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Phoenixes, mockingjays and chameleons: youth re-empowerment in contemporary fantasy and speculative young adult literature

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Phoenixes, Mockingjays and Chameleons
Youth re-empowerment in contemporary fantasy and speculative young adult literature.

Jessica Seymour
Thesis Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University.

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Abstract

Children’s literature tends to invite controversy among academics because children rarely produce the literature they read; rather, adults write the texts that children read. This apparent passivity within a child-centred discourse has led some theorists to argue that children lack agency because they internalise whatever morals or issues the adults, or power-holders, wish to impart. The current debate among academics about the child’s power in the children’s literature discourse often fails to take into account the literature itself and how young people are represented.

The popular assumption among some adult critics is that children require protection and censure due to their relative inexperience, and that if children have too much power and freedom they will destroy themselves. It is frequently argued that the fiction produced for children by adults indoctrinates them into the ideology of youth subordination. Often, contemporary young adult (YA) fiction works against this assumed power hierarchy by analysing power relations through the subversive, antagonistic strategies employed by youth. YA fiction portrays young characters as active and powerful by placing fictional young people with extraordinary abilities opposite fictional adults who want to disempower and control them. In contemporary YA, the disempowerment of young people acts as a catalyst for action. Young people are portrayed as active, engaged individuals capable of toppling oppressive social orders.

This thesis examines three YA book series as case studies in an evidence-based, exploratory approach to textual analysis; Harry Potter by JK Rowling, The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins, and The Hunchback Assignments by Arthur Slade. Using a mixture of theoretical frameworks, I locate my case studies in the wider context of YA literature and demonstrate the progression of each narrative’s protagonist from a
position of disempowerment to a position of power. Most importantly, I examine how each protagonist engages with the constructed social hierarchy of the narrative, which generally privileges adult power, in order to exercise as much autonomy as possible. Despite conclusions drawn by academics that children’s literature has marginalised or colonised the child, analysis of contemporary YA literature indicates a growing trend towards the representation of young people as powerful, autonomous individuals.
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Abbreviations

The Harry Potter, Hunger Games, and Hunchback Assignments books referred to in this thesis are frequently abbreviated in parenthetical references as follows:

PS – Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone: Book One
CoS – Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: Book Two
PoA – Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban: Book Three
GoF – Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire: Book Four
OotP – Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: Book Five
HBP – Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince: Book Six
DH – Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Book Seven

HG – The Hunger Games: Book One
CF – Catching Fire: Book Two
M – Mockingjay: Book Three

HA – The Hunchback Assignments: Book One
DD – The Dark Deeps: Book Two
ER – Empire of Ruins: Book Three
ID – Island of Doom: Book Four
Introduction

It is astonishing how little attention critics have paid to Story considered in itself.

C.S. Lewis, 1966, p. 12

A child is standing on a battlefield, surrounded by bodies with still-steaming bullet holes in their chests and blank, staring eyes. There’s an arrow in her fist and blood in her hair. Another child gazes out at a tiny island and prepares himself for an invasion planned decades before he was born. In a world that hides in plain sight, a school becomes a war zone and students gather what weapons they can, sure up their defences, and make their stand against the giants and monsters beating at their door. The castle walls, which once protected them, crumble to dust.

War, danger, the battlefield – these images dominate contemporary non-realistic fiction for young people. Despite the intense critical scrutiny this fiction tends to invite, born from the assumption that children should be protected from these images, there is a pervasive theme of hardship and struggle in the literature they consume. The young character is the young reader’s representative in the narrative, and is expected to rise above their trials and tribulations to live ‘happily ever after’ in spite of this hardship. But there is another theme at work here. In the above passage, one conspicuously absent image is that of the adult. That is because the adult is frequently portrayed as the child’s adversary in such violence-heavy non-realistic texts. They are on the other side of the battlefield, or giving orders from their cosy office while the child goes to war. Adults have the power in these narratives; just as they have power in the real world. This thesis will analyse how the representation of adult power in fiction for young readers reflects and subverts the real-world power hierarchy occupied by adults and young people.
Andrew Melrose’s (2011) keynote address during the Australasian Association of Writing Programs conference in Byron Bay, discussed the current propensity among some children’s literature academics to relegate the child reader to a passive role in the children’s literature discourse. It has been argued in recent years that child readers cannot have power within the discourse of children’s literature because they do not produce children’s literature (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009). For this reason, they are classified primarily as consumers.

