metaphor at the core of one of the numerous myths embedded in the text: "Do you know the legend of Hercules and Antaeus, the giant wrestler, whose strength was incredible so long as he stood firmly on the earth. But when he was held, rootless, in mid-air, by Hercules, he perished easily" (Bradbury 108-109).

Although rarely mentioned in critical approaches to dystopian literature, Isaac Asimov's "Robot" and "Foundation" series feature quite elaborate accounts of future societies in which the breakdown of family ties represents a consequence of technological progress rather than the result of abusive state practices. In this particular case, the reconfiguration of human society is rendered particularly salient by the contrast between a claustrophobic but otherwise familiar Earth, where little has changed at the level of traditional family life beyond restrictions on the number of offspring, and its considerably more prosperous and sophisticated space colonies. Viewed from the extremely relatable angle of a terrestrial police detective, the latter range from the bohemian Aurora, where marriage requires limited commitment, children are brought up away from their parents and very few inhabitants even know their immediate relatives, to the strait-laced Solaria, whose carefully organised society regards physical proximity as the ultimate taboo:

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> "Were you happily married?" [...] "Well, you saw one another often?"
> "What? I should hope not. We're not animals, you know. [...] I had my quarters and he had his. [...] We viewed each other whenever necessary. [...] It's not a thing one talks about but he did see me."
> "Do you have any children?" [...]
> "That's too much. Of all the indecent –"
> "Now wait. Wait!" [...] "I have to ask all sorts of things. For one thing I want to know whether you're sorry your husband is dead." [...] "You don't seem to be." [...]
> "I'm sorry when anyone dies, especially when he's young and useful." [...] "He was assigned to me and, well, we did see each other when scheduled and [...] if you must know, we don't have children because none have been assigned us yet. I don't see what all that has to do with being sorry over someone being dead." (Asimov, *Naked Sun* 65-66)

It is quite interesting to note that whereas most dystopian narratives provide a narrow window into a near or distant future, usually accompanied by glimpses of a more or less recognizable past, the wide scope and interconnectedness of Asimov's collected works occasion repeated encounters with Solarian society, culminating in a world to come of Wellsian proportions in which the ideal of "perfect liberty" through "complete isolation" (Asimov, *Foundation and Earth* 259) has been achieved by means of radical evolutionary changes that render any form of direct human contact superfluous:

> we finally became whole human beings, incorporating both the masculine and feminine principles in one body, supplying our own complete pleasure at will, and producing, when we wished, fertilized eggs for development under skilled robotic care. (Asimov, *Foundation and Earth* 203)

Inordinately proud of the lineage reflected by the urns in their "ancestral death chambers" but quite reluctant to acknowledge the "rather 'shamiferous'" physiological limitations of their distant "half-ancestors" (Asimov, *Foundation and Earth* 217), the hermaphroditic and telepathic Solarians of the post-Foundation future still rely to some extent on "visionscreens" for the purpose of social interaction, yet boast a level of independence from them that is conspicuously absent from both real and fictional relationships with devices ranging from Orwell's telescreens and Bradbury's parlour walls to the smartphones of our own present: "The world opens before me through that screen but it in no way limits my freedom for I cannot be compelled to use it" (Asimov, *Foundation and Earth* 204).

Haunted by the same paranoid fear of the humanoid robots produced and cherished by off-world colonies that characterises most of Asimov's Earthmen, the protagonists of Philip K. Dick's 1968 *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* resort to rather surreal and increasingly ineffective empathy tests to verify the human status of potential robotic impostors whilst endeavouring to advertise their own ability to harbour feelings through the conspicuous addition of pets to their otherwise diminishing households: "every family in this building [...] every one of us has an animal of some sort" (Dick 9). The supreme irony of Deckard's efforts to accumulate the necessary funds to trade up from his lifelike electric sheep resides in their ultimate pointlessness, given the relative emotional range of his putative victims and his apathetic spouse – "Most androids I've known have more vitality and desire to live than my wife. She has nothing to give me" (Dick 89) – the dubious hierarchy of his own affections – "You love the goat more than you love your wife, probably" (Dick 189) – and humanity's general disinclination to experience much beyond the questionable

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entertainment and news delivered by "Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends" (Dick 3) and the interactions mediated by the ubiquitous empathy box: "the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone" (Dick 63).

