

“We have to fix this world now”

Hope, utopianism, and new modes of political agency in two contemporary Finnish young adult dystopias

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Literature for children and juveniles is often considered utopian by nature. For many centuries, the Western tradition of children’s fiction has cherished the myth of childhood being an innocent, happy, and idyllic time. As Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry suggest in their introductory chapter to *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003, 5), there are two reasons for the deeply rooted association between childhood and utopia in Western thinking. First, there is a long tradition of regarding childhood itself as utopian, as a space and time apart from adult

life and all its worries. Secondly, the utopianism and utopian writing seem to play an important and unique function in the socialization and education of children.

Considering this connection between childhood and utopianism, it is very interesting that a considerable amount of twenty-first century fiction addressing young readers involves antithetical themes: young adult (YA) literature has tended toward dystopian visions of the near future. World-famous and commercially successful crossover authors like Suzanne Collins and Veronica Roth have embedded the dystopia genre indelibly into contemporary western young adult fiction.

Dystopian works always reflect our fears. The political landscape of our time is filled with horror visions of the future, such as climate change and huge economic crises, so it could be claimed that our cultural conversation has strong dystopian undertones. Some theorists even talk about the millennial obsession with the apocalypse (see, for example, Barton 2016, 5). Although often considered a negative and hopeless genre, dystopian works addressing young audiences also feature utopian tendencies and the hope for a better future. In particular, such works often depict young characters with the power to change society. In this article, I will take a closer look at hope, utopianism, and the new modes of agency that contemporary YA dystopias seem to offer to young readers.

Literary scholars have already written much about the current popularity of YA dystopias. Indeed, anthologies have been published about the topic, such as *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* (2013) and *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003). Researchers have been keenly interested in international bestsellers and dystopian YA fiction published in English. However, the dystopian boom in many other Western language areas has been overlooked. For

example, the amount of contemporary dystopian fiction aimed at juvenile readers in the Nordic Countries has been remarkable.

In this article, I consider Finnish contemporary YA dystopias, a genre that has seen pronounced growth over the last ten years. In general, the whole genre of dystopian fiction is relatively young in Finnish literature. There are some early examples, but the genre began to take off in the 1990s. Specifically YA dystopian literature entered the scene even later – mostly in the 2010s. Considering the relatively brief existence of Finnish YA dystopias, it is surprising that so many works have been published. Finnish authors such as Emmi Itäranta, Siiri Enoranta, Laura Lähteenmäki, Anu Holopainen, Salla Simukka, K. K. Alongi, and Siri Kolu have established the dystopia as a genre in Finnish YA literature. In addition, Finnish dystopias for child and pre-teen audiences have recently been published by Vuokko Hurme and Timo Parvela (with the Norwegian author Bjørn Sortland). So far, the only internationally known Finnish YA dystopia is Emmi Itäranta’s *Memory of Water* (2012), which is available to the international audience because the author wrote and published the book simultaneously in both English and Finnish.

I will take a closer look at two Finnish YA novels: Siiri Enoranta’s *Nokkosvallankumous* (*Nettle Revolution* 2013) and K. K. Alongi’s *Kevätuhrit* (*Spring Sacrifices* 2015). Neither of these novels has been translated, and all quotations are my own translations. Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution* is an example of dystopian YA fantasy. The novel describes a future world so contaminated that the sun no longer shines and the land is covered with endless clouds of pollution. Plants barely grow because of the lack of sunlight, and food scarcity is a major issue for ordinary people. To make matters worse, nuclear accidents have contaminated the land and water, making people sick. The authorities – the evil and corrupt Ministry – have long pretended to operate according

to the rules and principles of democracy, but in reality, they have allied themselves with the unscrupulous “perinists,” who wish to rule the world uncontested. In the novel, nation states have collapsed, and the world is dominated by a totalitarian regime, though many rebel organizations fight against it. K. K. Alongi’s *Spring Sacrifices* is more of a post-apocalypse, and compared to Enoranta’s fantasy novel, *Spring Sacrifices* is very realistic. It is set in Helsinki – the capital of Finland – in the near future. One seemingly ordinary day, almost everyone in Helsinki, Finland, and apparently the whole world mysteriously dies. Only a few teenagers survive.

