

Title: A feminist analysis of gender inequality in *Divergent*

Research Question: How does Veronica Roth use her protagonist's language and inner voice in the novel *Divergent* to challenge traditional gender expectations?

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Contents:

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Literary Structure of Divergent.....	
Symbolism in Language and Identity.....	6
Irony in Language of Rejection.....	8
Motifs of Fear and Emotions.....	9
Tone of Transformation and Rejection.....	10
Antitheses of Male Oriented Narrative.....	11
Chapter 2: Self-Definitive Language.....	
Feminist Literature and Beatrice's Language.....	12
The Female Narrative Voice.....	14
Critique of Gender-Based Heroism.....	15
Language of Emotion and Power.....	16
Conclusion.....	17

Introduction

This essay will analyse how Veronica Roth's uses her protagonist Beatrice Prior's language and inner voice to reflect traditional gender expectations among young adults with her successful dystopian novel named Divergent. Veronica Roth is a well-known dystopian writer. In Divergent, Roth creates a world that is formed by five factions, Abnegation, Dauntless, Erudite, Amity and Candor. Each faction represents a human character. However, the protagonist of the novel is not fitting into any of them. Because she belongs to a different kind who are called Divergent.

When Veronica Roth is creating her female protagonist, she focuses on introspection and moral reasoning to transform emotions into wisdom and strength. By this way, Roth challenges patriarchal ideals of being a woman through her feminine linguistic patterns, her declarations, her withdrawn tone, and her emotional precision.

Beatrice's story starts while she stares at her own reflection in a mirror. She lives in a society that aims to create selfless personalities. In this society even a mirror gaze is restricted. Contrarily Veronica Roth begins her story with Beatrice Prior observing herself in the mirror. There begins Beatrice's transformation from self-distrust to self-actualization. From the opening line Roth reflects , *"In my reflection, I see a narrow face, wide, round eyes, and a long thin nose. I still look like a little girl, though sometimes in the last few months I turned sixteen."* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 2) By detailing the descriptive gaze Roth mentions that Beatrice will stand against the imposed system.

By mentioning “*The other factions celebrate birthdays, but we don’t. It would be self-indulgent.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 2) Beatrice reflects the oppressive society in which she lives. Here, Roth indicates Beatrice’s awareness to inhumane community rules. In addition, Roth shows Beatrice’s developing identity. The identity that will not be shaped through the perception of others but through how she expresses herself. In the novel, her way of using language reflects the environment that Beatrice questions. Through her language like “*Who cares about pretty? I am going for noticeable.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 87) Beatrice redefines the cultural boundaries that were forced her by the society and her sexual identity.

Traditional female protagonists in dystopian fiction are usually portrayed as male-centered characters. Roth questions this tradition by building Beatrice a set of discourses that asserts her independence from patriarchy. The narrative simplicity in Beatrice’s language like “*I want to be brave, and selfless, and smart, and kind, and honest.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 405) mirrors her act of shaping her own identity. The syntax that she repeats “*I want to be...*” indicates resistance and wisdom. Roth builds her character Beatrice standing strong through her language. Her rational and emotional voice calls for equality for woman in patriarchal society. By this way, *Divergent* redefines female heroism not through male based physical power or romance, but through a detailed linguistic approach specific to women. Beatrice’s voice represents feminist expressions. Mainly, the character created by Veronica Roth shows that she is influenced from contemporary feminist philosophy and literature.

Feminism is an intellectual and political movement that criticizes gender inequality. They pursued social justice. Therefore, feminist thought provides a wide range of perspectives on cultural, economic, social, and political issues.

The analytic feminist philosopher Kathryn Norlock, explains that:

Feminist Ethics aims “*to understand, criticize, and correct*” how gender functions within our moral beliefs and practices and our methodological approaches to ethical theory. Particularly, feminist ethicists aim to correct the binary view of gender, the privilege historically available to men. (*Stanford E*)

Hélène Cixous is an important figure in feminist analysis. She defines the topic of feminine writing as a theory of expression. Thus, women must write through their bodies and she should invent a language that will challenge social rules, norms and “*silence.*” (*Gaelle A.*)

In summary, Veronica Roth’s dystopian novel reflects feminist philosophers and writers ideas. Hence, divergent will be evaluated according to reflections of feminist ideology based on the ideologists mentioned above.