Jack Zipes (2009; 2002) is a particularly noteworthy scholar in this instance. He discusses the cultural paradigm of adults producing media for young people in Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter (2002), and concludes that children have been turned into ‘investments’ whose only purpose is to consume media and become indoctrinated into the capitalist culture. Following on from Zipes’s conclusions, a popular assumption among children’s literature scholars is that the child’s relative inexperience (compared to an adult’s) renders them vulnerable to the ideological subtext of the narratives produced for them (Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2009; Nodelman, 2008). This expectation relies on the premise that the child is a blank receptacle for adult agendas. Children’s literature academics have been divided on the subject of the readers’ passivity within the discourse; with many arguing that the adult author has colonised the child by using children’s and YA literature to perpetuate adult values (Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2002; 2009; Nodelman, 2008). Perry Nodelman (2008) writes:

If colonialist thinking tends to conceive of people as colonisable in part by perceiving them as childlike, it seems logical to suggest that adult thinking about childhood is inherently colonialist already. The metaphor of childlikeness applies most immediately to children themselves – and children’s literature might be best
characterized as that literature that works to colonize children by persuading them that they are as innocent and in need of adult control as adults would like to believe (p. 163)

I disagree with Nodelman’s proposition that the child and the colonial figure occupy the same social space mainly because the child figure, unlike the colonial figure, occupies a transitional stage; they will grow and develop into adults, and so in time come to occupy the same social space as their supposed colonisers. I am drawing upon Nodelman’s claim of the child as a colonised figure in order to argue that there should be a way to address this problem. It is troubling that Nodelman has identified this potentially colonising effect of children’s and YA literature, and the perceived power imbalance between adults and young people, without offering any way to improve the situation.

There is an assumption at work here that the texts produced by adults for young readers deliberately construct the child as innocent and passive, and in doing so they perform the colonial practice of oppressing and marginalising a group through representations in fiction (Delgado, 1997; Rushdy, 1992; Sekora, 1987). While Nodelman’s (2008) study, and similar studies conducted by children’s literature academics, address the potential for ‘colonized’ young readers to be exposed to the normativity of the author what remains to be investigated is whether the fiction itself constructs young people as submissive and dependant on adults for guidance. The representation of young people and their relationship with adults in fiction for young readers is the focus of this thesis.

Fiction has long been perused and probed for its hidden meanings, and children’s and young adult (YA) fiction has drawn particular critical attention out of fear that the young reader will be absorbing hazardous ideologies (Abanes, 2001; Zipes, 2002; Hunt,
Young people are constructed in the social discourse as needing guidance and support as they cross from youth to adulthood (Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005; Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012). Given the popular understanding that literature consumption in early years shapes the values of a culture (Gierzynski & Eddy, 2013), the literature consumed by young people is considered of crucial importance to their intellectual and moral growth. Adult authors are therefore expected to include in their texts whichever dominant ideology is at work when they are writing; books which are not structured to support the dominant ideology are frequently banned or censored to prevent potential damage to young minds (Denzin, 2013; Althouse, 2013; Webb, 2009; Hunt, 2005).

Several critics argue that adults have marginalised and ‘othered’ the child through a process of repeated portrayals of conservative, powerless young characters who learn to associate goodness with their adult betters (Nodelman, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2002), although, as I will discuss shortly, these conclusions are generally drawn from reading outdated and non-contemporary texts.

Although there are many critics engaged in the debate, this thesis draws mainly on the works of key theorists whose works are commonly cited in those academic writings which are broadly concerned with power and agency in children’s and YA literature. There are nuances to the debate and there is no unified approach to the question of the child in literature. The central premise for this thesis rests upon an interrogation of the positions taken by critics such as Nikolajeva, Zipes, Nodelman, and Hunt, because these theorists represent the core of the issue which this thesis is working to address.