Dystopian worlds, especially in the post-disaster stories that both *Nettle Revolution* and *Spring Sacrifices* represent, are often dark and gloomy. Nevertheless, they also convey hope for a better future or opportunities for the young protagonists to change the damaged world they inherit. In both novels, the young characters have both the opportunity and the obligation to change the ruined world around them. Scholars of dystopian fiction seem to agree that in the case of YA dystopias, the element of hope is a necessity. As Alexa Weik Von Mossner (2013, 70) writes, the young reader expects and needs stories that at least promise the possibility of a better world. I would not claim that this is something young readers themselves need, but rather something that we adults (want to) believe that adolescents need. However, a certain amount of hopefulness seems to be distinctive to YA dystopias as a genre.

YA dystopias falling between the dystopia/utopia dichotomy

Dystopian fiction brings our greatest fears to life and lets us experience terrifying visions of future through experience of fictive characters. Dystopian literature is often opposed to utopian fiction. M. Keith Booker (1994, 3) defines dystopia as literature that positions itself in opposition to utopian thought and warns against the potential negative results of arrant utopianism. He notes that dystopian literature constitutes a critique toward existing conditions or political systems in two ways. Firstly, it extends those conditions or systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws, and secondly, it critically examines the utopian premises upon which those conditions or systems are based. Booker’s definition covers important aspects of dystopian fiction and it is a good definition for classical dystopian literature (about classical dystopia, see, for example, Moylan 2000, 121). Contemporary dystopian fiction, however, seems to be a more open genre that often borrows from other literary traditions. Many theorists (like Bradford et al. 2008; Day et al. 2014, 8) have classified the dystopia as a mode rather than a genre, meaning dystopian features may appear in texts that would more generally be considered to represent broader genres. In YA dystopias, for example, certain generic features of young adult literature intermix with the generic features of dystopia.

When it comes to YA dystopias, the most problematic aspect of Booker’s definition is its apparent exclusion of the apocalypse or post-apocalypse from the umbrella term of “dystopian literature.” Apocalyptic works portray the end of the world, so they are eschatological narratives. Eschatology in a theologian sense refers to the end of the world, the end of the time, or the ultimate destiny of humanity. Outside eschatological religious narrative

texts, apocalypses hardly ever portray the end of the entire world. In modern apocalyptic narratives, the apocalypse is more likely to be some form of catastrophe (Heffernan 2008, 6). Post-apocalyptic fiction tells stories that depict life after the apocalypse or great catastrophe. As a genre, post-apocalyptic fiction therefore depicts human survival after some great catastrophe. These kinds of stories do not fit into Booker's definition, since the cause of the bad and terrifying future depicted in post-apocalyptic narratives may not be caused by "arrant utopianism" but rather by the pure recklessness, extravagance, or irresponsibility of humankind – or just by uncontrollable natural forces. Therefore, I consider contemporary dystopia as an open genre, that explores fearful visions of future.

In Finnish contemporary YA dystopia, the cause of the suffering in the fictive world is most often some kind of climatic or ecological catastrophe. In Alongi's novel, the cause of the epidemic is not revealed in the first book of the trilogy. In *Nettle Revolution*, however, it is clear that ecocide and food shortages have created a power vacuum, leading to an unequal and totalitarian society. These kinds of ecological themes are also common in contemporary dystopian YA fiction in other European cultures. Our current climatic and ecological fears seem to make the post-apocalypse the more current and topical genre than the classic societal dystopia when considering humankind's future in the face of climate change. This does not mean that dystopian YA novels do not utilize the generic repertoire of the classic dystopian tradition, where an evil, corrupt, and unequal society lies at the center of the narrative. The same story can be a post-apocalypse and a societal dystopia, as we will later see. In this article, I use the broader understanding of dystopian fiction, meaning stories that depict a grim, corrupt, and fearful future.

Here, I understand the apocalypse and the post-apocalypse as subgenres of dystopian fiction.

Nevertheless, the connection between utopia and dystopia in Booker’s definition is very important. The concepts are often understood as simple binary oppositions of each other. Tom Moylan (2000, 122) has argued, however, that dystopias are located on a spectrum ranging from utopia to anti-utopia. A dystopia is not the reverse of a utopia. Often a dystopia extends a utopia to its extreme, and every dystopian society has some utopian undertones. The dystopia is therefore more of a liminal genre (Moylan 2000, 122; Basu et al. 2013, 2; Day 2014, 9). This is especially important in YA dystopias, which seem to include more hope than dystopias aimed at adult readers.

Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution* utilizes the conceptions of utopia and dystopia in a clever way. The novel has a structure based on two parallel worlds. Most of the narration concentrates on the dystopian present of the novel, but the two protagonists and firstperson narrators – Vayu and Dharan – are able to visit a place they call paradise. This parallel universe is a kind of pastoral idyll, where there is a flowery summer, the fields are fertile, and people live in the sort of abundance that the inhabitants of the primary world could scarcely comprehend:

The city was surrounded by a zone, up to a hundred meters wide, filled with such a flaming color that I found it difficult to breath, and I did not instantly understand what they were: flowers, millions of different flowers, every color that could be imagined. I just had to guess it would smell like that in the garden of the gods. We stared at it for a long time in astonishment, but we didn’t talk about it yet. We would not go there yet. Not now. The free land, wind, grass, water, and both of us understood that everything there was built with respect for nature, not to its cost. (*Nettle Revolution*, 109)

The depiction resembles a mythical story of a paradise lost. In the fictional world of the novel, this secondary world shows the planet as it would have been in the present moment if humanity had not destroyed the Earth. The parallelism between these two worlds interestingly thematizes time, history, and causality, which are all important themes in the dystopian genre. This parallel structure between the two fictive worlds also seems to question the strict dichotomy between utopia and dystopia.

New political agency of adolescents in YA dystopias

Many theorists have noted that YA dystopias often utilize some elements of the *bildungsroman* genre (see Lauer 2013, 44; Hintz 2002, 255). This is only natural when considering adolescent literature as a whole, as it has its origins in this genre. However, when we compare the two traditions of dystopian fiction and the classic *bildungsroman*, we notice that the actual ethos is profoundly different when it comes to the relationship between the young protagonist(s) and society. In the classical *bildungsroman*, the young – usually male – protagonist discovers himself and his social role often through hard experiences of the realities of the world (Lauer 2013, 45). By contrast, in traditional dystopian YA fiction, society is so bad that children or teenagers cannot rely on the adults already in power. Their task is no to adapt to the society around them, but to change it. I find this difference important: dystopian fiction for young readers is often subversive by nature.

The *bildungsroman* traditionally depicts a young protagonist's development from childhood toward adulthood and all the responsibilities adults have in society. This is the fundamental

idea behind the whole concept of growing up. Dystopian YA fiction, however, seems to challenge the ideology of children learning from the adults and becoming fully authorized members of society. In YA dystopias, adolescent heroes learn that adults in authority are not necessarily good or trustworthy, and they must take matters in their own hands (Lauer 2013, 46).

In the post-apocalyptic reality of *Spring Sacrifices*, all the adults are dead, only teenagers (and not even all of them) are left alive. There exists an important difference between older and younger teenagers. Teenagers over 17 years old have transformed. They look the same, but they have started to act aggressively. They torture and kill everyone they see. The teenagers closer to adulthood are therefore dangerous and sick, and the young protagonists have no one other than their same-age peers to trust. In the dystopian world of *Nettle Revolution*, few people live long enough to grow old. People tend to die when they reach adulthood due to radiation poisoning and starvation; only the ruling powers have enough supplies to stay sufficiently healthy to live to old age. Therefore, adolescents at least partially hold power in both fictional worlds.

This is of course not the case in our contemporary reality. The role of young people in society could be said to be liminal when considered in the context of political structures and institutional practices. In some contexts, young people are treated as competent, responsible, and liable, whereas in other contexts, they are perceived as incompetent, irresponsible, and unreliable. This liminality or “in-betweenness” in relation to the state’s legal and political practices makes young people interesting and unique political subjects (Skelton 2010, 145).

When discussing adolescents as political subjects, we must also discuss citizenship. The application of citizenship to minors is challenging, especially since as political actors, underage

citizens are only partly entitled to participate in political decisionmaking. Thus, children are marginalized within the framework of modern Western citizenship. Dystopias, especially the postapocalyptic sort, offer interesting opportunities for social agency and make it possible to look at young people in a new way. I argue that this kind of child citizenship often becomes thematically important in contemporary YA literature. In post-apocalyptic or dystopian worlds, the old social hierarchies have collapsed or decisively changed: the social separation of powers is redefined, and the young characters are offered a new range of functional opportunities or obligations. Whereas contemporary society does not seem to offer teenagers much sense of political agency or an ability to influence society, dystopian fiction gives young people a role as political subjects.