Chapter 1: Literary Structure of Divergent

Story of Beatrice Prior is written in first-person, which enables Veronica Roth to deliver Beatrice's perspective to readers. She opens her female hero's mind and shows her emotions to readers. By this way, she forms a strong connection between readers and her protagonist. To understand how the Veronica Roth constructs the language in Divergent, it is important to examine the novel through the perspective of feminist literature. In the book, Veronica Roth forms a political expression which challenges traditional gender roles. Her work matches with ideas of feminist analysts such as Judith Butler, who uses language to question gender roles in traditional social structures.

Symbolism in Language and Identity

Symbolism in the story is applied to put a clearer picture of dystopian society. In the novel, the Five Factions structure categorizes people. In contrast, being Divergent symbolises free will and resistance. Symbolic tattoos like Beatrice's birds and Four's faction tattoos reflect personal identity. Collective language of factions and tools like serums, simulations and combat exercises emphasizes the system's mental control over its subjects. Veronica Roth uses these symbols in her storytelling to visualise Beatrice's world to readers.

Phrases such as "*Faction Before blood.*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 43) show imposed ideological choices of the system that prioritized society over family. However, Beatrice's expressions like, "*Who cares about pretty? I am going for noticeable.*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 87) symbolises her self-recognition and self-confidence as a divergent.

In the novel, Roth's such preference of symbolism and writing style confirms feminist rejection of patriarchy. Veronica Roth builds the story through Beatrice's perspective by following the ideas of the feminist writer Hélène Cixous, language is a style of struggle over sexual identity. In her many works of philosophy, she explores relationships among language, psychoanalysis, subjectivity and politics. (*Poetry F.*)

According to Cixous, throughout the history, women have been defined with their own bodies by male behaviour. However, she believes that women can tell their story better by writing through their bodies. She suggests that women who have been defined by the male gaze can remain trapped inside themselves while maintaining the passive role determined for them by the male gaze. But if they use their bodies as a way of communication and self-expression, they are able to speak bravely. She believes that woman should take back their right to speak from men. (*Vanderbilt University*) Therefore, Veronica Roth uses the perspective of Helene Cixous when Beatrice looks at herself in the mirror. Thus, beginning the story with mirror represents symbol of a young girl's disobedience to the system. The system that categorizes people.

In the story Beatrice's inner voice tells, "*I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 442) indicates that she is whatever she chooses to be. She refuses social definitions which are imposed on her by the Five Faction system. This denial emphasises the process of liberation. Similar to the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's idea, "*One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.*" (*The Guardian*)

Over time, Beatrice refuses social categorisation. Through disobeying and rejecting imposed social patterns, Beatrice becomes a symbol of liberation, in other words, a divergent heroine.

Irony in the Language of Rejection

In the book rejection is expressed through ironies. For instance, “*selfless*” Abnegations are actually holding political power and “*brave*” Dauntless are often described as bullies. Hence, faction system is not bringing peace to society. On the contrary it is bringing conflict between both individuals and Factions.

Sidewise, Roth criticises Candor’s idea of “*honesty is effortless*” with Beatrice’s statement “*It must require bravery to be honest all the time*”. (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 62) Here, the verb “must” indicate that she questions the system. Veronica Roth uses these ironies to show Beatrice’s aim to change the imposed language of her society. By this way, she explains how words such as honesty and bravery can be misused. By this way, the book criticises systems that claim to be ideal or moral could in fact be corrupt and violent in practice.

When Beatrice states that “*Becoming fearless isn't the point. That's impossible. It's learning how to control your fear, and how to be free from it.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 239) In this statement Roth accepts the feeling of fear but she prefers to face it with knowledge. So, she rewrites the language of heroism and bravery by showing mental bravery as an alternative to physical bravery.