Melrose (2012a; 2012b) argues against the notion of the child as ‘other’ by stating that the young reader cannot be considered passive when making meaning from a text because no reader is passive when making meaning from a text. Melrose’s argument is
particularly persuasive when viewed in the context of wider interpretive discourse. Considering that one of the key beliefs of reader-oriented theory is that the reader ultimately has the most interpretive power over the narrative (Barthes, 1968; Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), to argue that the young reader is inactive in the literary process “surely suggests that all readers are… surely we can’t believe that in any literary relationship?” (Melrose 2012b, p. 4). While adult authors produce texts for young readers, and may approach the practice with the intention to impart some ideological wisdom, Melrose argues that the child is not ‘othered’ in this process because the child as a reader has the potential to create personal meaning from the work.

Chantal Francois’s (2013) empirical study on youth reading practices examines how young readers approach the act of reading as “a moment when young people negotiate identities, both individual and group-based, both familiar and possible” (p. 148). The communal nature of youth reading practice, despite reading being typically constructed as a solitary practice, extends the young reader’s ability to contextualise the text they are reading and connect it with their own lived experience: “Students in this study confirm that relating to reading is important not just to oneself but also to the act of connecting with one another in settings that prioritize the relationship between self and school” (Francois, 2013, p. 149). The delivery and absorption of ideology through YA fiction will be discussed at greater length in the Other Findings & Discussion chapter of this thesis. The Other Findings and Discussion chapter will also include a brief analysis of the position of the mother figure in texts for young readers, the applicability of Atwood’s (1972) theories of postcolonial victim empowerment, and the place of online spaces in youth-centred discourse.
If young characters were constructed as passive and submissive in children’s and YA fiction, then the potential internalisation of the fiction’s themes among young readers would be cause for alarm. But an analysis of various contemporary YA series demonstrates that authors tend to populate their narratives with powerful young protagonists. In children’s and YA fantasy and speculative fiction, young characters often find themselves at the centre of the narrative, carrying the plot, and relying on their wits and unique strengths to protect themselves and the people around them from harm.

I am not arguing that the authors are not ‘powerholders’, in the sense that they are not in a position of age-based power over the child reader. I am arguing that they are responding (not naturally, but as per the postcolonial tradition where exposure to counter-narratives gradually alters perception) to the developing position of the child in fiction. I am also arguing that the children’s literature academics this thesis focuses on are not responding to this changing perception because they are not, as mentioned previously, engaging with contemporary fiction when they draw their conclusions about the power of the author over the young reader. These fictional worlds reflect the reader’s experience of the real world either directly (when the setting is a world beneath the surface of the reader’s experience), or indirectly (when the setting is a reflection or echo of the reader’s imagination), and these reflections allow the narratives to explore issues and themes relevant to the young reader. Young readers see fictionalised portrayals of their peers fighting dragons, giant metal monsters and mutated beasts; they fight with magic, bows and knives, and their bare fists. Young characters have strength and skills that far outweigh those of their adult counterparts. Adults in the narrative may be represented attempting to control or contain their young charges, but these attempts are ultimately portrayed as futile. Simply put, the fictional child is too powerful for the
fictional adult to control. This representation of the power hierarchy in children’s and YA texts is critical to this thesis because it demonstrates that, despite conclusions by some academics that children’s and YA literature has colonised the child, by portraying them as passive and needing adult guidance the fiction actually provides a counter-narrative to the assumed power of adults.

This thesis will outline an evidence-based, exploratory approach to textual analysis through an examination of three case studies. The case studies are YA book series chosen from the fantasy and speculative fiction sub-genres of YA; the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling, The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins, and The Hunchback Assignments by Arthur Slade. I have chosen to limit my analysis to three case studies to ensure a deeper level of critical engagement, but I have contextualised my reading of each case study through wider reading. I will begin by addressing how adult characters are depicted as having power over young characters, with reference to styles of oppression historically utilised by real-world adults, and explore the adult/child power hierarchy as it is portrayed in the non-realistic, fictional work. From there, the analysis will track the growth of representations of the young character’s agency and power through the subversive strategies employed by the oppressed individual.

