TERROR AND THE TEEN: SLATED AND YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This Masters of Arts thesis comprises a novel, *Slated*, and contextualizing thesis. *Slated,* a young adult dystopian novel, is Kyla's story: a sixteen-year-old girl who has been Slated, her memory wiped as punishment for crimes she cannot remember. It is set in a future England, a society where underage criminals and terrorists are given a so-called second chance with Slating, a new life and family. The thesis considers the writing process of *Slated* in the context of terrorism and cultural trauma, and the use of creative writing in translating trauma. The definition of terrorism and whether it includes freedom fighters is considered, both in international law and its treatment in dystopian young adult fiction, and the conclusion reached that whether terrorists are considered to be freedom fighters is largely a matter of perspective. The genre of recent dystopian young adult fiction is examined, and how *Slated* fits within it and within dystopian fiction more generally considered. Finally, the impact of the analysis of terrorism and young adult dystopian fiction on the writing process of *Slated* is examined.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Name of candidate: Teresa Ann Terry   Signature:

Date:

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A. Introduction

> We learn writing by doing it. That simple.
> (Goldberg 1986, p.30)

I considered doing an MA in creative writing for some time before signing up for one. At that point I'd written eight novels and gathered enough rejections to paper a smallish house. While I'd had occasional interest and positive feedback, and I could see that my work was getting better in certain respects, I was scared I'd hit a plateau in what I was producing: that learning by doing, something I'd subscribed to since reading Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* in 2007, wasn't enough (Goldberg 1986).

Deep down I had an uncomfortable suspicion that what I was producing was superficial; that I skirted over difficulties and moved on to the next thing rather than working them through. And I tried it all: adult, young series, middle grade, crime, teen fantasy, teen realism, as well as bad poetry and worse short stories. While over the few years prior to starting this research degree I'd narrowed my focus to novels and writing teenage voices, I was still writing novels in a huge burst of energy, then abandoning them and moving on. An MA would make me focus on one thing for a long, long time. It would force me to evaluate what I was doing, and why.

At around the same time I was reading broadly in emerging young adult (YA) fiction and became involved in a YA critique group. The term 'young adult' has been variously defined, but for my purposes I consider it to be between the ages of twelve and eighteen, as defined by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA n.d.). As I delved more and more into recent YA

fiction, I was becoming uneasy with the degree of violence depicted for teenage readers. The same year I'd written the prologue and opening chapter for a new YA novel: *Slated* (Terry 2012a).

Slated is Kyla's story: a sixteen-year-old girl who has been Slated, her memory wiped as punishment for crimes she cannot remember. It is set in a near-future England, a society where underage criminals and terrorists are given a so-called second chance with Slating, a new life and family.

Before I even knew where the story would go in any detail, one thing was clear: *Slated* was going to push at my boundaries on violence in YA fiction. It was going to make me look at where these limits are for me, and my story, and work out which would win if the limits weren't in the same place.

Slated felt like it had power to become something, but unease with these issues had me put it aside for some time. With the decision to attempt this research degree came the impetus to deliberately push through these barriers in my own writing, and also to focus on the context within which it resides: the recent upsurge in dystopian YA fiction being published. The violence aspect of this has been narrowed in focus to reflect the evolution of *Slated*: depiction of terrorism in recent Western YA dystopian fiction.

The perceived darkness of dystopian worlds created have brought debate. Why are teens drawn to these bleak, frequently violent worlds? Why are they being written and published? I had to answer these questions for myself to continue, and in a larger context, to see how my story fits within the publishing landscape.

My original plan for *Slated* was to confront terrorism from two points of view: victim, and terrorist. I was alarmed at the black and white rhetoric of good and evil in the West in the wake of 9/11, and wanted to put readers into the mind of one empathetic character who could be both. As my research into

YA dystopian fiction continued, this evolved to focus more closely on another question: are freedom fighters terrorists if they use their methods? As writing continued, changes ensued, such that the second half of this equation has become the second book of a trilogy.

Slated was published by Orchard Books in the UK in May 2012 and will be in the US and Canada by Penguin imprint Nancy Paulsen Books in Jan 2013. The second of the trilogy, *Fractured*, will be 2013 with both publishers (Terry, in press).

My goals are to consider my writing process in the context of both terrorism and cultural trauma, and the role of creative writing in translating trauma; and recent dystopian young adult fiction, and how *Slated* fits within this genre. This will be followed by a final consideration of my writing process and outcomes.

B. Terrorism and Trauma

1. *Slated*: first steps

> Lucid dreams also provide a way to tap the mind's creative powers, according to LaBerge. In Lucid Dreaming, he notes that many scientists, artists, writers, and musicians find inspiration through their dreams… Samuel Coleridge, for example, claimed to have composed his great poem "Kubla Khan" in a dream, and chemist Friedrich Kekule said he discovered the structure of benzene while dreaming.
> (Horgan 1994, p.3)

As a child I had terrible nightmares. Waking terrified after one such dream I remember reasoning with myself. The dream was scary because when I was in it, I thought it was real. If I could work out when I was dreaming and when I wasn't, then it wouldn't be scary anymore. Soon after in the grip of another dream, I asked myself: is this a dream? And with checking my surroundings and what was happening, logic said it wasn't real: it had to be a dream. And then I found sometimes I could influence dreams, take them in a safer direction.

I'd never heard of lucid dreaming, but of course that is what it was. Lucid dreaming – where the dreamer knows they are dreaming during the dream– has been validated by sleep laboratory studies that show it occurs during REM sleep: it is truly dreaming (Gackenback 1991, p.110). It has had a recent surge in popularity with such things as apps that claim to help control dreams, even sleep masks that are meant to promote lucidity in dreams (BBC 2012).

Somewhere about 2007 I began using lucid dreaming in my writing: to both mine dreams for stories, and play with stories in dreams. Combining lucid dreaming and early morning writing is how *Slated* (Terry 2012a) began. In that blur between dream and consciousness where you're not sure where one ends and the other begins, the editor is silent and the creator takes over. Like Dorothea Brande advised in 1934:

> …if you are to have the full benefit of the richness of the unconscious you must learn to write easily and smoothly when the unconscious is in the ascendant… what you are actually doing is training yourself, in the twilight zone between sleep and the full waking state, simply to write.
> (Brande 1934, pp.72-73)

Slated began early one morning with a lucid dream, one in which I played the scene of the prologue back and forth:

> I run.
> Fists of waves claw the sand as I force one foot to pound after the other. Scramble up, slip down, repeat. Faster. Eyes fixed on dunes ahead. Don't look back. Mustn't look. Ragged breath; in, out; in out. Still I run.
> (Terry 2012a, p.7).

The prologue as published is almost identical to what I wrote on waking the morning of the dream, 1st September, 2009. The concept of Slating and the title weren't in the dream, but appeared in a rush of free writing that same morning.

But given the origin of this story from a dream, it wasn't a conscious decision to go in this direction. It wasn't a story I thought I wanted to write.

There were several reasons. From a writing point of view, there was a whole future world to create. While I loved science fiction as a reader, particularly as a teenager, I'd never attempted to write it before, and doubted my ability

to do so. There was also a maimed consciousness to deal with in my main character. But most of all, I couldn't write this story without addressing the deep discomfort I have with depictions of violence.

I've never been able to tolerate violent movies or books as an audience or reader, so how could I even consider writing about terrorism? We all have our boundaries, and I wasn't sure if this story was going to cross some of mine. And underlying this was the conviction that I wasn't up to writing about it, whether I wanted to, or not.