Motifs of Fear and Emotions

Motifs such as aptitude test and initiation stages or fear landscapes in the novel reflects the constant feeling of fear in Beatrice's world. However, this motives and patterns embedded into the story shows the inner transformation of an extraordinary female heroine. An aptitude test that defines factions of young candidates takes place in the start of the novel. This test was designed to find participant's tendencies. During the Virtual Reality based test, participant's faction tendencies were defined by their choices. Beatrice being selected as a "*Divergent*" indicates her distinctiveness. Because she didn't choose any of the given options during the test but followed her own way. During the VR test, in order to stop an aggressive dog, she petted the dog to calm it down while she had to choose either a piece of cheese or a knife to do that. Afterwards, she grabbed the dog to protect the small child. Beatrice is a protagonist who comes up with unexpected solutions rather than imposed ones. Her unexpected solutions transform the test which is designed with the choices of masculine emotions into an insufficient examination. Thus, Beatrice's way of controlling emotions over fear makes the test useless.

In the novel *Divergent*, Roth tries to answer questions like Sarah Ahmed's, "*How does emotions such as hate work the shape of individual bodies?*" (Ahmed) Fear stands for failure in traditional adventure stories. Yet, Roth transforms fear into an understanding by saying "*Fear doesn't shut you down; it wakes you up*". (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 313) This formative sentence is structured like a rule and shows that fear can lead to awareness rather than panic. In short, Roth's language turns fear into self-confidence.

Beatrice's expression, *"I have to face the fear. I have to take control of the situation and find a way to make it less frightening."* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 394) conveys her logical approach to fear. Instead of reacting emotionally and dramatically, she tries to manage the situation logically. By transforming vulnerability into confidence, Beatrice challenges the stereotype of female characters being emotional.

Tone of Transformation and Rejection

In her novel, Roth builds her main character through tones. In the early chapters, Beatrice is speaking with a questioning and a pessimistic tone, *"We are like the factionless now. I don't know what life will be like, separated from a faction, it feels disengaged, like a leaf divided from the tree that gives it sustenance."* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 487) But as the novel progresses, her tone becomes more confident when telling her favorite quote of Dauntless manifesto *"We believe in ordinary acts of bravery"* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 206). This shift in tone also represents Beatrice's journey of self-liberation. When she uses a sarcastic tone to express emotional struggle like, *"Sometimes crying or laughing are the only options left, and laughing feels better right now."* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 205), she resists fear by creating something to have fun out of her situation. Her direct language here represents a simple method to control Beatrice's overwhelming emotions.

Beatrice's growth throughout the novel continues with her powerful tone in *"We believe in ordinary acts of bravery, in the courage that drives one person to stand up for another"*. (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 206) Here, the *"ordinary acts of bravery"* means that heroism does not have to be extreme or physically violent. Through this expression, Roth creates a collective form of heroism that is unselfish.

Antitheses of Male Oriented Narrative

From the beginning, Veronica Roth illustrates how language can transform a woman's perspective of world and herself as well. It is a declaration of rejecting traditional female characters and protagonists. In Roth's storytelling, the female character Beatrice Prior is written as being completely opposite of traditional male centered heroism. Therefore, Beatrice does not only represent a female hero but she also represents transformation of a male dominated world.

Her transition from gazing at herself in the mirror into saying "*Fear doesn't shut you down. It wakes you up.*" (V. Roth, *Herper Fire*, 2024, pp 313) indicates Beatrice's awakening. In order to strengthen this idea, she usually uses minimalist expressions as a way of breaking imposed gender roles.

Similar to Hélène Cixous, Roth destroys traditional rules and sexual hierarchies. Cixous defines feminine writing as "*a liberating experience of language*". By this way, she encourages woman to be proud of their writing as a way of resistance. She indicates that showing female emotions is a strength in order to transform woman into storyteller. As her emotions and feelings are seemingly deviating from the system, Beatrice's "*Divergence*" personality contrasts with traditional adventure narration.