In this thesis, the texts being studied represent a sample (small, to ensure maximum engagement, but contextualised through wide reading) of data. This is a result of the combination of sociology and textual analysis, as modelled by Lobe, Livingstone, Haddon and others (2007), where they make specific reference to texts as ‘case studies’ Michel Foucault’s ‘The Subject and Power’ (1982), identifies subversive strategies as an excellent reference point for analysing power relations because it takes the analyst outside of the ‘internal rationality’ of the power hierarchy: “the main objective… is to
attack not so much “such or such” an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power… It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects” (p. 781). In this way, this thesis is focused more on the types of power being exercised in a fictional work, whether it is portrayed as damaging to a young character, and how the young characters are shown subverting it. The form of power present in much of children’s and YA literature is generally an age-based hierarchy with the eldest characters in the dominant position (Nikolajeva, 2009; Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012). By analysing the subversive strategies of young characters portrayed in my case studies, I can draw my analysis away from a limited case-by-case analysis and into a more inclusive examination of the adult/child power hierarchy with a reference to in-depth textual analysis.

The terms ‘children’s literature’ and ‘YA literature’ are often used interchangeably in academia (Nodelman, 2008). While children’s and YA literature are closely related, the terms are generally considered to mean books targeted towards prepubescent readers and teenaged readers respectively. This can change depending on the nationality of the academic as these terms can often carry different meanings in the UK, USA and Australia, and this probably contributes to the terms’ perceived interchangeably. Although the debate around the marginalisation and disempowerment of young readers tends to focus on younger readers (early childhood to middle grade), this thesis will use YA literature as a focus point. YA literature is still, ironically, an adolescent genre in terms of time spent under academic scrutiny, and much of the academic criticism related to the genre is steeped in children’s literature traditions. I will explore this phenomenon further in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis. I have chosen to limit my study to fiction meant for comparatively older readers because it provides the best scope for analysis of overt power hierarchies and methods of subordination. The
protagonists, usually teenagers, are close to becoming adults themselves, and so the depiction of these protagonists engaging with a power hierarchy which subordinates youth is more critically interesting and indicative of a preoccupation with empowerment.

YA literature is a difficult genre to define. Teenage-targeted books tend to have young protagonists and deal in rite of passage themes which are relevant to teen audiences – themes such as sexual awakening and identity, peer-relationships, self-esteem, and so on. Although it would be tempting to use the young protagonist and teen-relevant themes to define the genre, many books targeted towards adult readers share these conventions, such as George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1996), or John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One In* (2004), which both have adolescent third person focalisations and deal with themes of maturation and acceptance but are not recommended for young audiences due to their graphic portrayals of sex, violence and mature themes.

Jack Zipes (2002), a prominent children’s literature academic, writes that children’s and YA literature does not, in fact, exist. Instead, he defines the genre as any fiction that is *marketed* towards young people by publishers. Even this is problematic, because the market does not always reflect the publishers’ desires; for example, well-known YA author Sonya Hartnett recently released *Golden Boys* (2014). Despite the fact that Penguin published the book for adult audiences, young adult fans of Hartnett have continued to seek out and enjoy *Golden Boys* (Flanagan 2014). Children’s and YA fiction, thus, could be considered any fiction marketed to, or widely consumed by, young people. I will elaborate on these issues of definition and classification in the *Literature Review*.
In order to contextualise my own approach to power and agency in the case studies, I must first understand how other critics have approached the same themes. As Nodelman (2008) notes, there is some perceived interchangeability of the terms ‘children’ and ‘young adults’ in academic literature, but as this thesis examines YA literature which covers a spectrum (from lower-middle grade to older readers), I will draw on the literature around both of these categories in order to frame the analysis effectively.