Because of this discomfort with the subject matter, while I didn't consciously put *Slated* on hold, that was the effect. I kept thinking about the story and looking at the few chapters I'd written. They were getting under my skin and I wasn't sure what to do about it.

And then serendipity had me attend a writing retreat in 2010, and a talk by picture book author Pippa Goodhart. One of the things Goodhart said was that characters in picture books are often animals instead of children, so a child being read the story can explore fears – such as being lost, not being able to find their mother, the dark – without them being too close.

This is echoed by Linda Strachan:

> Removing the child from the story and placing a creature or animal as the main character gives a level of separation from reality. It also avoids any idea that the child might try something dangerous, and stops the story from becoming too frightening for an active imagination.
> (Strachan 2008, p.11)

My audience of young adults, between the ages of twelve and eighteen, are between the innocence of childhood and the experience of adulthood: YA

fiction is 'aimed specifically at young adults, and it deals with issues and storylines that aim to capture their imagination' (Harbour 2012, p.3).

Books for very young readers give context and meaning to things that children experience (Lamb 2001, p.19). Harbour suggests those for young adults fulfil a similar function:

> Engagement with fiction is immersion in a cultural space that allows us to find out who we are, or even who we are not, because stories and storytelling are all about helping us to make connections... storytelling is the key that opens the door to the connections that help us make sense of the world.
> (Harbour 2012, p.2)

Reading provides a safe place for young adults to try on different lives; to work out who they are, and where they fit. As Patrick Ness stated in his 2011 Carnegie acceptance speech:

> …how ideal to have a safe space to figure out who I was and what mattered to me? There's so much proscription in the life of young people, and it's so vital to have a place that says, look, here are the doors onto the world and amazingly, you're free to choose any one you like.
> (Ness 2011, p.2)

And with this, I had my reason *why*. Why I thought I should try to write this novel; why it was important to me to write it; why I wanted to risk it. Just like animal characters are used to make picture books a safe place to explore fears, *Slated* is set in a future world, an unreal place: *a place to explore fears without them being too close*. I could use fictional treatment of terrorism to provide a way to try on fears of the future, and of terrorism. But looking at terrorism in a future with political groups that do not exist now is a way to distance it from readers. It doesn't deal with recognized events or conflicts where readers may already think they know the side they are or should be on.

2. Terrorism and Trauma: a personal and cultural perspective

> When you continue to stop yourself from going all the way in your writing and coming to a deep resolution, it's not a dream you wake up from, but you carry the nightmare out into the streets. Writing gives you a great opportunity to swim through to freedom.
> (Goldberg 1986, p. 103)

The events of 11th of September in 2001 had an effect on me even as a distant observer that I still haven't worked through. I lived in Adelaide in Australia at the time the events unfolded in New York and Washington D.C., and have a clear memory of my then partner calling out to me that something was happening, then watching the live coverage late into the night. I felt the complete lack of comprehension on the faces of the reporters who were standing there, trying to say what was going on when they couldn't grasp it. Going to work in a daze the next morning, I was unable to believe that half the people I worked with had yet to even hear about it.

The subsequent bombings in Bali on 12 October 2002, like the events in New York, didn't enter my world personally: I didn't know anyone involved directly. But it seemed like everyone I knew in Adelaide knew someone who did. It felt personal. The tube and bus bombings in London on 7 July 2005 likewise: I was living an hour out of London by then, and the unreality of that day is still there when I think of it. Yet not having lost anyone there was almost an embarrassment at feeling as I did about it, as if I didn't have a reasonable, personal claim to distress.

In *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, Kaplan considers the impact of trauma on individuals, and on nations (Kaplan 2005). She notes there are different positions in the context of trauma:

> Equally important about trauma is one's specific positioning vis-à-vis an event. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish the different positions and contexts of encounters with trauma. At one extreme there is the direct trauma victim while at the other we find a person geographically far away, having no personal connection to the victim. In between are a series of positions…
> (Kaplan 2005, p.2)

I've no doubt that for myself it was watching media coverage as it happened that was a large part of why I was so distressed. Hearing about something afterwards, even watching the footage and seeing the images over and over in the media, isn't as immediate when you already know the end result. As stated by Kaplan:

> The phenomenon of 9/11 was perhaps the supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies (Internet, cell phone) as well as by television and radio, and responded to in a myriad of ways depending on peoples' national and local contexts.
> (Kaplan 2005, p. 2).

The whole world watched the events. Gray notes that the 'global public was in the unique position of watching the event as it occurred; the impact, the explosion, the fall of the towers were there for all to see in what media people like to call "real time" ' (Gray 2011, p.7). Viewers – consumers of this global media, such as myself – experienced vicarious traumatisation as a result (Kaplan, 2005, p.21), and the effects were magnified by the feeling of shared experience (Kaplan 2005, p.19).

Both Gray and Kaplan stress the importance of translating trauma through art and other means. As Kaplan states:

> I show the increasing importance of "translating" trauma—that is, of finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as to oneself. Art, perhaps

> paradoxically, is one such way... Trauma can never be "healed" in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnesses a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being "translated" via art.
> (Kaplan 2005, p.19)

Likewise, Ulrich Baer in his introduction to short story anthology *110 Stories* written after and dealing with the events of 9-11 says that writers write to deal with trauma: 'stories address the need for narrative in the wake of a disaster' (Baer 2002, p.1). Was this why my unconscious was throwing up these issues whether I wanted it to, or not?

Kaplan (2005), Gray (2011) and Baer (2002) were speaking more of dealing directly with real events in story, not indirectly as I am. Yet as Gray notes:

> The determining feature of trauma is that it is unsayable... perhaps one way to tell a story that cannot be told is to tell it aslant, to approach it by stealth.
> (Gray 2011, p.34).

3. Terrorism, Terrorists and Freedom Fighters

> Not all individuals and groups who commit similar kinds of violent political actions are generally viewed as "terrorist" in nature... Why does the label "terrorist" stick to some violent groups and not others?
> (Zack 2004, pp.4-5)

What is terrorism? It is a question that seems superficially to have an obvious answer: we know it when we see it. But is use of the label a matter of perspective?

Reitan (2010), in seeking a definition of terrorism for public policy purposes, notes there are two issues in defining the scope of terrorism. The first is that

what terrorism and terrorist acts encompass is not clear in ordinary usage (Reitan 2010, p.254). The second is that 'terrorist' is a label of condemnation: a label applied to 'violent acts performed by those of whose positions and goals the speaker disapproves and fails to apply it to similar acts by those with whose positions and goals the speaker identifies' (Reitan 2010, p.254). And as noted by Zack in comparing the 1950s Algerian war and the US war on terror, labels are important: how political groups are responded to and interacted with depends in part on how they are identified (Zack 2004, p.5).

A definition of terrorism is essential in international law to deal with it effectively. Cassese argues that in times of peace a generally accepted definition of terrorism in the international context has evolved:

> ...broadly speaking, terrorism consists of (i) acts normally criminalized under any national penal system... (ii) intended to provoke a state of terror in the population or to coerce a state or an international organization to take some sort of action, and finally (iii) are politically or ideologically motivated, i.e. are not based on the pursuit of private ends.
> (Cassese 2006, p.937).

However, disagreement continues on whether there should be exceptions to the definition in times of conflict, to exempt acts by freedom fighters in wars of liberation (Cassese 2006, p.935).

Apart from legal or policy definitions of terrorism – and the classification of groups as terrorists or freedom fighters – how are these issues dealt with in YA dystopian fiction, and what are the implications for my treatment of my terrorist group in *Slated* (Terry 2012a)? This will be considered in the next section, beginning with an examination of YA dystopian fiction.