In the absence of a console on which to dial "pleased acknowledgment of husband's superior wisdom in all matters" (Dick 5), the female protagonists of Margaret Atwood's "Puritan hell" (Theis 138) have to make considerable efforts to come to terms with the "open and official misogyny" (Kuźnicki 24) of a regime that does not merely reduce a small subclass of females with viable ovaries to reproductive activities (Kuźnicki 26) but completely limits most of its citizens' freedom, regimenting them into "easily distinguishable, and thus controllable" (Kuźnicki 23) social classes with clearly established functions:

> The women of Gilead are strictly segregated into handmaids, fertile women who bear children for Commanders; Commanders' Wives, whose redundancy and enforced domesticity have no real outlets; Marthas, who undertake domestic work; Econowives, working-class women who have to undertake a number of functions, and Aunts, women of nominal power who enforce the regulations. [...] The men, too, are segregated, into Guardians, Angels, Eyes and Commanders, and everyone watches everyone else for slips and transgressions. (Slettedahl Macpherson 54)

Taking advantage of the almost pathological fear of being "pushed into the circle of the outsiders" (Gottlieb 40) dominating most communities, dystopian or not, Gilead's rulers appear to take most of their cues from the ancient past, not only reconfiguring households and modelling society along the lines of the patriarchal family (Palumbo 29) but also successfully implementing the *divide et impera* maxim. In order to "maintain power by inducing minor conflicts between various social groups so as to prevent them from linking up" (Kuźnicki 23) women are divided into often antagonistic classes and thus prompted to forget their almost equal lack of legal rights, irrespective of the position occupied on their gender's hierarchy, until such time when what Offred and other first-generation handmaids experience as "sexual and reproductive slavery" (Varsam 214) becomes social normality:

> For the generations that come after, Aunt Lydia said, it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family; you will be like daughters to them, and when the population level is up to scratch again we'll no longer have to transfer you from one house to another because there will be enough to go round. There can be bonds of real affection, she said, blinking at us ingratiatingly, under such conditions. Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. (Atwood 171-172)

Much like a "dysfunctional family that maintains its framework but is unable to fulfil its function" (Gottlieb 41) to provide for each of its members, Gilead keeps invoking the sanctity of reproduction to justify its usurpation of maternal rights, ostensibly ensuring the survival of the human species but actually attempting to "gain absolute control over man's past, present, and future by determining its demographic and genetic character" (Theis 158) as well as by carefully selecting the information available to the general public. As Offred poignantly observes whilst grieving over

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her absence from the photograph of her confiscated daughter, members of her own class are likely to be as unfamiliar to future generations as biblical passages which fail to support state ideology:

> there will be family albums, too, with all the children in them; no Handmaids though. From the point of view of future history, this kind, we'll be invisible. But the children will be in them all right, something for the Wives to look at […]. Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away [...]. I have been obliterated for her. I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become. (Atwood 240)

Whereas the shallowness of Gilead's commitment to family values transpires from the first pages of Offred's account, the considerably younger narrator and target audience of Lois Lowry's 1993 *The Giver* ensure that most readers' first impression is that of an idyllic albeit rather strictly organised society so committed to its inhabitants' wellbeing that it has even designated a professional category to cater for the "physical and emotional needs of every newchild during its earliest life" (Lowry 7). That impression, however, is gradually dispelled by the revelation that the "evening telling of feelings" (Lowry 4) is an empty ritual unaccompanied by actual emotions; that Jonas' apparently perfect family is based on a strict formula – "Two children – one male, one female – to each family unit" (Lowry 8) – not all citizens benefit from: "Most of the people on the night crew had not even been given spouses because they lacked, somehow, the essential capacity to connect to others, which was required for the creation of a family unit" (Lowry 8); that "the Birthmothers never even get to see newchildren" (Lowry 22) and are casually dismissed as second-class citizens: "There's very little honor in that Assignment" (Lowry 22); and that the excitement preceding the arrival of a new baby entails considerations of a new asset's compatibility with an "established family unit" rather than genuine feelings: "The year we got Lily, we knew, of course, that we'd receive our female, because we'd made our application and been approved" (Lowry 12).