Today's dystopian YA literary problematizes the role of young people as citizens and members of their community or nation. As we know, one of the main tasks of literature for children and youths has often been to raise its readers to become good citizens and obedient, helpful, and productive members of society. Literature aimed at young audiences in general aims to help young souls become socially eligible adults. In this respect, it is interesting that contemporary dystopian YA literature challenges the model of good citizenship. The central question in these dystopias often concerns what it means to be a good citizen in a society that is in some way corrupt, destructive, and evil (Flanagan 2013, 248).

Frequently – and especially in post-apocalypses – the world is going through some kind of post-nationalist stage where the nation is no longer a category that defines the world and its political power relations. This is the case in Enoranta's *Nettle Revolution*: Young people start a resistance movement called the “nettle children.” The movement consists of children and young

adults under 25 who are led by Dharan, one of the two first-person narrators of the novel. Dharan is only 16 years old, but he is already an experienced and sure-handed leader of a rebel group. He gives passionate political speeches, and he has the ability to win children and young people over to his side:

We are the nettles and our roots are stronger than theirs [the enemy’s]. ... Tonight, we will eat and the night after that too, but this food will not last long. This is less than we need. This is less than we deserve. We have to grow, my nettles, we have to grow stronger. And we have to beat the perinists. We are moving toward a new world where old attitudes have no place. (*Nettle Revolution*, 61)

Although young, Dharan wields real political power in the dystopian world of the novel. During the course of the story, the oppression grows, and hundreds of ordinary people come to join the rebel group, which is finally able to start a war against the oppressive regime. The adolescents are able to challenge the adults and take their future into their own hands. This kind of political agency is important and a common motif in contemporary YA dystopias.

As the above speech by Dharan shows, he can make rebellious nettle children believe that a new world is about to come. Dharan is a complex figure, and he often loses faith in his own abilities and goals – and in their purity. Still, he always has the ability to bring hope to the suffering children and young people. Hope is an important motif in both *Nettle Revolution* and *Spring Sacrifices*. Hope is, in general, a prerequisite for survival in a dystopian setting. In *Spring Sacrifices*, the brave teenagers in the middle of the fearful post-apocalypse want to give up more than once, but they are driven on by the hope for a better life.

Hope is also closely connected to resilience, something that gives people the ability to face difficulties and stops them giving up (McDonald & Stephenson 2010, viii). According to the philosopher Nancy Billias (2010, 20–22), hope is something that enables humans to exist in the present as well as in the future. The resilience that is achieved through hope enables humans to be in time and act in the world. To be human is to exist in a time that is always simultaneously the present and future. Hope gives humans the potential for agency: “Even minimal, nascent awareness of one’s existence as temporal, agential and relational demands one hopes; otherwise one cannot act.” This is always the timeline of dystopian fiction. The characters do not experience themselves in the eternal present, but rather “always in a present that is open to the future” (Billias 2010, 22).

The notion of development is an important and distinctive feature of the dystopia genre. As Margaret Atwood (2005, 93) notes in her essay “Writing Utopia,” utopia and dystopia are genres that tend to be produced only in cultures based on monotheism and that postulate a single goal-oriented timeline. Other cultures based on polytheism and the circularity of time do not seem to produce utopias or dystopias. As Atwood writes, “How can you define a good society as opposed to a bad one if you see good and bad as aspects of the same thing?” (Atwood 2005, 93) Dystopia always relies on the causal reasoning process, and dystopian fiction conceptualizes humans as beings with a future-oriented consciousness (Billias 2010, 23). The future belongs to the children and young people, and it is therefore no surprise that dystopian fiction so often chooses to depict young protagonists. Of course, the whole concept of the warning that is inevitably connected to the dystopian ethos is connected to hope. If dystopian fiction provides a warning, there must also be the potential for change.

Growing up under fearful conditions

In a sense, post-apocalyptic fiction is nostalgic, since it cherishes the idea of happier times prior to the current scenario. This is obvious in *Spring Sacrifices*, where the teenage protagonists suddenly lose everything. All the luxuries that adolescents in the industrialized West take for granted are suddenly gone. There is no more electricity or running water, and mobile phones stop working. There are no more adults to take care of them. The habitual lifestyle of the ordinary Finnish teenager vanishes in the blink of an eye. In *Spring Sacrifices*, the hardest hit by this is Susette, who had been the most popular girl in school before the catastrophe. The Barbie-like Susette has always been obsessed with her looks: “If she had been told two days ago that she would survive in the mornings without a shower, hairdryer, or hair straighteners, she wouldn’t have believed it” (*Spring Sacrifices*, 66). In this new, dystopian world, she must concentrate on more important things.