C. A Question of Genre: Dystopian YA Fiction

1. Dystopian and Dystopian YA Fiction

> ...genre is just a flavouring. It's not the whole meal. Don't get confused by the scenery.
> (Pratchett 2001)

When I'd barely begun writing *Slated*, I was asked what was it about? What box do we put it in? I struggled to define it when the story was still forming, but with my answer that it was a future where criminal young people had their memories stolen, the answer I frequently heard back was this: that is dystopian.

In an imprecise way I felt I knew what a utopia was: an imagined perfect society; and that a dystopia was somehow the opposite, defined by the absence of perfection. One, a dreamy vision of how things could be; the other, the nightmare that may result if it goes wrong.

These terms are defined more precisely by Hintz and Ostry, in their introduction to *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*:

> We use "utopia," a more familiar term for the reader, to signify a nonexistent society that is posited as significantly better than that of the reader. It strives toward perfection, has a delineated social system, and is described in reasonably specific detail. Dystopias are likewise precise descriptions of societies, ones in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok.
> (Hintz and Ostry 2003, p.3)

However opposite they sound, the division between the utopia and dystopia is not absolute. One example in YA fiction is Gemma Malley's *The Declaration* (2008), a future world where humans seem to have achieved the dream of immortality with medication. But never aging comes at a cost: the world will soon be overcrowded if everyone has children. Therefore, each person must declare whether they choose to take the medication and live forever, or refuse it, and have a child. But this led to terrible consequences for children who were not meant to be born.

Likewise with *Slated* (Terry 2012a): giving violent young offenders a second chance and a new life, and making them be happy, sounds like a good thing, a utopian ideal. Society is safer for its citizens, the young wrongdoers aren't imprisoned or executed, and they can become useful, happy members of society. At a recent event I attended, the policeman father of one of my readers said he thought being able to Slate underage criminals was a brilliant idea. I'm not sure how serious he was! But in my fictional *Slated*, no matter the motives in setting up the system in the first place, the actual execution of Slating and abuses by those in power made it become something else entirely: the utopia becomes a dystopia.

As stated by Totaro:

> ...if we move beyond the automatic impulse to define utopia as perfect and dystopia as evil, then we can examine these terms more critically... one person's ideal world may be dystopia for another. (Totaro 2003, p.127)

There are two aspects of dystopian YA fiction and how it fits in a literary and real world sense that I want to consider, and on their face they are completely contradictory. Is it depressing enough? Is it too depressing? After these considerations, I'll look at how *Slated* evolved and how it fits – or doesn't fit – in this genre box.

2. Is it depressing enough?

> The unequivocally unhappy endings... are necessary to underline the point that, unless urgent change is undertaken, and soon, then the very principles of human happiness and even life itself are under threat…final defeat is necessary to highlight the dire consequences of the extinction of moral belief.
> (Sambell 2003, p.166).

The essential characteristic of classical adult dystopian fiction is that of a future society where something is going wrong; someone, our hero, fights against it, but tragically fails. There is no hope, no chance for redemption. The role of the dystopian novel is that of a warning: change now, or this may come to pass. This is the case for social change as described by Sambell (2003).

But is there a conflict between this didactic requirement of dystopian fiction and writing for children? One often posited requirement of writing for children is the provision of hope. According to Hughes:

> …there must be a gripping plot that answers this question: "What would happen if all this went wrong?" In other words, dystopia creates plot! But, acting as a rein on the writer's imagination of worlds spoiled and broken through human greed and hubris, there is the dictum that I came across early in my writing life: "You may lead a child into the darkness, but you must never turn out the light."
> (Hughes 2003, p.156)

Dystopian writing for children and young adults tends to adhere to the requirement for hope, with ambiguous or even happy endings. As Sambell notes, they often '...seek to circumvent the logical consequences of the predictive dystopian scenario in which their child protagonists are cast, and implausibly lucky escapes are legion' (Sambell 2003, p.172).

Endings of three recent dystopian novels will now be examined to see how well they fulfil the contradictory requirements for utter defeat of the hero, and the provision of hope. For these purposes where the novel is part of a trilogy the ending of the final book of the trilogy will be considered.

In Suzanne Collins well-known trilogy, Katniss and Peeta survive and win in the initial *Hunger Games* (Collins 2008) only to be forced back to the arena in *Catching Fire* (Collins 2009). They are freed by the Resistance, and the fight against the Capitol begins. In *Mockingjay* (Collins 2010) the uprising against the Capitol finally ends with victory, one that comes at a high cost when children on both sides of the conflict, including Katniss' own sister, are deliberately killed by the Resistance to tar the Capitol. Katniss is given the task as the symbol of the Resistance to execute the Capitol president, but instead sends her arrow to kill the head of the Resistance. Expecting death, she has reprieve; she and Peeta, both terribly damaged by their experiences, finally find their way back to each other in the ashes of their district. The final chapter carries them forward towards healing, and hope, with Katniss' realizations:

> What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that.
>
> So after, when he whispers, "You love me. Real or not real?"
>
> I tell him, "Real."
>
> (Collins 2010, p. 453).

After this is an epilogue: Katniss and Peeta, many years on, with children of their own. They are still deeply affected by the horror they survived, but learning to live despite the marks it has left behind.

In Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* (2004) fifteen-year-old anorexic Daisy's visit to her English cousins goes wrong with the outbreak of war. She has fallen passionately in love with her cousin, Edmond, but they are separated. Daisy

and her cousin Piper eventually make their way to the farm where Edmond and his twin are meant to be, only to find a scene of devastation and death. Once they return to the cousins' family home, Daisy is whisked back to the US by her father.

The story continues in a short Part 2 that takes place six years on, after the war has ended. There is about thirty pages summing up Daisy's life in the meantime and then being reunited with her cousins, including an Edmond horribly damaged by his experiences, who returned all those years ago to find her gone. Gradually, they reconnect, and there is hope he will recover:

> I have no idea how damaged Edmond is, I just know that he needs peace and he needs to be loved. And both of these things I can do...
> After all this time, I know exactly where I belong.
> Here. With Edmond.
> And that's how I live now.
> (Rosoff 2004, pp.210-211)

Scott Westerfeld's Uglies trilogy follows Tally's evolution from an Ugly, to a beautiful and compliant Pretty, then finally a Special: surgically changed again, this time to become part of Special Circumstances—special police that control the Uglies and keep the Pretties stupid (Westerfeld 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Special Circumstances are defeated, and the fourth last chapter of *Specials* ends with Tally's escape from being de-specialized:

> She was finally free of her cell, of the operating tank, of Dr. Cable. No one would change her against her will, not ever again. There would be no more Special Circumstances.
> But even as relief spread through her, Tally felt herself bleeding inside. Freedom was cutting her...
> She tasted salt again, and finally felt the heat streaming down her cheeks. Tally reached her hands up, not quite believing until she saw her own fingertips glistening in the starlight.
> Specials didn't cry, but her tears had finally come.
> (Westerfeld 2006, p.359)

But then the story continues: she is reunited with ugly friend David, and they stay in the wild. She issues a manifesto: a warning. Tally's final word to her friends is that she will stay out there, some sort of vigilante to make sure they do what is right, as they move towards an uncertain future:

> However hungry the human race becomes now that the pretties are waking up, the wild still has teeth. Special teeth, ugly teeth. Us.
> We'll be out here somewhere—watching. Ready to remind you of the price the Rusties paid for going too far.
> I love you all. But it's time to say good-bye, for now.
> Be careful with the world, or the next time we meet, it might get ugly.
> (Westerfeld 2006, p. 372).

