



Real and Metaphorical Hunger: The Case of the Divergent Trilogy

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In 1825 Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin boldly declared “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are”. Undoubtedly he would have found Veronica Roth’s best seller trilogy *Divergent* (*Divergent, Insurgent, Allegiant* 2011-13) extremely appropriate to exemplify his assumption. Roth portrays a dystopian future developing a multifaceted concept of hunger, both real and figurative, and using food as a cultural metaphor. Actually what we eat, but also how and why we eat, reveal our personality and our background, and “tell us much about society, history, cultural change, and humans’ view of themselves” (Bentley 2012: 1), both individually and collectively.

The use of food as a means of representing single or collective identities is particularly intriguing in this dystopian saga; the trilogy is set in a post-apocalyptic Chicago whose population is divided into five allegorical factions, according to a number of personal and social characteristics: Abnegation (those who value selflessness above all), Amity (kindness), Candor (honesty), Dauntless (bravery), Erudite (Knowledge). The protagonist is the sixteen-year-old Tris (Beatrice) Prior from



Abnegation: her perfectly ordered world starts to collapse and her certainties to waver when she finds out that she is divergent: a dangerous anomaly that has aptitude for more than one faction at the same time, and cannot be clearly categorized. This makes her a natural charismatic leader against the different forms of oppression arising in the course of events.

This saga follows the popular trend of novels written for a young adult readership like James Dashner's *The Maze Runner Series* (2009-2011) and Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* (2008-2010), which can be ascribed to a wide variety of genres from dystopian, science fiction, fantasy, survivor story to *Bildungsroman*, action adventure, political and romance (Henthorne 2012: 6). Despite the increasing popularity of young adult fiction, scholars and critics are just beginning to "talk about the aesthetic qualities and political valences of these texts" (Basu, Broad, Hintz 2013: 2). In addition to the analysis of the dystopian characteristics of Roth's novels, two main lines of criticism have been followed so far in discussing *Divergent*: on the one hand, the dangers of categorizing people into "pre-existing identity type[s]" (Basu 2013: 20) and its impact on personal identity formation; on the other hand, the concept of girlhood, "an ideologically loaded term in Western culture" (Reid-Walsh 2011: 92). This notion is explored through the magnetic protagonist Tris Prior who, like Katniss Everdeen, contributes "to redefine what it means to be a young woman" (Green-Barteet 2014:35) in the XXI century. As well as featuring two appealing female protagonists, *Divergent* and *Hunger Games* have a further fascinating similarity: both the authors use food as a complex "metaphor for cultural, social, political and personal longing" (Despain 2012: 69), and explore the concept of hunger from multiple perspectives. While this aspect has been examined in detail with regard to Collins's trilogy, it has passed completely unnoticed in Roth's saga.

The present contribution aims at discussing how the issue of hunger, both real and metaphorical, becomes a means of expressing and communicating personal and social identity. On the one hand, each faction is associated to specific kinds of food and eating habits which emphasize their peculiar features; however, also the lack of food is highly significant, as in the case of the factionless, outcasts excluded from every faction, who live their life in extreme poverty and starve. On the other hand, the life of the characters seems to be based on a form of metaphorical hunger, a profound desire which guides their actions: selflessness and altruism for Abnegation, peace and harmony for Amity, honesty and truth for Candor, danger and adventure for Dauntless, knowledge and power for Erudite and revenge against the faction system for the factionless. As will emerge, these two forms of hunger, which are strictly intertwined, effectively contribute to mapping the characters' personalities and identities as single individuals and as groups.