Susette and the other characters in the novel learn to survive without the conveniences of modern society, and they finally learn to be proud of their new abilities. Therefore, after the first shock, the new post-apocalyptic world order may lead to new solidarities, new modes of agency, and new value systems. For Jade, another girl character, the preponderance of death seems to have paradoxically made the world a better place. The whole story begins with Jade, who (as is later revealed) was planning to kill herself by jumping from a bridge. Jade is a marginalized problem teenager who had been shunted from one foster home to another. Her rebellious nature first prevents her from getting along with her peers, but during the story, she finds the courage to feel and to trust another human being: “Jade was used to the fact that nobody needed her, and that she didn’t need anybody, but over

the last hour she has finally began to understand that maybe it was time for her to change that opinion” (*Spring Sacrifices*, 286).

YA fiction often deals with the theme of growing up and becoming independent. An important condition for adolescents to gain their independence is having time and space to experiment apart from adults. In the realistic world of *Spring Sacrifices*, the total disappearance of communications technology also allows the young characters to grow up and become independent. This seems to be an especially important motif at a time when adolescents are constantly connected to their parents through their cellphones and therefore lack the freedom to develop their own distinct sense of self (Demerjian 2016, 131).

Although Alongi’s novel is an extreme scenario – i.e., children completely exempt from adult supervision – the story is quite common in Western children’s literature. In many books addressing young readers, young characters are isolated from adults and therefore forced to leave the safety of their homes. This is necessary in order for adventures to happen, but time away from the parents’ tender care also gives child characters the opportunity to grow up. For the very same reason, robinsonades – tales of a shipwreck and survival in nature – are such a common motif in children’s fiction. In fact, post-apocalypses can often be read as modern robinsonades, as the story centers on the survival of the protagonist(s) and isolation is the spur that makes mental development or growth possible. In Alongi’s novel, all the teenage characters change and develop – in other words, they grow up. They make mistakes, argue, and get tired or frustrated, but they also learn to take care of themselves and each other.

In Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution*, the milieu is important to the theme of the novel. The novel’s nettle children live in Huhtikaunaa, an abandoned amusement park, which is highly symbolic:

“We have to fix this world now”

Quickly calculated there, where about thirty rides in Huhtikaunaa. They squatted in the darkness like gigantic, sleeping insects. Children lived in the structures of almost every ride. There were dozens and dozens of them, like small birds in their nests. ... “This is the ghost ride, that is where I live, and over there is the jungle carousel – mostly girls live there. Behind the glowworm are the toilets and from the restaurant kitchen, one can get food twice a day, if we have any. ... On the top of the love boats we have built a rainwater system so that you can take a shower.” (*Nettle Revolution*, 78)

The eerie and empty amusement park emphasizes the premature end of childhood; this safe, innocent and happy time is lost in the dystopian world. Then again, the park is filled with nettle children and more arrive every day. They fill the abandoned rides like little birds. The amusement park environment becomes a utopian setting, with the adolescent’s own innovations and wealth and luxury built by their own hands. By using the amusement park for their own purposes, the nettle children take possession of power and remold the childhood milieu built by adults to suit their own needs.

Our saviors?

One of the main themes of contemporary dystopian fiction in general is the search to find a way to save the ruined world. Older dystopias are quite often narrated from the perspective of an adult male protagonist. In contemporary dystopias, the protagonist is most often adolescent and female. Barton (2016, 14–16) has analyzed contemporary female protagonists of dystopias as

“Artemisian” heroines, who are strong and independent saviors. The Artemisian woman survives violation, exploitation, and all the awful things she must confront without being traumatized. On the contrary, this type of heroine empowers herself. Such characters can be found, for example, in *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010), the *Divergent* trilogy (2011–2014), and the film *Children of Men* (2006).

The YA dystopias of the 2010s seem to exploit the motif of the child savior inherited from Romanticism, where a child or a young person is presented as the savior of a doomed humankind. The motif is connected with a rebellion plot that is common in the so-called critical dystopia. It is typical in YA dystopias that the protagonist becomes a Harry Potter-like savior (Lauer 2013, 40). In this plot type, the dystopian or totalitarian society can be defeated by rebellious individuals. For example, in Enoranta’s novel, the social responsibility for resistance is thrust upon young people. I find it surprising that enormous hopes are placed on children and young people in many contemporary YA dystopias.