Chapter 2: Self-Definitive Language

The novel begins while Beatrice is looking at a mirror, which is a restricted act. The society that prohibits to gaze into mirror symbolizes a world with deeper problems. However, this problematic prohibition also delivers the solution to readers from the very beginning of the story. By placing the mirror to the centre of the story, Roth gives Beatrice a powerful inner perspective of herself. This perspective later becomes the source of solutions of dystopian external world. Through her inner dialogue with herself, Beatrice gains confidence which is rarely given to female characters in adventure narratives. As Beatrice talks, she forms a new identity which can shape the world.

The simile in “*I still look like a little girl, though sometimes in the last few months I turned sixteen.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 2) Implies the beginning of her mental transformation. By contrasting “*a little girl*” and “*turned sixteen*”, Beatrice starts to question her identity for the first time, after looking at herself on the mirror. Through this, Veronica Roth enters to story with a self-questioning position rather than with physical descriptions. By this way, Beatrice takes control over the narrative when she shifts from her internal gaze to her external look.

Feminist Literature and Beatrice’s Language

In feminist literature, language is a form of power. It shapes how women see themselves and express their identities to others. It’s aim is to build a metaphoric identity which will be formed through actions rather than biology.

Likewise, when Beatrice's expresses herself through a self-defining tone by saying "*But I will find new habits, new thoughts, new rules. I will become something else.*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 87) and "*I am selfish, I am brave*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 47) she emphasizes her confidence and courage. By this expressions Roth rejects the idea of the selfless woman. So, Beatrice rejects silence with her ironic expressions. She also prefers direct and clear words when rejecting silence.

When Beatrice's inner voice says, "*I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am whatever I choose to be*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 442), her aggressive tone represents her refusal of external definitions from social factions. With this language, she indicates her self-recognition with her own voice.

Veronica Roth's literary choices reflect Butler's gender theory. In Butler's book "*Gender Trouble*", Gender is performed within linguistic and behaviours. (Çınar) In *Divergent*, the faction system is influenced by this idea, as each faction's social roles and language are predetermined by an authority to reflect ideals such as "*selflessness*" and "*bravery*."

When Beatrice states, "I never thought I would need bravery in small moments of my life." (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 373), she underrate the imposed idea of manly bravery. Roth's such narrative style redefines courage as an internal trait. In other words, Beatrice rejects imposed identities of her society by refusing to accept the enjoined notions.

The Female Narrative Voice

Similar to the Susan Lanser's study in feminist narratology, Roth's first-person narration gives Beatrice complete control over the act of storytelling. In her work *"lost voice of woman poets and pioneers"* (Lanser), Lanser argues that the traditional narrative voices are not really "women's writings" but they are "intentionally men-made". (Lanser) In contrast to that, in *Divergent*, the author builds the entire novel through Beatrice's diverging narrative voice. Her understanding of the society with her emotions reflects the reader a vision which gives them ability to see the society and its expectations through Beatrice's transparent perspective. For example when Beatrice advises Four, *"Why don't you tell me where this fear comes from. Maybe talking about it will help us...somehow."* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 325) she mentions overcoming fear by understanding not by overcoming with it. Hiding the fear from others, even from oneself is an uncomfortable idea of standing alone and isolated from others. Similarly, with her other statements like, *"Fear doesn't shut you down; it wakes you up"* (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 313) she stresses transforming an external danger into an internal understanding. This declaration shows her growing confidence. By placing herself as an observer, Beatrice transforms fear into emotion.

Beatrice's line *"I am selfish, I am brave."* (V. Roth Herper Fire, 2024, pp 47) The narration mentions self-confidence of a young woman. Such narrative transparency gives respect to her emotions in the reader's mind. Through this way, Veronica Roth uses self-understanding as a form of resistance in her story.

Referring to traditional gender roles, the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey defines and criticizes “male gaze” in her article “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*”, as the strong force and centre of modern storytelling. Laura Mulvey describes how “*women are often objectified through male-cantered cinematographic narration*”. As criticized by Mulvey, Roth limits the male gaze and the view of others in her novel.

