

ABSTRACT

KRISTIE L. ELLISON. Leaving on the Light: Creating Hope by Building a Community with the Reader and Adopting Its Morals in Young Adult Dystopian Literature. (Under the direction of Professor Barbara Bennett.)

Heroes and their journeys have been a part of literature since storytelling began. Young adult heroes provide hope for their readers and teach them moral lessons. Dystopian heroes explore uncharted territory in cautionary tales, which often end tragically. Young adult dystopian literature offers a unique blending of the two, yet scholars have noted a tension between them. Having gone through a separation and initiation, young adult heroes must return to their communities to share the lessons they have learned and take their place in society. However, dystopian heroes either destroy or permanently abandon their communities, thus leaving no place for the hero to return and removing all hope. By examining three young adult dystopian novels—Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*—I argue that given the goal of young adult literature to teach moral lessons to its readers and the interactive ways in which readers now respond to texts, this tension is resolved by the hero creating a new community with the reader to which he can return, thereby completing his journey. Evidence of this can be found in the thoughts and actions of the young heroes as they demonstrate an adherence to the moral and legal code of the reader—even where the fictional community would have allowed, expected, and even celebrated the choice to do otherwise—in order to gain acceptance by this new community. Accordingly, the formula for young adult dystopian literature is attempt at conforming, enlightenment, adoption of the reader's moral code, and integration into the reader community. Not only does this new model of the return allow for completion of the hero journey, it also provides hope for the young adult readers that they can survive and make moral choices as well.