All these three examples fulfil Hughes requirement for writing for children: they provide hope (Hughes 2003). Thus they fly in the face of the dystopian requirement for the hero to be destroyed and serve as an explicit warning. As noted by Miller, 'Dystopian fiction may be the only genre written for children that's routinely *less* didactic that its adult counterpart' (Miller 2010, p.2).

But if these novels as dystopian fiction are to serve a teaching impulse, to serve as a warning and call to action, do their endings subvert this aim? According to Sambell, many criticize this departure of YA dystopian novels from the adult model:

> This tendency for children's writers to compromise the adult dystopian denouement has routinely attracted adverse critical reaction. It is often viewed as an evasive tactic, in which the author somehow finally tries to dodge or ignore the logical consequences of the preceding text.
> (Sambell p. 173).

But Sambell goes on to propose that some children's writers adapt the form, to allow readers interaction and inquiry in the created fictional worlds, by 'allowing multiple interpretations throughout the whole text' (Sambell 2003, p.173). This allows readers to learn through inquiry and questioning in the

text, from making their own choices: they aren't told what to think. This suggests a new form and role for dystopian novels for the young. Is this fulfilled in the examples discussed above?

In my view: no. Whether an authorial impulse or one suggested by publishers, convinced stories must be neatly tied up in a hopeful bow to be palatable, many YA dystopian novels like the ones considered go beyond the end of the action and denouement of the story, beyond an ambiguous or even hopeful ending. They stray into glimpses of the characters' futures.

As a reader I find this jarring. In Rosoff's *How I Live Now* (2004), I wanted to see what happened in real time, not in retrospect: even if it ended with the tragedy of Daisy's forced departure without knowing Edmond's fate. The Part 2 with their older selves felt like another story tacked on to the end. Likewise in Collins' *Mockingjay* (2010), perhaps even the last chapter went too far in telling the readers what the future may be; the epilogue went much further when it showed Katniss and Peeta would stay together and have children many years in the future.

In both these cases, an open ending – where the reader's imagination decides what happens next – would have gone some way towards Sambell's vision of a new kind of dystopian novel for the young (Sambell 2003). The ending to *Specials* comes closer: you don't see into Tally and David's future, and what will happen to them and their world is left open (Westerfeld 2006). Yet to me the story still could have ended with Tally's tears several chapters earlier.

Where do I stand, as a writer whose novel has been put in the dystopian box? Overall, while I agree with Hughes (2003) that novels for the young should not end in nihilism and despair, going beyond the story and trying to wrap up the characters' futures is a step too far.

I don't consider my role to be providing a warning to readers or to teach them in an explicit sense as is the traditional view of dystopian novels. So if *Slated* doesn't fulfil this literary definition of a dystopian novel, it was never my aim to fit within this and there is, in my view, no failure to reach it. Yes, I want readers to think about issues raised within my writing. But no, I don't want to tell them what to think about it. That is up to them: I want the questions there, and the answers sought within the minds of my readers.

In any event, how far from the dystopian model my trilogy will stray is yet to be determined, as I haven't decided how the third book will end. Considering the endings of the novels above in this light, though, has given me more insight into how I feel about the options as I grapple with this decision.

Another question is whether this recent wave of YA fiction should even be labelled as dystopian at all. The classic adult dystopian novel was something quite specific. It seems the label is applied to any YA novel set in a future where something has gone wrong. But the essence of plot in any genre is surely that something is going wrong: without this, there is no plot and no story. It would perhaps be more accurate to call this group of YA novels futuristic, or science fiction.

Whatever literary critics may think about departures from the classic dystopian model, implausibly happy endings aren't going to get past the harshest critics: teenagers. As Monica Hughes cautions: 'On the other hand, the "happy ever after" utopian world is a trap to be guarded against' (Hughes 2003, p.160).

I agree: stories and how they end must feel real to the reader. I wouldn't do violence to this either to fit a literary model, or to give a happy ending I hope for my characters.

As stated by Tim Bowler at the 2012 Oxford Literary Festival:

> Must there be hope? The easy answer is yes. But…don't give them humbug, either.
> (Terry 2012b)

3. Is it too depressing? The Dark YA Debate

> If books show us the world, teen fiction can be like a hall of fun-house mirrors, constantly reflecting back hideously distorted portrayals of what life is. There are of course exceptions, but a careless young reader—or one who seeks out depravity—will find himself surrounded by images not of joy or beauty but of damage, brutality and losses of the most horrendous kinds.
> (Gurdon 2011, p.1).

In complete contradiction to the previous section is the dark YA debate: why is so much of what is written for teenagers allegedly so bleak and depressing?

Gurdon's Wall Street Journal article 'Darkness Too Visible' quoted above created a storm (Gurdon 2011). Within hours of its publication, author Maureen Johnson started a twitter tag #YASaves, asking for stories of how YA helped readers, which quickly trended worldwide (Johnson M. 2011, Johnson L. 2011). I remember reading them on Twitter for hours, awed by the avalanche of personal stories and overwhelming support for YA. Angry blog posts against Gurdon's article, many written by young adults themselves, also proliferated on the subject. One example is by blogger Nicole, who credited reading *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson (2009) with saving her anorexic best friend's life:

> Young adult is brilliant. It can be terrifying and dark and gritty and fantastic and wonderful and full of hope. It shows the darkest of the dark while letting us know that there will always be light.

> Just like our lives.
> We are the books we read. To attack them is to attack us.
>
> (Nicole 2011)

Words that echo this appeared in Maureen Johnson's article in the Guardian a few days later: 'Young-adult fiction shows that bad things happen, and that you can survive. How is that objectionable?' (Johnson, M. 2011).

Of course the debate on the role of children's literature is nothing new:

> 'Since the appearance of works for young readers, authors, parents and critics have debated these questions: Is the role of these books to educate young people about the world in which they live, including its unpleasant aspects. Or, is it their responsibility to shield children from such elements?'
> (Abate 2010).

Gurdon's article dealt with YA fiction generally, though there was a mention of the 'hyper-violent' Hunger Games being one of the most challenged books (Gurdon 2011). Most of those defending the darkness in YA as an answer to Gurdon focused on novels which dealt with real issues and situations, and how reading them helped teens in dark places deal with what had or was happening to them, and also helped readers who were lucky enough to never experience darkness to have empathy for others (Johnson L. 2011, Johnson M. 2011).

The perceived darkness of dystopian fiction as a genre and what is behind its popularity have also been the subject of frequent debate. One commonly proposed view is that young adults devour dystopian fiction because they crave truth, and the truth is that the world is falling apart (Bacigalupi 2010). However, I question whether this explains the recent surge of popularity of dystopian fiction. There have always been fears, they just change. When I was growing up it was the cold war and insecticides poisoning the environment; I also remember being terrified by the US embassy hostage drama in Iran of 1979-1981 being played out on the news before my eyes.

Author Maggie Stiefvater doesn't buy that the darkness of dystopian novels reflect fears of the future: to her, it is pure escapism (Stiefvater 2010). Costa winner Moira Young echoes this, saying that dystopian novels are heroes' journeys, and 'Teenagers like to read dystopian fiction because it's exciting. It all comes down to the story' (Young 2011). And readers love scary stories, which must be scarier than they used to be to frighten readers in our media-saturated age (Clements 2010).

But to author Scott Westerfeld, it is all about breaking down the system:

> 'Schools are places where teens are subject to dress codes, have few free speech rights, and are constantly surveilled, where they rise and sit at the sound of a bell. Is it any wonder that dystopian novels speak to them?... What is the apocalypse but an everlasting snow day?' (Westerfeld 2010).