Critique of Gender-Based Heroism

Dystopian literature criticizes rigid social systems. However, Roth shifts this uprising from public revolution to a personal and internal challenge. Thus, in Beatrice’s world, even speaking differently is seen as an act of betrayal. Along the story in her declarative tone “*I feel like someone breathed new air into my lungs. I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent*” (V. Roth Herper Fire, 2024, pp 442) Beatrice signals refusal to obey to an imposed identity. By this way, Roth connects individuality to her narrative voice and she turns language into a weapon against the authority. This also oppose heroism by violence or dominance and redefines it with empathy.

Particularly when Beatrice ironically states, “*It must require bravery to be honest all the time.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 62) She connects the idea of bravery with morality rather than violence. Likewise, when she tells “*We believe in ordinary acts of bravery, in the courage that drives one person to stand up for another.*” (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 206) she shows reasonable behaviour over aggression. Through this, Roth transforms aggressive rebellion into a calm and patient set of behaviour.

In comparison with other dystopian women protagonists, Beatrice Prior's rebellion indicates that it is not focused on physical battle but it is focused more on intellectual resistance. When she reflects, "*Sometimes crying or laughing are the only options left, and laughing feels better right now*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 205) and "*Becoming fearless isn't the point. That's impossible. It's learning how to control your fear, and how to be free from it.*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 239) she also implies choosing control over emotion. This way, she becomes stronger by reflecting her feelings bravely. By this way, Roth shifts language to the centre of heroism from the external battlefield to Beatrice's inner thoughts. This line of sight challenges the physical aggression with emotional strength. The model of female protagonism moves from an aggressive background to an empathy-based behaviours. Obviously, Beatrice's Divergence is her rejection of gender-oriented society. Thus, Roth shows that the storytelling is an act of rebellion with Beatrice's confident claim of being "*divergent*".

Language of Emotion and Power

Beatrice's story extends female self-awareness by expressing emotions as a source of her understanding. The transformation at Beatrice's statement "*fear doesn't shut you down; it wakes you up*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 313) indicates her fear turns into self-understanding.

In the book, Roth constructs emotional control over masculine authority. She expands this form of feminine power into a wider field by using imagery enhances for visual scenes. Scenes like train transfers, fights, fear simulations and tests in the narration allows reader to visualise the Divergent world, feel the pressure on characters and feel the danger and intensity of the environment.

Roth builds the character of Beatrice as a symbol of emotional strength rather than physical power to cope with problems. So, the Divergent is different from traditional dystopian stories because Roth's main character does more than survival. She symbolises a pioneering female protagonist by rejecting definitions that are imposed by men.

Conclusion

Veronica Roth's Divergent changes the traditional female heroism. By her voice Beatrice controls the world which is designed to silence her. Finally, Beatrice's self-determination becomes her source of resistance. So, the story of Veronica Roth challenge the power of physical strength with language.

Accordingly, throughout the book, Roth challenges traditional gender codes. She reforms emotionless bravery by rejecting male influence on woman. Roth creates this feeling with simple dialogues of Beatrice that commands the story with her emotions.

Roth's first-person narration and Beatrice's language become a reflection of Cixous's idea of "a woman writing herself". Her anaphoric sentences like "*I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent*" (V. Roth, Herper Fire, 2024, pp 442) shows that she is extraordinary. Beatrice's evolution as a female character implies what Simone de Beauvoir call "*one is not born rather become a woman*". Similarly, Beatrice's refusal to repeat the linguistic obedience and gender rules represents Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity.

In reality, Veronica Roth transforms language into an instrument of resistance. By writing her own story Beatrice's character changes from indecisiveness to moral clarity. Visible development of her inner voice reflects growth of her identity. During this development of controlling her language, she survives a cruel world and reshapes it.

As a result, Veronica Roth's narrative work indicates feminist bravery as linguistic act. Beatrice's voice represents contemporary feminist authorship. Likewise, Roth's minimalist style creates a heroine who represents both cleverness and empathy. By giving Beatrice full narrative control over her story, Veronica Roth does more than telling a rebellion story but she also performs it. Through her novel, Veronica Roth brings the feminist ideology "*commit is to speak herself into being*" to life.

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