

Disability as Adolescent Agency in YA Literature: Shared Experience in Marissa Meyer's *Winter*

Young adult fiction that privileges the adolescent capacity for empathy has the potential to create spaces that empower adolescent activism. Marissa Meyer's *Winter* is a young adult novel that recodes the stigmatization, perception as "lack," and psychological pain of adolescent intellectual disability, transforming intellectual disability from an individual, shameful, and private problem to a shared trauma and mode of empathizing with others such that the shared experiences of trauma make possible coalition building. The novel's protagonist, Winter, is a contemporary snow white afflicted with "lunar sickness," a chronic condition caused by prolonged abstention from the use of telepathic ability. In a social climate where the invasive nonconsensual telepathic control over others for utility is normalized, Winter recognizes and refutes the unethical nature of control without consent. As an intellectually disabled step-daughter to the lunar monarch she is regarded shamefully, abused, and hidden away; however, the pain she feels becomes a way of empathizing with others. She understands what it is like to be unable to claim sovereignty over one's own body. She feels psychological pain, hears voices, experiences periods of non-verbality, and occasionally loses consciousness, but gains further capacity for empathy. She finds common ground with, among others, a group of human-wolf hybrids, equating her pain with what they feel and using that shared pain to understand what their goals are. In this way, the novel positions empathy from shared trauma as a potential site for coalition building, thus, granting Winter the agency to resist a power structure perpetuating inequality.