1. DIGESTING EMOTIONS



"Do you habitually have a sensitive stomach, Beatrice?" (*Divergent*, 359) Jeanine Matthews, the cruel leader of Erudite, pretends to be worried about the sensitivity of Tris's stomach but her question hides her real concern: understanding why the results of Tris's psychological tests (called simulations) have not been recorded:

I don't know how they [the simulations] work," I say, "but the liquid I was injected with made me sick to my stomach. Maybe my simulation administrator was distracted because he was worried I would throw up, and he forgot to record it. I got sick after the aptitude test too. (*Divergent*, 359)

Her question is rather provocative: Jeanine is testing Tris's honesty since she is quite certain that her results have been deleted in order to hide her divergence; yet it is extremely interesting since it calls attention to the function of the stomach in the story. It is only in *Divergent* that the term 'stomach' recurs 63 times (39 in *Insurgent* and 24 in *Allegiant*) and in most cases it refers to Tris's stomach. It has a number of functions: on the one hand it is conceived as the bodily part that Tris needs to train for fighting "Suddenly he presses a hand to my stomach.[...] 'Never forget to keep tension here'" (*Divergent*, 84), her instructor reminds her; or a target to hit in a fight: "I duck and drive my fist into her stomach, right over her bellybutton" (*Divergent*, 172). It is no coincidence that many characters die of an injury to the stomach like the pitiless Jeanine Matthews, stabbed in her stomach, or two friends of Tris's who are shot by a fatal bullet in that part of the body.

On the other hand, the stomach is assigned a fundamental role in Tris's mental and emotional experience, even replacing the mind in some situations: "'Why?' The question forms in my stomach and launches from my throat like a moan" (*Insurgent*, 364). This makes its function as the principal organ of digestion only secondary in the story, since meal times are more often moments devoted to deep reflection than to mere nourishment: "I move my peas around with my fork, and my thoughts drift back to the aptitude tests. When Tori warned me that being Divergent was dangerous" (*Divergent*, 80). Tris expresses most of her feelings using stomach related metaphors, which seem to capture the natural connection between this organ and the mind: she is instinctive, she 'trusts her guts' more than anything so that her instinct seems to be localized there, in the pit of her stomach. Thus it becomes a locus of thoughts and emotions: when she is scared, her stomach "tightens" (*Divergent*, 71) or "clenches with fear" (*Allegiant*, 296). If she is homesick, it is "hollow" (*Divergent*, 75) ("I ignore the pinch in my stomach that comes every time I think of my mother", *Divergent*, 120). Her anger and her violent impulses pass through this organ ("Once I'm dressed and the urge to cry is gone, I feel something hot and violent writhing in my stomach. I want to hurt them", *Divergent*, 170), as well as the sense of guilt ("Guilt clutches at my stomach", *Insurgent*, 125) and emotional pain, which is somatized in the stomach: "I feel the



monster of grief again, writhing in the empty space where my heart and stomach used to be" (*Insurgent* 46).

Tris's stomach likewise digests also positive emotions like relief ("the knot in my stomach unravels", *Divergent*, 91), joy ("I wipe my face with my sleeve, laughing so hard my stomach hurts", *Divergent*, 156), attraction and desire ("When he touches me, I feel like everywhere his skin meets mine is changed by the connection. It sends a thrill through my stomach. Not just fear. Something else, too. A wanting", *Divergent*, 404)

Acknowledging that Tris's stomach is the digester of her feelings and regulator of her emotional health, it is not surprising that her perception of the world is strictly connected with food and eating habits.

2. FACTIONS AND APPETITES

2.1 Life in Abnegation

At the beginning of *Divergent*, the description of a meal introduces us to the life in Abnegation, the faction the protagonist Tris belongs to. This is just the first example of the numerous meals described by Roth in various contexts, ranging from a formal dinner in Abnegation to a break with a muffin in Dauntless: while they mark the tightly well-ordered days of the factions, at the same time they re-create the atmosphere within the groups and reflect the identity of each of them. Meals in Abnegation are a sort of ritualized and disciplined reunion in a patriarchal family:

We sit at the table. We always pass food to the right, and no one eats until everyone is served. My father extends his hands to my mother and my brother, and they extend their hands to him and me, and my father gives thanks to God for food and work and friends and family. Not every Abnegation family is religious, but my father says we should try not to see those differences because they will only divide us. (*Divergent*, 32)

Conversation is regulated as in a traditional Victorian family, where parents used to teach "obedience and respect for the elders and [allow] the child to speak only when spoken to" (Thompson 1988: 124): "We aren't supposed to speak at the dinner table unless our parents ask us a direct question, and they usually don't. Our listening ears are a gift to them, my father says. They give us their listening ears after dinner, in the family room" (*Divergent*, 34).