Hope is one of the main attributes connected to children and adolescents in Western thinking, and it is associated with the temporal distance between children and adults. Children and young people are the future, and in this sense, the association of hope with children and young people is understandable. As the main actors in YA dystopias, young people are situated in an interesting way with respect on the axis of hope and despair. Youth appears as a liminal time between childhood and adulthood. As I mentioned before, liminality can also be seen as a typical feature of the dystopian genre in general. According to Moylan’s (2000) thinking, utopia and dystopia belong on the same spectrum: dystopian utopia is just an extreme form, a utopia that has turned against itself. In this sense, dystopia as a genre examines the complex boundaries between utopia and

dystopia, hope and despair, and past and future. In YA dystopias, this liminality also extends to the boundaries separating age groups.

Apocalyptic thinking signals the foreground experience of the loss of a former way of life. Apocalyptic and dystopian fiction can be read as a projection connected to cultural and technological shifts. As Barton (2016, 5) claims, humans start to write apocalypses when “some traditional mores, beliefs and societal constructions no longer resonate with an emerging zeitgeist.” It could be claimed that we live in an age of dystopia. Many dystopian themes have indeed become less speculative and more familiar.

YA dystopia is an interesting phenomenon also when considering the rhetoric of the contemporary political conversation about children and adolescents. It is especially interesting that the temporal distance between children, young people, and adults is often utilized in political rhetoric. The question of “what kind of world we leaving to our children?” is very often used when discussing global or local problems. We could claim that YA dystopias are providing answers to this question. Using the tools of speculative fiction, YA dystopias really describe what kind of a future our children (future teenagers) might face if the current developments continue.

YA dystopias are therefore permeated by adult guilt. Against this feeling of guilt, it is interesting how strongly these novels seem to expect that it will be children and young people who will rescue the world. YA dystopias might be somewhat brighter and more optimistic compared to dystopias aimed mainly at an adult audience, but it is also noteworthy that the burden passed on to the future generations is a heavy one. In this sense, YA dystopias are often politically conservative by nature. Change does not

have to happen here and now, because the possibility of change lays in the future, on the shoulders of young people.

For example, the young guerrilla fighters in Enoranta's novel often develop an outright messianic tinge. This happens with the expedients of fantasy fiction. In Enoranta's novel, the teenage protagonists Dharan and Vayu are the descendants of the great stone gods, as is Vayu's sister, Pavan. Their names are written on the wall in a hidden cave in the parallel universe, a wall showing the family tree of the stone families. Their destiny is to save the world and humankind. Pavan suggests that she and Dharan should rule together and procreate. Dharan does not agree:

I feel like the lineages of the stone families are not meant to continue. I feel like this is our last chance. ... I just feel ... if we don't succeed now, there won't be another chance. We have to fix this world now and if we can't, we're not worth it. If we don't succeed, everything is lost. Our children wouldn't even have anything to fix. There'd be nothing left. (*Nettle Revolution*, 304)

One reason Dharan and Vayu are not meant to be together is that they are both male and therefore cannot reproduce. In the novel's worn-out world, reproduction is immoral. The most important message behind this address is the idea that responsibility can no longer be escaped. The task given to the young heroes is binding. They cannot transfer their duties to the future generations. The change must happen now. This is an important and quite explicit theme in Enoranta's novel.

Conclusion

Above, I have analyzed two Finnish dystopian novels aimed at young readers. In Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution*, the task of changing the oppressive society falls on the shoulders of the young protagonists. In Alongi’s *Spring Sacrifices*, teenagers are left alone to survive in a fearful and partly hostile environment without any help from adults. As I have shown, both works question the dichotomy between dystopia and utopia. Although the dystopian setting in both novels is terrifying, both works still offer their readers hope for a better future. The dystopian world order also offers young protagonists a space to become independent and fulfill their potential. Especially in *Nettle Revolution*, teenagers are also given a level of political agency that is usually not extended to minors in Western societies.

Particularly important in all this is the discourse that closely binds together young people and the hope for a better future. This seems to show that the recent boom in dystopian writing for adolescents is not simply a marketing trend. Instead, the YA dystopia has become the most important contemporary genre because of its examination of the political power structures between adults and juveniles. Furthermore, the genre reveals how we construct the concept of adolescence in our time.

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