At a panel I attended on dystopian YA fiction at the 2012 Eastercon, the British annual science fiction convention, Doctorow notes 'it is part of adolescence when you wake up and think the adults have ruined it all. There is a craving for the cosy apocalypse: *if only all the adults were dead*…' (Terry 2012d). Author Parini says teens feel gamed: 'trapped, forced into a world of tests that humiliate and unnerve them' (Parini 2010). And despite her emphasis on dystopian fiction being escapist, Stiefvater also notes that in our '…culture defined by shades of gray…the absolute black and white choices in dark young adult novels are incredibly satisfying for readers' (Stiefvater 2010).

I agree that a large part of the attraction of dystopian literature is young adults feelings of powerlessness, of living in the dystopia that is adolescence. But the other side of the equation is engaging imagination with the *what ifs* that are behind the stories: what if this happened? What if that goes wrong? I don't look at the pull of these stories as pure escapism; more that it is a way

to explore possibilities and push boundaries. As publisher Amanda Rutter stated at the 2012 Eastercon on why dystopian fiction is being written:

> YA is the bravest area of fiction being published today: it doesn't tread the same old paths.
> (Terry 2012d).

Most of the comment on dystopian fiction and its popularity focuses on why it has appeal for young adult readers. Another question, though, is why do writers write it in the first place? Of course once a genre's popularity is established there may be a certain amount of deliberate chasing of it by both writers and publishers, but what got it out there to begin with?

At the 2012 Eastercon when author Emma Newman was asked why authors write dystopian fiction, she answered that 'we've been sucked into the system and feel disempowered: maybe we're trying to give ourselves therapy. Anyhow we're all writing from our unconscious mind' (Terry 2012d).

Moira Young in the Guardian puts it this way:

> A new wave of dystopian fiction at this particular time shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. It's the zeitgeist. Adults write books for teenagers. So anxious adults – worried about the planet, the degradation of civil society and the bitter inheritance we're leaving for the young – write dystopian books.
> (Young 2011)

For myself I don't think it is any accident that the recent boom of Western dystopian fiction for young adults happened after 9-11, or that it primarily started in the United States where those events took place. Most of their readers may be too young to remember these events, but to the authors writing the stories, the horror is immediate. And I agree with Emma

Newman's comment in my own writing, that the fears and obsessions I write about come from my unconscious.

Finally, YA dystopian fiction isn't all bleak and depressing. Sure, some of these worlds are dark, violent places. It is hard for me to imagine a world more horrifying than that created by Suzanne Collins, where children are forced to fight to the death for reality TV entertainment (Collins 2008, 2009, 2010). But at the end of it all, Katniss *survives*. Surviving against all adversity *is* hope.

As Philip Reeve states:

> The settings may be nihilistic, but the message that an individual can make a difference and that courage and ingenuity can triumph even in the most dreadful circumstances, is anything but.
> (Reeve 2011, p.2).

To teens who may feel helpless in their own lives and futures it shows them someone who has it far, far worse than anything in their darkest imaginations, and gets through it.

4. Recent Dystopian YA fiction: terrorists, or freedom fighters?

> The attraction of such stories for teenage readers is clear… they can draw a bleak satisfaction from imagining adult society reduced to smoking rubble. They are also, perhaps, becoming aware of the deep injustices in the wider world, which dystopian fiction often reflects… Or maybe it's just cool to mentally recast yourself as a rebel against some future tyranny.
> (Reeve 2011, p.2).

Cool or otherwise, rebelling against authority is one thing: what about blowing it up?

In Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007), between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, parents or guardians can have teenagers unwound. This is not considered an end to their life, as every bit of them is useful, valuable – and kept alive in transplantation. They are told that '100 percent of you will still be alive, just in a divided state' (Shusterman 2007, p.24).

Unwind focuses on three teens who escape unwinding. One of them, Lev, has been raised as a tithe: born to be unwound on his thirteenth birthday. First angry at being torn from his purpose, then full of rage at unwinding, he becomes a Clapper – a suicide bomber – ingesting dangerous chemicals so that the act of clapping his hands will cause an explosion and his death. Lev's reason for joining them is that 'Someone has to pay for the unfairness of it all. *Everyone* has to pay. He'll make them' (Shusterman 2007, p.229). But when Lev asks what they believe, this is the answer he is given by a Clapper leader:

> If you're asking if we have a cause, we don't, so get that out of your head… Causes are old news. We believe in randomness. Earthquakes! Tornadoes! We believe in forces of nature—and *we* are forces of nature. We are havoc. We're chaos. We mess with the world. (Shusterman 2007, p. 229)

While Lev doesn't go through with it in the end, two other teens in his cell do. The clappers themselves in *Unwind* do not appear to be fighting for freedom in their purpose, though the organization behind the clappers – those who use them – are not revealed in either *Unwind* or the recent sequel, *Unwholly* (Shusterman 2012).

Shusterman doesn't glorify these acts of random violence; far from it. He gives a glimpse inside the heads of those who are seduced by chaos:

> Who can say what goes through the mind of a clapper in the moments before carrying out that evil deed? No doubt whatever those thoughts are, they are lies. However, like all dangerous deceptions, the lies that clappers tell themselves wear seductive guises.

> For clappers who have been led to believe their acts are smiled upon by God, their lie is clothed in holy robes and has outstretched arms promising a reward that will never come.
>
> For clappers who believe their act will somehow bring about change in the world, their lie is disguised as a crowd looking back at them from the future, smiling in appreciation for what they've done.
>
> For clappers who seek only to share their personal misery with the world, their lie is an image of themselves freed from their pain by witnessing the pain of others.
>
> And for clappers who are driven by vengeance, their lie is a scale of justice, weighted evenly on both sides, finally in balance.
>
> It is only when a clapper brings his hands together that the lie reveals itself, abandoning the clapper in that final instant so that he exits this world utterly alone, without so much as a lie to accompany him into oblivion.
>
> (Shusterman 2007, pp.304-305).

Like in this example, Shusterman's views are often explicit. I'd rather he let the story say it: it says it very well.

In Shusterman's sequel *Unwholly* (2012), teenager Connor is the reluctant leader of hundreds of runaway Unwinds – AWOLS – hiding in a desert airplane graveyard. Addressing some new arrivals, including one, Starkey, who wants to blow up all the 'chop shops' where teens are unwound, Connor says:

> I'm sorry to disappoint you, but we will *not* be blowing up Chop Shops…They already see us as violent, and the Juvies use public fear to justify unwinding. We can't feed into that. We're not clappers. We will not commit random acts of violence. We will think before we act…
> (Shusterman 2012, p.29)

Starkey was storked: left on a doorstep, unwanted. Under law, storked babies must be kept and raised, but once they are teenagers can be unwound. Connor does go on raids to rescue teens about to be taken for unwinding and confronts their parents, but unnecessary violence isn't used. Starkey, on the other hand, soon goes on secret, violent raids of his own, on a mission to

rescue other storked kids. By the end of *Unwholly*, he has escaped with a large group of storks:

> …this time it won't just be a handful of avenging storks, it will be all of them: a guerrilla army 128 strong, heaping punishment on anyone who would unwind a stork. Their numbers will grow with each stork they rescue…in time they could take down entire harvest camps. (Shusterman 2012, p.377)

Starkey's goals in *Unwholly* are vengeance, destruction and the pursuit of personal power. But *Unwholly* ends with Connor and Lev contemplating their next move, suggesting they will set up another group whose goal will be to end unwinding. The methods they want to use appear to be nonviolent, and they may be freedom fighters in a true sense, but whether this will be the case awaits the next book in the series.