Parents and children take turns in cooking the meals, whose simple dishes are mainly based on frozen or canned food. An example of the typical Abnegation menu is cooked by Tris and her brother Caleb: "Caleb and I work together without speaking. I cook peas on the stove. He defrosts four pieces of chicken. Most of what we eat is frozen or canned, because farms these days are far away" (*Divergent*, 31). Interestingly,



their meal does not include red meat or wild game, as if abstaining from this kind of food corresponds to the refusal of a lifestyle and eating habits culturally associated with physical strength, violence and power (Montanari 2004: 91). Therefore the plain and shapeless food eaten in Abnegation perfectly mirrors the selfless attitude of its members.

Tris's life undergoes a radical change when she turns sixteen. At this age adolescents have to take a psychological aptitude test: the way they face some hypothetical difficult situations will determine which of the five factions they best fit into. Then, during the Choosing Day Ceremony, they can choose, freely and independently from their test results, the faction they really feel they belong to. This occasion is the key event in the life of every citizen because it marks the beginning of a new existence: on this day "the atmosphere feels hungry, like every sixteen-year-old is trying to devour as much as he can get of this last day. It is likely that we will not walk these halls again after the Choosing Ceremony—once we choose, our new factions will be responsible for finishing our education" (*Divergent*, 5). Anyone is well aware that choosing a faction implies having a hunger to be driven by. Tris's choice is much more complicated than that of her peers since she turns out to be divergent, that in her case means revealing an aptitude for three factions at the same time: unexpectedly she decides to abandon the safeness of Abnegation for the dangers of Dauntless.

2.2 Life in Dauntless

As soon as Tris enters Dauntless Headquarters, she realizes that their lifestyle is poles apart from the calm and formal atmosphere in Abnegation. This new way of life also includes diverse foodstuffs and eating habits; among the Dauntless, food is not only eaten but also played with for fun: it is thrown ("I look over Will's shoulder at the members, who are now flicking bits of food at one another with their forks", *Divergent*, 226) or it is used as a target in an improvised shooting competition ("Marlene stands in front of one of the targets and sets the muffin on her head. Uriah squints one eye as he aims the gun. 'Wait!' calls out Marlene. She breaks off a piece of the muffin and pops it into her mouth. 'Mmkay!' she shouts, the word garbled by food", *Divergent*, 272) Actually muffins (for example "banana-flavored, with walnuts", *Divergent*, 120) are hugely popular along with chocolate cake: "Have a piece of cake for me, all right? The chocolate. It's delicious" (*Divergent*, 188).

Also meals are radically different: now Tris eats in "a dining hall full of people and clattering silverware" (*Divergent*, 65), with other transfers like her (people who had abandoned their old faction for a new one), like Christina from Candor, and her instructor Tobias, nicknamed Four, who will become her boyfriend later on:



We look for empty seats. Christina and I discover a mostly empty table at the side of the room, and I find myself sitting between her and Four. In the center of the table is a platter of food I don't recognize: circular pieces of meat wedged between round bread slices. I pinch one between my fingers, unsure what to make of it. Four nudges me with his elbow. "It's beef," he says. "Put this on it." He passes me a small bowl full of red sauce. "You've never had a hamburger before?" asks Christina, her eyes wide. "No," I say. "Is that what it's called?" "Stiffs eat plain food," Four says, nodding at Christina. "Why?" she asks. I shrug. "Extravagance is considered self-indulgent and unnecessary." She smirks. "No wonder you left." "Yeah," I say, rolling my eyes. "It was just because of the food." The corner of Four's mouth twitches. (*Divergent*, 65-66)