Although still a child, Jonas is aware of the care taken to maintain social equilibrium, which requires the cultivation of a strong sense of civic responsibility from a relatively young age as well as the willing surrender of certain attachments – "What's important is the preparation for adult life, and the training you'll receive in your Assignment. […] So your friends will no longer be as close" (Lowry 22) – but ensures that nobody feels out of place:

> How could someone not fit in? The community was so meticulously ordered, the choices so carefully made. Even the Matching of Spouses was given such weighty consideration that sometimes an adult who applied to receive a spouse waited months or even *years* before a Match was approved and announced. All of the factors – disposition, energy level, intelligence, and interests – had to correspond and to interact perfectly. (Lowry 48)

Somewhat confusingly, after spending eleven years "learning to fit in," standardize their behaviour and "curb any impulse that might set" them "apart from the group" (Lowry 51), the Community's youngest citizens are informed that it is their individual peculiarities that have determined their futures. It is only in his unique capacity as "Receiver of Memory" (Lowry 60) – the living repository of the suppressed "memories of the whole world" (Lowry 77) – that Jonas finally comprehends the full scope of the control exerted over his peers and of the emotional losses accompanying "the choice to go to Sameness" (Lowry 95) and do away with differences: "The life where nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual. The life without color, pain, or past" (Lowry 165).

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The president and the Consortium of the dystopian version of the United States outlined in Lauren Oliver's 2011 *Delirium* appear to have reached a similar conclusion as regards the destructive impact of emotional attachments on social balance and have perfected a surgical cure that purportedly only targets the disease now known as "*amor deliria nervosa*" (Oliver 5) yet actually "destroys other connections between individuals" (Childs 194), occasionally rendering a parent "unable to bond normally, dutifully, and responsibly with his or her children" (Oliver 12) and removing the common history and affection at the core of friendships. Kept safe "and free from pain" (Oliver 5) much like the inhabitants of Jonas' Community, Lena's peers are subjected to a rigorous assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and then "assigned to a school and a major," as well as provided with a list of "four or five approved matches" including "people who received a similar score in the evaluations," in an attempt to "avoid any huge disparities in intelligence, temperament, social background, and age" (Oliver 16). However, notwithstanding the fastidious attention to detail which ensures that even the number of children decided on for each family depends on the "stabilization marks" earned in the "annual review" (Oliver 12), prosperity is by no means guaranteed as the mere suspicion of being related to a sympathizer results in immediate relegation to the unenviable position of social outcast.

Instead of being completely sheltered from knowledge of the past, the citizens of this clinically ruthless dystopia are constantly reminded of the "dark days" before people realized "how deadly a disease love was," affecting "your mind so that you cannot think clearly, or make rational decisions about your own well-being" (Oliver 5), yet denied access to the real truth surrounding their immediate family. Told that her mother had been claimed by the disease and led "to the edge of a sandy cliff" (Oliver 52) and taught that "all the happiest moments" of her childhood were "wrong and unsafe and illegal" (Oliver 188), Lena regards the past as "nothing but a weight" (Oliver 285-286), relentlessly assaulting her with uncomfortable reminders of an identity she would rather forget:

> It's still strange to hear my real name, Haloway, and a dull feeling settles at the bottom of my stomach. For the past decade I've gone by my aunt's name, Tiddle. [...] at least it isn't associated with my mother and father. At least the Tiddles are a real family. The Haloways are nothing but a memory. (Oliver 42)