In Patrick Ness's award winning *Chaos Walking* trilogy (Ness 2008, 2009, 2010), men and boys can hear the thoughts of all those around them, but not women and girls: their thoughts are their own, and they are unaffected by the virus that causes men to hear this endless 'noise'. In the first instalment, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008), Todd is told all the women of his town, his mother included, died from an illness released by the indigenous Spackle. In truth the men, led by Mayor Prentiss, killed them because they couldn't hear their thoughts. When a scout spaceship crashes and Viola is the only survivor, Viola and Todd escape and run towards Haven as war erupts around them. When they reach what they hope will be safety, they find Mayor Prentiss.

In the second instalment, *The Ask and the Answer* (2009), Todd and Viola are separated and civil war escalates. Viola becomes part of a group of women, led by healer, Mistress Coyle – The Answer – that form a resistance and begin a bombing campaign against Prentiss. The Answer were used in a previous war against the Spackle, as the women, having no noise, were the only ones who could sneak up on anyone.

Viola is initially resistant to joining The Answer, horrified by the bombs they use. But when she must flee to their camp and later sees the state of tortured and starved prisoners rescued, and witnesses the death of Corinne, another healer, she says she is ready: she'll do anything (Ness 2009, p.299).

The sequence of events have Viola taking steps she would previously thought unthinkable. Are the women of the Answer terrorists, or freedom fighters? Their organization originated in the war against the Spackle; they learned the way to win is with bombs. Prentiss argues to Todd that if The Answer wins, it will be replacing one tyrant with another (Ness 2009, p.505). A similar theme also arises in *Mockingjay* when Katniss realizes that the head of the Resistance played the Capitol and other districts against each other, then swooped in to take power (Collins 2010, p.421).

As Viola quotes in *The Ask and the Answer*, and Ness uses as the title of his third book: 'War makes monsters of men' (Ness 2009, p.102). Coyle, The Answer's leader, says this about war:

> If you ever see a war…you'll learn that war only destroys. No one escapes from a war. No one. Not even the survivors. You accept things that would appal you at any other time because life has temporarily lost all meaning.
> (Ness 2009, p.)

There is a tendency for many YA dystopian novels to frame teens as freedom fighters, tearing down an unjust system built by adults, such as Katniss in *Mockingjay*. Moira Young views dystopian novels as a hero's journey:

> …the teenage protagonist…cross the threshold into a world of darkness and danger, of allies and enemies, and begin a journey towards their own destiny that will change their world. They will be tested, often to the very edge of death. The stakes are high. The adults are the oppressors. The children are the liberators.
> (Young 2011)

Using bombs and death to achieve political objectives by coercion and spreading terror is terrorism (Casesse 2006). In my view, if the same methods are used in a war of liberation against an unjust, oppressive system, nothing changes: terrorists aren't freedom fighters if their violent acts are the same. While it is hard not to be on the side of the causes behind the Resistance in *Mockingjay* (Collins, 2010) and The Answer in *The Ask and the Answer* (Ness, 2009), they both use the methods of terrorism to achieve their ends.

Collins in *Mockingjay* (2010) ably shows the horrors of war, the terrible cost to survivors, and how Katniss was manipulated to be the symbol of the Resistance. Yet teens at the screening of The Hunger Games film I went to were all chanting 'Down with the Capitol': in that moment, they were part of the Resistance, part of the fight. In the *Chaos Walking* series the adults are largely evil or indifferent: only Todd and Viola can save the day (Ness 2008, 2009, 2010). The overall message of youth against evil adults is established again. Similarly in *Unwind* (2007) and *Unwholly* (2012), even the anti-divisional resistance, adults who help AWOLS escape, are portrayed in a poor light.

Despite the messages of the horror of war in many of these novels, this genre taken overall could easily leave the impression that the only way to deal with problems is with violence. Is there any place for pacifism in these future worlds? In *The Ask and the Answer*, Corinne, one of the healers, refuses to fight:

> Everyone here is someone's daughter… Every soldier out there is someone's son. The only crime, the *only* crime is to take a life. There is nothing else.
> (Ness 2009 p.215)

Paradoxically, it is Corinne's death that persuades Viola to join The Answer and their bombs – the one thing that would have horrified Corinne more than anything. If everyone felt like Corinne in *The Ask and the Answer* (Ness 2009), there would be no war, yet in the story she dies a horrible death for her beliefs.

The impact this examination of dystopian YA fiction had on the writing of *Slated* (Terry 2012a) and the look forward to *Fractured* (Terry, in press) follows in the next section.

D. Slated as dystopian YA

1. Violence and the Genre

> We are carried on the backs of all the writers who came before us. We live in the present with all the history, ideas and soda pop of the time. It all gets mixed up in our writing.
> (Goldberg 1986, p. 79)

To Goldberg, writing is a communal act. I wasn't consciously aware of dystopian novels for this age group as a genre when I started *Slated* (Terry 2012a). At that point I had read *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, the first book of Chaos Walking (Ness 2008) and *Pretties*, book 2 of The Uglies trilogy (Westerfeld 2005b) as a small part of the soup of everything I was reading, but had not yet heard of the *Hunger Games* (Collins 2008). I read the latter and many more along the way after I became interested in the genre as a result of writing *Slated*.

Reading widely in this genre was sometimes difficult. In particular, I found reading *The Ask and the Answer* (Ness 2009) distressing, both the events that take place and the powerlessness of the protagonists in the story. I haven't been able to face the third book of this trilogy, and doubt I ever will. With *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008), by the time I'd got to *Mockingjay* (Collins 2010), the final instalment, I felt more hardened against it. It bothered me less than the opener, partly because it seemed more cartoon—almost like a violent video game. The death within it was less confronting than those of the children in *The Hunger Games*. But when I read *The Ask and the Answer* I had

to stop writing for a while. Combining this with watching the summer 2011 riots play out in the media, I felt creatively frozen.

I am also concerned about the current lack of balance in science fiction for the young. As Philip Reeve states:

> More worrying still is the absence of any counterbalance. Half of the science-fiction stories that I read in my teens seemed to predict terrible ends for us all, but the other half concerned themselves with bright, shining futures in which human beings would spread out among the stars… It's as if optimism has become so hopelessly quaint that we can no longer allow ourselves even to imagine a better future… What sort of future awaits a society whose young people are taught that there's nothing to look forward to but decline and disaster, and that decline and disaster may be all that they deserve?
> (Reeve 2011 p.3)

Despite my concerns regarding lack of balance and the violence-conquers-all message I fear can be taken from the genre as a whole, *Slated* (Terry 2012a) was still my story to write: one I felt I had to write. However, the misgivings I felt as a result of reading widely in dystopian YA fiction influenced the writing of *Slated*.

I didn't want to make every adult either evil or indifferent as often seems the case in dystopian literature for the young. I made a conscious choice to make my characters multi-faceted, to avoid having good and evil be black and white. A character like Dr Lysander could easily have been cast as a pure villain, but what lies behind her careful eyes? Likewise Kyla's new mother in *Slated*, who over the course of writing evolved from an unsympathetic, unpleasant woman to one of the few people Kyla can trust. Even the teenage bully Phoebe has a caring side with animals, and a family life that may explain her hostility to the two-legged variety.

But most of all, I wanted to show terrorism as ugly, for what it is: that terrorist bullets leave behind pools of blood (Terry 2012a, p.270); that

regardless of purpose, terrorist bombs are indiscriminate in action. They can kill the innocent, like a busload of school children, as easily as Lorders (Terry, 2012a, p.170).