This brief extract points out several important aspects in terms of identity and otherness. Hamburgers and ketchup are the type of food that perfectly embodies the rebellious nature of Dauntless: besides its cultural association with physical prowess, this kind of 'junk food' may be seen as a symbol of the violation of the rules of healthy nutrition. They are both utterly unknown to Tris, who is used to eating plain food like all the 'Stiffs', a rather offensive word to identify people from Abnegation. Their food is by definition disgusting: stale bread and a plain oatmeal (*Allegiant*, 30) or "scrambled eggs, which, as it turns out, is a disgusting food. [...] Must be a Stiff breakfast, then" (*Insurgent*, 403). While Christina is surprised at Tris's reaction to this new food, Four tries to help her, by suggesting how she should eat it. As we find out later, Four had transferred from Abnegation like Tris, a fact which makes him fully aware of her difficulties.

Another peculiarity of the Dauntless concerns their levels of alcohol consumption: its members are used to drinking alcohol until they are drunk; this happens on several occasions, even at the funeral of a transfer, during which Tris sees the main hall "crawling with people, most of them drunk" (*Divergent*, 304). Also Four adheres to this thoughtless behaviour, but for a strictly personal reason: his actions can be read as a form of transgression against the moral code of conduct of his previous faction, Abnegation, in which sobriety was the rule. This is a way of proving himself and the people around him that he really belongs to Dauntless. "The primary function of identity construction in contemporary culture", Coats reminds us, "is recognition from the others" (2011: 112). As a matter of fact identity and sense of belonging are vital in the trilogy: the characters need to find their place within the faction system in order to understand who they really are.

It is hard for Tris to embrace her new identity as Dauntless since she has gradually become aware that a part of her will always belong to Abnegation:

I stare at my plate of food. I just grabbed what looked good to me at the time, and now that I take a closer look, I realize that I chose a plain chicken breast, a scoop of peas, and a piece of brown bread. [...] I sigh. Abnegation is what I am. It is what I am when I'm not thinking about what I'm doing. It is what I am when I am put to



the test. It is what I am even when I appear to be brave. Am I in the wrong faction?
(*Divergent*, 379)

Tris's eating choices reflect her developing identity and her consciousness of the impossibility of being categorized with a single 'label', a faction group: "I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either" (*Divergent*, 487).

While in *Divergent* Tris mainly comes in contact with one new faction (Dauntless), in *Insurgent* she sets out on a journey through the other groups. As a matter of fact, after the Erudite's violent *coup d'état*, Tris and her friends resolve to visit the other factions in search of allies. On the other hand, her journey can be also conceived as a 'culinary experience', in which she gets to know the other factions through the medium of food. Moreover she gets first-hand knowledge of the diverse forms of hunger that characterize each of them, an experience which will contribute greatly to shaping her identity.

2.3 Life in the other factions

One of the elements that distinguishes Erudite from the other groups is that it is the only faction never associated with any specific kind of food (apart from two single references to fizzy drinks, *Insurgent*, 216, and to a drink as "sweet as syrup and lemon-flavored", *Allegiant*, 27). Actually their hunger is for power and knowledge, not for food, even though Tris thinks that "not all the Erudite are power hungry and devoid of conscience, like their leader, Jeanine Matthews" (*Insurgent*, 34). It is no coincidence that they perceive food in metaphorical terms, as food for thought, but also in scientific terms, since their main interest concerns genetically modified food. The sculpture "shaped like a lima bean that dwarfs me in size" (*Divergent*, 351) stands out at the entrance of Erudite headquarters, as symbol of the progress achieved in the field of biological genetic engineering. As Tris remembers "there were people who wouldn't buy genetically engineered produce because they viewed it as unnatural. Now we have no other option" (*Divergent*, 31).

