



**THE YA IRON-JAWED ANGEL: THE FEMINIST PARADIGM IN
VERONICA ROTH'S *DIVERGENT* SERIES**



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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, there has been an explosion of fiction targeted at a young audience. These kinds of novels which are a commercial success for both adolescent and adult readers are now commonly known under the banner of YA (Young Adult) literature.

An arguably early example of dystopian literature, Plato's *The Republic*, is dated to around 380 BC. Some other well-known works of dystopian literature are *1984* (1949) by George Orwell, and *Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding. During the nineteenth and twentieth century the dystopian genre has become more common, and *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins has received much attention. The *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth is constructed along similar lines.

Divergent is the debut novel of Veronica Roth, written during winter break of her senior year at Northwestern and published in 2011. *Divergent* is the first book in the acclaimed *Divergent* series, followed by sequels *Insurgent* (2012) and *Allegiant* (2013).

A type of dystopian fiction is the representation of a post-apocalyptic feminist dystopia, where women have no rights whatsoever. The novel is set in a place ruled by misogynist laws, where the future of the voiceless “gendered subaltern” is decided by the totalitarian government, as in *Matched* (2010) by Allyson Braithwaite Condie. The so-called sub-genre of “feminist dystopian fiction” began to appear in the mid-twentieth century. Heretofore viewed as a male-dominant genre, dystopian fiction expanded its characteristic social criticism to the consideration of female social issues with the emergence of dystopian narratives from that period known as the “second wave of feminism” (1960s to the present), which focused on gender and sexuality as social constructs.

Notably, much of the discussion of women in dystopian fiction refers to the “classics” and the treatment of current science fiction or dystopian literature is not as prevalent. That which does exist about current literature, though, looks at the relationship between gender and power and the transition into maturity. *Feminine Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* is one of the most recent works about contemporary YA dystopian fiction.

Divergent, though it does not depict a feminist utopia/dystopia, concentrates on its female protagonist, Beatrice, and her resistance to the contemporary social order in her world. The female protagonists of contemporary YA dystopias occupy liminal spaces as they seek to understand their places in the world in which they live, making their societies more egalitarian, more progressive, and ultimately, more free. The seemingly fearless Tris of *Divergent* both recognizes her liminal situation and, over time, uses her position as a means for resistance and rebellion against the social orders that seek to control them.

In the instance of Tris, she learns that reaching adulthood is wholly dependent on her ability to conform to her society’s mandates, which govern virtually every aspect of her life. The female protagonist becomes a subject, at least in part, because she is oppressed by the dystopian regime.

KEYWORDS

dystopia, post-apocalyptic fiction, feminism, female hero, agency.