When Kyla's dad asks her what she thinks of the terrorists, she muses to herself about them blowing up students and killing nurses, before answering that they are evil (Terry 2012a, p.280). Knowing that being a terrorist is one of the crimes that can get you Slated, she fears what lurks in her own past: 'Whoever Kyla is, there is another person hiding away. And it is her I am afraid of, most of all' (Terry 2012a, p.175). When the violent confrontation at the end of *Slated* causes her memories to return, memories of being trained as a terrorist, her fears are confirmed (Terry 2012a, p.438).

While you do the see the ugly side of violence in many dystopian YA novels, such as those discussed above, in these and many others you also see the terrible seductiveness of violence as a means to an end, in support of the cause behind it. Looking towards writing *Fractured* (Terry, in press), I found myself moving away from my original plan to show terrorism from both sides through one character – victim, and terrorist – and more wanting to show the wrongness of using violence no matter the provocation. Terrorists aren't the good guys even if you can understand why they became what they are, and why they do what they do; whether they are viewed as terrorists or so-called freedom fighters is a matter of perspective. I've no doubt this is in part a personal reaction to the violence in all the dystopian novels I've been reading.

However strongly I feel personally about the writing resolutions made above, one thing I don't want is to tell readers to think the way I do. To me the story must stand on its merits without an authorial voice creeping in. Sambell's view of the dystopian novel for the young becoming an inquisitory space where the reader supplies their own interpretations is one I subscribe to (Sambell 2003).

Writing *Slated* also involved confronting uneasiness with creating my own violent content. I suspect at least part of the reason I previously avoided violent or scary stories in my own reading and viewing habits is because of the way my mind works. Numerous times I've seen an accident that nearly happens, and in a flash have imagined that it did, in every horrible detail, and all the emotional fallout to those involved. And I try to avoid thinking about these things, much like I tried – and failed – to push out the terrorist attacks of 9-11, Bali and London.

But what happened when I let go of these conscious restraints and dived into the scenes that worried me so much?

> …when we write and begin with an empty page and a heart unsure, a famine of thoughts, a fear of no feeling – just begin from there, from that electricity. This kind of writing is uncontrolled, is not sure where the outcome is, and it begins in ignorance and darkness. But facing those things, writing from that place, will eventually break us and open us to the world as it is. Out of this tornado of fear will come a genuine writing voice.
> (Goldberg 1986 p.106)

It was very tempting to avoid facing the difficult scenes, and have things happen off-stage more than served the story. For example, with the scene in chapter 45 of *Slated* (Terry 2012a, pp.372-389) where Ben's Levo is cut off and he has apparently lethal seizures, I seemed to need to sneak up on it. I originally wrote that it happened off-stage, and Kyla didn't know exactly what happened: she just knew he was planning to do it, raced to stop him but found she was too late, and the Lorders were taking him away. Over the course of rewrites I realized it needed to be where the reader could see it; perhaps even more, it needed to be where I could see it. And this allowed Kyla's involvement and subsequent feelings of guilt at her role, and so enriched the story.

Curiously, despite the dread I felt of writing action scenes such as the terrorist attack on Kyla's hospital in chapter 34 of *Slated* (Terry 2012a, pp.263-274), and especially more violent scenes essential to the story in the coming sequel, *Fractured* (Terry, in press), I didn't find them difficult to write once I resolved to do so. Writing is obviously a different experience to reading: I'm in control. Plus my mind is busy imagining these things in graphic detail whether I want it to or not. So what I was avoiding and fearing worked itself out when plunged into my own tornado of fear.

2. The Move to a Trilogy

Many recent successful YA dystopian novels are in trilogies. *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008, 2009, 2010) *Chaos Walking* (Ness 2008, 2009, 2010) and the *Ugly* series (Westerfeld 2005a, 2005b, 2006) are examples, but there are many more.

As mentioned previously, when I began *Slated* (Terry 2012a) I intended it to be a single novel that would contain more or less what is now books one and two. While I was aware of the trend in this genre for trilogies, and was open to the idea because of it, the change was motivated by narrative demands. If *Slated* was to be a single novel, the section that is now the first book had to fit into roughly 20,000 words for the story structure to work in the frame of one novel of a reasonable length. But the further I got into writing, the more I realized that I couldn't do justice to this essential – and to me, overwhelmingly fascinating – part of the story with this word limit.

By autumn 2010 this section was in fact about 17,000 words. But I saw it as undeveloped. The character development didn't work to me in that span: more space was required to take Kyla from a newly released Slated, to someone who is increasingly capable of judgement, decision, and action, to

the return of her hidden memories. More and more I was realizing that the key to *Slated* was Kyla's search for identity.

Kyla asks Ben '…how can I know who I am now, if I don't know who I was?' (Terry 2012a, p. 170). Focusing on this aspect of Kyla's story, I became increasingly aware that at least part of my obsession with the identity issue has personal roots.

My background is that my mother, father and I were all born in different countries. Moving frequently, I've lived on three continents, and never near any extended family. Since moving to the UK in 2004 I've been in one place, and now have lived in Buckinghamshire longer than anywhere I've ever been in my life. So although my memories are intact, Kyla's struggle with not knowing who she is or where she comes from is a personal struggle.

Changing *Slated* to the first book of a trilogy also led to problems with the divide between books one and two. Kyla's internal story in *Slated* is essentially her search for identity after Slating, and the threat of who she was before coming through more and more from her unconscious in her dreams. It ends when the confrontation with Wayne causes the barriers to come down enough for her past to enter her conscious mind. In the sequel, *Fractured*, she is thus a changed person with new memories (Terry, in press).

The problem in dividing the two books wasn't a problem as such to me in the writing of *Slated*: I was always completely convinced *Slated* had to end exactly where it did. This instinctive decision gave an ending where not everything is resolved. When I was challenged in the editing process about the ending and examined it more closely, I was and am still convinced of the rightness of this decision. The two books are divided by the changes that take place in Kyla with the return of these memories.

As a reader, I don't like cliff-hangers for the sake of them; not as a deliberate ploy to make readers get the next book. In my view this is just as likely to alienate readers as to keep them. If I found a way to more neatly round off my story in the first book that felt right and made sense to the story and characters, I would have strongly considered it. Though I would argue that the ending to *Slated* is not a cliff-hanger in the usual sense. Kyla is no longer in any immediate jeopardy; there is at least some resolution of the main question of *Slated*: her *who am I?* dilemma. Where I split the story was more of a challenge when writing *Fractured*, when the inciting incident essentially happened at the end of *Slated*.

3. How Slated fits (or doesn't) in the YA Dystopian Box

As noted in the introduction, I've been writing and submitting to agents and publishers for years. When I started *Slated* (Terry 2012a), I made the decision that I was going to write it as I wanted without deliberately catering for my ideas of what the industry might want: I'd been wrong on that before, so there didn't seem much point in attempting to second guess. While it was still my ultimate goal to produce something publishable, I didn't want obsession with that to taint the process. So although I was immersed in YA fiction and aware of the trends generally and with dystopian fiction in particular, I made a conscious decision to not attempt to shoe-horn what I wanted to write into any genre box.

Once I'd written 'The End', though, the nerves set in. Most YA dystopian novels are full of action and bloodshed that rise to one high-stakes, bloody climax, but that isn't a story I could write, or would even want to. *Slated* is more a slow build of tension and a character study than a dystopian action fest. With the original one book plot this would have been less of a concern than what *Slated* became with the move to a trilogy. This worried me as far as

how it would be received by agents and editors, though time has shown that this was not an impediment.