Part of this success is due to the collaboration with Amity, the faction which accomplishes some feats of agriculture, deals with food distribution to the other factions, grows food in greenhouses that are used by the Erudite for their experiments. Despite this cooperation, this faction is always neutral in case of war or dispute; therefore this is the first stop-over for Tris and her friends who find refuge only temporarily at Amity headquarters. The pacific lifestyle of this faction, who are used to living in close contact with nature, immediately affects Tris's language introducing new natural metaphors: the voice of the leader of Amity, Johanna, is "honey-sweet" and she "moves like honey too, slow and careful" (*Insurgent*, 21). She notices a sort of



communion between the faction members and nature which is, in a sense, personified: "Johanna sighs quietly and looks out the window. Beyond it is a small courtyard with vines growing in it. The vines creep onto the window's corners, like they are trying to come in and join the conversation" (*Insurgent*, 64-5).

Tris's attention is immediately aroused by the 'new' food, real 'dark fruit' hanging from the trees in an orchard: "my feet sink into the ground, and above me, the branches grow into one another, forming a kind of tunnel. Dark fruit hangs among the leaves, ready to drop. The sharp, sweet smell of rotting apples mixes with the scent of wet earth in my nose" (*Insurgent*, 4). Fresh fruit (like apples and raspberries, notably) is the food that best corresponds to the spirit of the faction: available to everyone, not adulterated, so apparently more genuine. There are numerous references to the presence of apples, whose symbolic values are very complex and conflicting. In my view it is worthwhile taking into consideration two aspects: on the one hand the apple may evoke the fruit of the forbidden tree, the tree of knowledge, thus reinforcing the idea of Amity collaboration with the power-hungry Erudite; on the other hand in Chinese culture, the word for apple resembles phonically the term peace, and "the gift of a few apples suggests the idea of perpetual concord, and is equivalent to the greeting 'Peace be with you'" (Williams 2006: 18). Interestingly there is a further connection with Chinese culture in terms of food, since Amity is used to solving conflicts also by drinking tea, a traditional Chinese product. Tris is rather sceptical about its effectiveness: "What are you doing?' 'I am making tea,' he says. 'I don't think tea is really the solution to this'" (*Insurgent*, 58). However, the most popular foodstuff seems to be bread which everybody, except Tris, is particularly eager to eat: "You aren't going to eat your toast?" he says. "The bread tastes strange," I say. "You can have it if you want" (*Insurgent*, 34). In this case it is appropriate to say that their strong hunger for peace actually comes from the food; as Amity leaders reveal, their bread contains small doses of a 'peace serum', a clear allusion to the tranquilizing drug *soma* in Huxley's *Brave New World*; its calming effect helps to keep peace and avoid any strife.

While in Amity any kind of conflict, both verbal and physical, is prevented, in Candor all contrasts are to be solved by debating. The atmosphere of the dining hall where everybody gathers for the meals well reflects the character of the faction; what dominates is order, with the people getting their food after standing in disciplined line: "Uriah and Tobias are still in the lunch line, waiting behind two dozen Candor who are too busy bickering to get their food" (*Insurgent*, 213-4). The second remarkable aspect is the soundscape of the situation with "the clatter of forks and the roar of hundreds of conversations all around" (*Insurgent*, 216). Despite the rigour and order that the faction shares with Abnegation, what distinguishes it is the idea of exchanging opinions, of "bickering", of lively debates to determine objective truth as if they were in a courthouse.



The group in which Tris and her friends seem to feel more at ease for a while is the factionless who, despite the name, are a real community which shares food even with strangers, as emerges from the description of a meal among them:

One of the factionless started a fire so we could heat up our food. Those who want to eat sit in a circle around the large metal bowl that contains the fire, first heating the cans, then passing out spoons and forks, then passing cans around so everyone can have a bite of everything. I try not to think about how many diseases could spread this way as I dip my spoon into a can of soup. (*Insurgent*, 102)

Roth emphasizes the real hunger that the factionless have experienced for decades: they are regarded as outcasts worthy of nothing, neither attention nor food, as the characters from the other factions used to say: "food for the factionless, my eye" (*Divergent*, 184). Actually the only faction showing interest in their wellbeing is Abnegation, that takes care of them by providing them with food (like cans of soup or of peaches, or dried apples); Tris meets one of them on her way back home at the beginning of *Divergent*:

I see a factionless man standing on the corner up ahead. He wears ragged brown clothing and skin sags from his jaw. He stares at me, and I stare back at him, unable to look away. "Excuse me," he says. His voice is raspy. "Do you have something I can eat?" I feel a lump in my throat. A stern voice in my head says, *Duck your head and keep walking*. No. I shake my head. I should not be afraid of this man. He needs help and I am supposed to help him. "Um...yes," I say. I reach into my bag. My father tells me to keep food in my bag at all times for exactly this reason. I offer the man a small bag of dried apple slices. He reaches for them, but instead of taking the bag, his hand closes around my wrist. He smiles at me. (*Divergent*, 25)

Interestingly there is a foodstuff which is included in the diet of all the factions: butter, in particular peanut butter, highly popular in the American diet. Its presence in the menus of all the groups, even the factionless, may shed a light on the different forms of hunger: among the Dauntless the enthusiasm and the liveliness of the faction infects Tris, who grabs "a piece of toast from the plate in the middle of the table and start to butter it with a little too much enthusiasm" (*Divergent*, 340). The light-hearted atmosphere makes them play with the butter knife instead of using it properly as in the case of Tobias, who plays with butter knives throwing them to hit a target, while the violence inborn in the faction leads Peter to use it to cut out the eye of another transfer. Butter and the butter knife recur also in Candor, in which the knife is thus used for its main purpose, to spread butter, not as a plaything or a weapon; during his stay in Candor Tobias "pauses with his knife against a piece of bread, a glob of butter waiting to be spread, and stares at the table" (*Insurgent*, 239). Peanut butter is



extremely popular among the factionless. As Tris notices, peanut plants are grown in Amity greenhouses: "They grow peanuts because they are high in protein and fat, which is important for the factionless in particular" (*Insurgent*, 117). She eats eagerly all the butter she can find, even using her fingers, as a real hungry factionless would do ("I scoop some of the peanut butter out with my fingers and eat it", *Insurgent*, 117) and keeps on eating it ("I eat another fingertip's worth of peanut butter", *Insurgent*, 118-9), while all the other people around her seem to be doing the same ("All I see is Caleb and Susan on the ground in the corner, passing a jar of peanut butter back and forth", *Insurgent*, 117). This true all-American food which all the factions share reveals that, despite the differences, they share a strong American identity. As the biographer Krampner (2013: xii) argues, "peanut butter is a staple of childhood, and it's a comfort food. In times of economic distress and emotional uncertainty (like the present), Americans turn to it". If on the one hand food may reflect the uncertain contemporary situation, on the other it also recalls the past: as a matter of fact the food eaten by the factions is mainly mass produced, "standardized, quick-cooking, convenient" (Gabaccia 1998: 149), like the one available in post-war America in the '50. However this common cultural character clearly emerges only in *Allegiant*, when the characters are told that the city where they have been living for decades is Chicago and is situated in the United States of America.

At the end of *Insurgent*, after her journey through the different factions, Tris has in a sense assimilated all their forms of hunger, both real and metaphorical, acquiring a more complex identity: now she has learnt how "to be brave, and selfless, and smart, and kind, and honest" at the same time (*Divergent*, 405). This self-awareness enables her to take on the demanding new challenge she has to face: she has to lead her friends outside the fence, a barrier that surrounds their city, to visit the unknown land which they had been always forbidden to see.

3. REAL AND METAPHORICAL HUNGER

As soon as she leaves the city and crosses the fence, Tris starts to notice posters advertising "colorful bottles with shampoo or conditioner or vitamins or unfamiliar substances inside them, words I don't understand, "vodka" and "Coca-Cola" and "energy drink" (*Allegiant*, 103). Coca-cola, the most powerful and popular American symbol of globalization, is unexpectedly unknown to her. This is the first step towards the revelation (both to the reader and the characters) that their world is not real: as a matter of fact they have been all unknowingly monitored, spied and controlled for decades as in Orwell's *1984*. The faction system is only part of a genetic experiment carried out by an agency of the United States government, the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, in order to restore mankind to its presumed genetically pure state.