Set, like *Delirium* and the more critically acclaimed *Hunger Games,* in a world that requires its citizens "to relinquish their individual power in exchange for a certain level of safety and security" (Green-Barteet 37), and similarly driven by a female embodiment of "liminality, straddling the lines of childhood and adulthood, of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity" (Day, Green-Barteet, Montz 4), the plot of Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series also features rulers determined to "enslave minds and murder" in order to keep their population "ignorant and safe and *inside the fence*" (Roth, *Divergent* 667) and individuals willing to join the battle "against human nature itself" at the cost of their own roots: "You are to be a clean slate. [...] Like the rest of you, I will voluntarily forget my name, my family, and my home. I will take on a new identity, with false memories and a false history" (*Divergent* 669).

The carefully controlled social experiment that Tris Prior puts an end to allegedly stems from the belief that it is human personality rather than "political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for [...] the world's disarray" and endeavours to divide the population into five distinct factions, each seeking to eradicate one of the flaws fuelling "humankind's inclination toward evil" (Roth, *Divergent* 62) – selfishness, duplicity, ignorance, aggression or cowardice – and contributing to a specific sector of society:

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> Abnegation has fulfilled our need for selfless leaders in government; Candor has provided us with trustworthy and sound leaders in law; Erudite has supplied us with intelligent teachers and researchers; Amity has given us understanding counselors and caretakers; and Dauntless provides us with protection from threats both within and without. [...] In our factions, we find meaning, we find purpose, we find life. (Roth, *Divergent* 63-64)

Expected to take an aptitude test meant to highlight one's compatibility with the values of one of the factions and then make a decision that might sever all previous ties – "choosing a different faction means I forsake my family. Permanently" (Roth, *Divergent* 40-41) – Tris finds herself questioning the system's wisdom: "I think of the motto I read in my Faction History textbook: *Faction before blood.* More than family, our factions are where we belong. Can that possibly be right?" (*Divergent* 63-64). Unable to find her true place within any of the rigidly delineated categories, Tris can only "claim a subject position" by defining herself beyond their scope and developing a sense of self that "merges characteristics from multiple factions" (Green-Barteet 46), values both blood ties and romantic attachments and derives a sense of grounding from the partially recovered past of her forebears.

However unlikely a future of rewritten collective memories, surgically excised emotions or fully engineered social units might be, there is no denying the extent to which technological and mediatic developments have already altered the parameters of human interaction. To give but one recent example, although the nightmare worlds of *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are generally perceived as polar opposites, the Facebook News Feed changes announced in the early days of 2018 successfully blended the Orwellian and Huxleyan into a complex system that simultaneously limits one's access to accurate information and engenders a supremely false sense of connection with friends and strangers alike (Taylor 1), sadly more often than not substituting the euphoria accompanying a soma-induced holiday with envy and frustration. Unlikely to ever share *Brave New World*'s and *1984*'s privileged positions in literary scholarship and the journalistic spotlight, Forster's "seemingly paradisiacal technological society" (Harris-Fain xvi) provides equally disquieting (and perhaps more plausible) glimpses of a future of "extreme isolation" (Weinstein, Weinstein 274), in which "technophilia or – holia" (Claeys 334) renders humanity not only weak but above all sociophobic, reducing individuals to the status of "passive drones within the honey comb of the all-encompassing Machine" (Luckhurst 44) and almost entirely obliterating any "sense of personal closeness, warmth, and affection" (Claeys 334). Considering the range of skills already ousted by IT dependency and the scope of direct experience "cancelled by technical mediation" (Luckhurst 44), it can only be hoped that the vast and perpetually growing archives of dystopian scenarios might still contain warnings of preventable mistakes or reversible damage among the sadly fulfilled prophecies of unsustainable population growth, resource abuse, waste overload, perpetual surveillance and insidious manipulation.

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