Interestingly, when it came time for submissions by my new agent of *Slated* to publishers, and then later on, the early marketing and publicity of *Slated* by my publisher, the word 'dystopian' was never used. Instead *Slated* was referred to variously as a psychological thriller, or a futuristic thriller. Likewise it was never referred to as science fiction.

This label dodging was in part the subject of my blog post on a science fiction panel event in May 2012 (Terry 2012c). The trend seems to be that in YA the science fiction tag is avoided. For a while the dystopian label was popular; then, with fears of saturation in the industry, it went out of vogue; now, with *The Hunger Games* film release, it seems to be acceptable to call it dystopian once again. But as I said in the blog, I don't care what they call it, as long as it gets out there and into the hands of readers (Terry 2012c).

E. Writing Process: balancing the internal creator and editor

> …there is another element…the critic rather than the artist. It must work continually with and through the emotional and childlike side, or we have no work of art. If either element of the artist's character gets too far out of hand the result will be bad work, or no work at all. The writer's first task is to get these two elements of his nature into balance, to combine their aspects into one integrated character. (Brande 1934, pp.38-39)

In the past I have not been a plotter. While I generally write a rough synopsis quite early on with a new story so I have an idea what it is about, I love writing into the unknown with no visible guidelines, and feeling the magic when characters surprise me with what must happen next. I was afraid that if I deliberately plotted, the magic would disappear.

Yet it is also fair to say that many of my past writing efforts had problems with structure. At some level I was aware it was an issue that needed to be addressed, but felt unease at doing so for the reason noted above. When *Slated* (Terry 2012a) went from one book to a trilogy, it couldn't be avoided.

I paraphrase Dorothy Brande's artist and critic as meaning that both the creator and the editor in my writing self must play a role: I was beginning to realize that I gave the creator too much free rein. Without the editor taking part this gives an out of balance result.

For the first time I did detailed chapter outlines in a table, which I updated regularly. At the time of the decision of moving from one book to three, I analyzed the chapter outlines at that point: what was missing? The beginning

and ending were in place; there wasn't enough middle. I sketched new subplots into the chapter outline before writing them.

Ben's role in the story was expanded, both to raise the stakes for Kyla in finding out what has happened in her past, and to have his fate be part of what drives her forward in *Fractured* (Terry, in press). He is Slated, but doesn't have unconscious memories coming through like Kyla does to make him different. I knew he couldn't be a realistic relationship interest for Kyla if he was just a blank, smiling Slated boy, and I needed him to have impetus to act in cutting off his Levo, something a Slated would normally never dare attempt. It was a dilemma. The running answered part of the problem, as endorphins gave both Ben and Kyla a logical way to get around the monitoring effects of their Levos, allowing Ben to think for himself. There is more behind Ben's actions in cutting off his Levo that will come out in *Fractured*, yet I had to make readers of *Slated*, without this knowledge, believe his actions were reasonably possible. I found the solution with Aiden's Happy Pills: they gave him another way to be different, to be able to think for himself.

Plot analysis at this early stage also revealed insufficient showing of the degree of Lorder control in the world created. Additional subplots that were added to address this were Phoebe's story, and that of Kyla's art teacher, Gianelli: both taken by Lorders. Both Phoebe and Gianelli were already present in the story, but their roles were expanded.

I also focused more closely on the memory aspects of the story. Everything is new to Kyla, including emotional reactions and how to relate to others. I wanted to show this, but had to balance this against slowing down the pace in the opening chapters. She had to progress from quite simple in some ways to being very quickly able to make judgements about people and their reactions, even though she herself had trouble hiding her feelings or reacting appropriately.

The amount of planning I did with *Slated* well exceeded my normal levels. This was essential with the intricacies of plot, and especially with the decision to move from one book to three. Despite my misgivings at this, it seems that providing these boundaries allowed the creator freedom inside of them, without any where-are-we-going stress intruding; at least, most of the time.

I'm now a converted planner! Overall, I strongly feel that increasing the role of my internal editor in the planning stages of *Slated* gave a far improved result.

F. Conclusions

> Sometimes you have to begin far away from the answer and then down-spiral back to it. Writing is the act of discovery. You want to discover your relationship with a topic, not the dictionary definition. (Goldberg 1986, p.97)

This is very much how I feel now when I look back at writing *Slated* (Terry 2012a). When I wrote those first pages I didn't know where I was going, if I wanted to, or why. I answered these questions for myself and *Slated* is the result.

The personal discomfort I felt with violence in YA fiction generally and dystopian YA in particular led to an analysis of the portrayal of terrorists and terrorism within this genre. This gave me a clearer idea of why I wanted to write these books, and how. For me the terrorist will never be a freedom fighter, no matter how just the cause. But this is show, don't tell: I agree with Sambell (2003) that the essence of my version of dystopian fiction for the young must be about providing a place to think, not being told what those thoughts should be.

That debate about whether stories for the young must provide hope: for me, the answer is yes. I'd go beyond this to say that this is true for me as a writer, no matter the age group. My approach to writing is summed up perfectly by Monica Hughes:

> There is the initiating "what if?" question; the necessity of a gripping plot; and always, at the end, the necessity of nurturing hope. These elements form, I hope, a paradigm of our own journey through this precarious world—and what writing for children is all about. (Hughes 2003, p.160)

This essential challenge of writing a dystopian novel for YA readers, one I'm becoming increasingly aware of as I contemplate the third book of my trilogy, is in coming up with a resolution that provides at least some hope for the characters and their future, but one that does no violence to a logical end to the story in the world created. This is both the authorial decision of where you ultimately stand, and the challenge of plot that makes it so much fun to write:

> Dystopian worlds are exciting! But the end result must never be nihilism and despair. Luckily for the writer, these very tensions lead to the development of plot, much as the grit within the oyster gives birth to the pearl.
> (Hughes 2003, p.156)

While writing *Slated* I also became increasingly aware that the identity issues so crucial to my main character had personal roots. I also suspect my short attention span in writing – always hopping to new things in the past – is a reflection of always moving on to new places and things in my life, and never staying anywhere long enough to get to the hard bits. With *Slated* I grappled with the hard bits, and I'm pleased with the results.

Also I hope I've learned to trust the Muse and where it wants to take me. I spent so much time denying that I wanted to think about the terrorism issues raised within *Slated* – let alone write about them – but it was a losing battle. As Goldberg states:

> Writers end up writing about their obsessions. Things that haunt them; things they can't forget; stories they carry in their bodies waiting to be released.
> (Goldberg 1986, p.38)

Despite a sense of terror that once it is in print it is the way it is forever and cannot be changed again, I'm happy with *Slated*, with what I've learned both

about writing it and myself along the way. And I went from someone who was afraid to focus on one novel for long enough to see it through properly, to someone who has voluntarily signed up to write a trilogy. Not quite sure how that happened!

Moving ahead, although the exploration of terrorism continues in *Fractured*, identity issues really predominate: the initial focus has shifted. Story and character have taken over, and whatever justification and mental gymnastics I felt I needed at the beginning to get on with writing *Slated*, they are in charge.

And as I sat down to write *Fractured*, and soon will be approaching the third yet-to-named book of my trilogy, the blank pages are as they are always: frightening. Magical. I have heard many authors tell of second book terrors: that once they have had one book published, the second was a nightmare to produce. I thought as mine was a trilogy, and I knew my characters and their world, this wouldn't apply in the same way. How wrong I was! As Natalie Goldberg says:

> …every time we begin, we wonder how we ever did it before. Each time is a new journey with no maps.
> (Goldberg 1986, p.5)

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