"Welcome to the compound," says Zoe. "This building used to be O'Hare Airport, one of the busiest airports in the country. Now it's the headquarters of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare—or just the Bureau, as we call it around here. It's an agency of the United States government." I feel my face going slack. I know all the words she's saying – except I'm not sure what an "airport" or "united states" is – but they don't make sense to me all together. (*Allegiant*, 113)

From this moment onwards the references to food and drink diminish considerably as well as their relevance. Regarding this, it is worth taking into consideration the evolution of the concept of hunger in the trilogy as a whole. The adjective 'hungry' and 'thirsty' (my emphasis in the table) and their nouns recur 19 times in the trilogy, mainly metaphorically. The following table presents the occurrences:

Volume	Physical Hunger/Thirst	Metaphorical Hunger/Thirst
<i>Divergent</i>	(1) I'm <i>hungry</i> for lunch. (172)	(8) "The atmosphere feels <i>hungry</i> " (5)
<i>Divergent</i>	(2) I'm not <i>thirsty</i> , but I need to do something. (276)	(9) The Erudite <i>thirst</i> for knowledge filling all the hidden places in his room. (52)
<i>Divergent</i>		(10) The reports that label my family as corrupt, <i>power-hungry</i> , moralizing dictators? (360)
<i>Insurgent</i>	(3) "Too <i>hungry</i> to do much of anything except look for food". (95)	(11) "Not all the Erudite are power <i>hungry</i> and devoid of conscience" (34)
<i>Insurgent</i>	(4) " <i>Hungry</i> ?" he says. He offers me a sandwich from the plate next to him. (129)	(12) "I see a kind of <i>thirst</i> in her expression, the same one I saw when she told me about her brother in the back room of the tattoo parlor. (263)
<i>Insurgent</i>	(5) "Are you <i>hungry</i> ? Want me to get you something?" (203)	(13) Before the attack simulation I might have called it a <i>thirst</i> for justice, or even revenge. (263)
<i>Insurgent</i>	(6) I am not <i>hungry</i> , but I know I need to eat, so I chew and swallow anyway. (405)	(14) but now I am able to identify it as a <i>thirst</i> for blood". (263)
<i>Allegiant</i>	(7) They were always <i>hungry</i> , always cold in the winter and hot in the summer, always struggling to survive. (242-3)	(15) the <i>hunger</i> in Tris's eyes, devouring everything around us as if it alone can sustain her. (115)



<i>Allegiant</i>		(16) Cara's mouth has fallen open, like she is <i>hungry</i> for answers and intends to eat them from the air. (122)
<i>Allegiant</i>		(17) What Jeanine did has nothing to do with a <i>thirst</i> for knowledge leading to a <i>thirst</i> for power (218)
<i>Allegiant</i>		(18) Still <i>hungry</i> for her even now that I know she's gone. (497)

Table 1

As it clearly shows, while the real and metaphorical references are almost equal in number in the first two books, there is a marked predominance of the latter in *Allegiant*. All the references to real hunger concern the factionless (3,7) and Tris (1,2,4,5,6). The former have experienced real physical hunger since the beginning of the faction system. In order to signal their poor condition, Roth applies the verb 'to starve' and the noun 'starvation' only to them. While looking at Four's mother, leader of the factionless, Tris notices that "still, she is handsome like her son. Near-starvation could not take that", *Allegiant* 13-4). With the example of the factionless, she underlines that an individual does not feel metaphorical hunger if she or he has a basic diet: actually it is only once they seize the power and their stomachs are full that a bottomless hunger for revenge against the faction system arises.

Their revengeful appetite infects many of those who join them in the fight against the faction system: among them the most significant example is Tori, the Dauntless tattoo maker, whose brother was supposedly killed because he was divergent. While among the Dauntless, Tori just wanted justice to be done, now, owing to the influence of the factionless, she develops desires for personal, bloody revenge (12,13,14).

The relationship between Tris and hunger is far more complex: as I have shown, the character is often associated with food and eating, but she does not ask for it (4,5) or expresses in words this need, apart from on a single occasion in *Divergent* (1). Instead she openly claims not to be hungry or thirsty (2,6) since her strongest hunger is metaphorical, as it is clearly stated in *Allegiant*: "the *hunger* in Tris's eyes, devouring everything around us as if it alone can sustain her"(15). Her hunger is much more articulated than the one experienced by the other characters since it is wide-ranging, not directed to a single objective. Let's have a look at the other examples to clarify this concept: the Erudite have thirst for knowledge (9, 17) which turns them into being power-hungry (11-17); the real hunger of the factionless has become thirst for blood (12,13,14), some characters like Cara, a former Erudite, are "*hungry* for answers" (16), once they find out the truth about the genetic experiment.

However, also due to the fact that she is divergent, Tris is driven by several metaphorical appetites that she wants to satisfy: she only rejects power and



knowledge (“I guess I grew up suspicious of both. Power and knowledge,’ I say. ‘To the Abnegation, power should only be given to people who don't want it” *Allegiant* 218-9). It is her hunger for answers that leads her to find out the truth, a strong hunger which is “a living thing has awakened from a long sleep inside me. It writhes in my stomach and throat. I need to leave. I need the truth” (*Allegiant* 54). This hunger progressively increases from the beginning, as the occurrence of the word ‘truth’ reveals: if in *Divergent* it is repeated only 12 times, since at this stage Tris is struggling to shape her own identity, in *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* it recurs respectively 52 and 60 times, thus reinforcing Tris’s concern about it.

Tris understands her role and her real hunger only when, after the abolition of the faction system, the Bureau decides to reset the experiment, by erasing the people’s memories with a memory serum, and so start it afresh. What drives her now is hunger for justice: she realizes the “power of self-sacrifice” (*Divergent*, 476) and, after the example of her parents who had died for her, sacrifices her life for what she sees as the greater good: her sacrifice is the only way to put an end to the experiment, while giving everyone the possibility of a new start in a world without factions. Significantly, like ‘truth’, also the recurrence of the term ‘sacrifice’ increases exponentially throughout the trilogy thus marking Tris’s rising hunger: it is used only twice in the first volume, while Roth employs it 9 times in the second and the number doubles in the last volume. The concept of hunger does not die with Tris, but undergoes a further evolution: it is neither the strong desire for an abstract concept or a moral value, nor real physical hunger but not less painful: it is the pain for her loss felt by the survivors like Tobias, who is, and will always be “hungry for her [Tris] even now that I know she’s gone” (*Allegiant* 497).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Roth’s trilogy provides a fine example of the “persistent discourse within American history that tries to define American society in utopian or dystopian terms” (Verheul 2004: 1). This saga can likewise be interpreted also as a profound sociological investigation which uses food as a cultural metaphor. Food turns out to be an extraordinary means of self-representation and cultural exchange: on the one hand the specific foodstuffs and eating habits of the factions reflect the group image and forge the identity of its members; on the other hand, eating the food of a different culture, in our case a different faction, is the best way to make contact (Montanari 2004: 151).

Also the multifaceted concept of hunger (real and metaphorical appetites) plays a fundamental role in forging identities since it affects the characters’ choices and guides their actions. This is what happens to Tris: after assimilating the different forms of hunger of the factions, she becomes more and more conscious of who she is and is



finally able to answer “the ‘who am I?’ question of young adult fiction” (Hastings 2011: 205).

The conclusion of this dystopian saga leaves the reader with a tiny glimmer of hope since Tris’s death can assume a further meaning as a sort of moral teaching: her sacrifice has shown that we have to be hungry for life, never surrender, since “sometimes it is nothing more than gritting your teeth through pain, and the work of every day, the slow walk toward a better life” (*Allegiant*, 509).

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