C.S. Lewis (1966), who is quoted at the head of this chapter, notes the propensity of academics to disregard story in favour of their opinions on stories. Lewis writes (1966) that “the Story itself, the series of imagined events, is nearly always passed over in silence, or else treated exclusively as affording opportunities for the delineation of character” (p. 3). While much of the academic literature examined in this thesis does mention children’s and YA texts in passing, there tends to be more emphasis on the academic’s understanding of the psychology of adults subordinating youth than on the portrayal of these themes in the fiction. There is also a significant lack of academic focus on the manner in which children’s and YA literature is constructed to provide enjoyment. Much of contemporary YA literature is consumed primarily for entertainment, not education, and as Henry Jenkins (2006) notes in his writings on young people and their relationships with media:

… consumers don’t sit down in front of their game consoles to learn a lesson. Their attention is even more fragmented; their goals are even more personal; they aren’t really going to be tested on what they learn. And they tend to dismiss anything they encounter in fantasy or entertainment that is not consistent with what they believe to be true about the real world (p. 212)

Jenkins’ argument remains relevant to the contemporary academic discourse and discussions around the audience/producer relationship because his points about
censorship and restricting access to certain media ‘for the child’s own good’ remain as relevant today as they did nine years ago. Despite this, some children’s and YA literature academics continue to assert that the young reader is a passive sponge soaking in the values and ideals of the media they engage with (Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2009; Nodelman, 2008). While these studies address the potential for ‘colonised’ readers to internalise the normative ideals of the author, what remains unclear is whether the fiction itself constructs young people as submissive to adult agendas. That is, if contemporary fiction colonises the young reader by portraying them as submitting to or being dependant on adult characters for security and welfare. That is the primary concern of this thesis.

Western culture has long been concerned with the development of young people’s morality and social awareness. This cultural preoccupation has extended to scrutinising the media consumed by and marketed to young people; often resulting in the censorship of texts deemed ‘inappropriate’ for young readers whose morality and social awareness are still developing (Denzin, 2013; Althouse, 2013; Webb, 2009; Hunt, 2005). Children’s literature as a genre began in the morality tale tradition and was originally designed to teach appropriate behaviour (Carpenter, 1985). Contemporary gatekeepers and moral idealists often scrutinise which texts their children read in order to ensure that they internalise the best moral messages. Adults frequently censor or outright ban the books that do not adhere to their values or beliefs; sexual themes, violence, and lack of adherence to religious values are among the most common reasons for the censorship of children’s and YA literature (Denzin, 2013; Althouse, 2013; Webb, 2009; Hunt, 2005).
This is an interesting situation given that adults are responsible for the production of the
text as well as the subsequent censorship. Many theorists (Beauvais, 2012a; Zipes,
2009; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009) offer brilliant examinations of themes and issues of YA
and children’s literature which can be attributed to the adult author’s ideologies, but
there is very little emphasis on the portrayals of young characters in fiction and their
relationships with these ideologies. For example, Beauvais (2012a) argues that
Stephenie Meyer’s (2005) *Twilight* saga uses a vampire/human hybrid infant to force
“the implied young reader to consider not only her own generation but also her future
children’s generation as the locus of social and political improvement” (73), but
minimises the fact that the politicisation of an infant is portrayed as having a negative
effect on the vampiric society as a whole.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Seymour 2014a), the construction of characters and
themes in a narrative is crucial to meaning-making – whether a narrative constructs a
character negatively or positively ought to have implications for subsequent analyses of
the text. It is frequently taken for granted, by some academics and adult critics of the
genre, that young readers will internalise these themes, regardless of how or whether
they are represented in the fiction.

‘Aetonormativity’, a phrase coined by Maria Nikolajeva (2009), refers to the adult ideal
of ‘normal’, or adult normativity, which she argues is ever present in texts for young
readers: “[i]ndeed, nowhere else are power structures as visible as in children’s
literature, the refined instrument used for centuries to educate, socialize [sic] and
oppess a particular social group” (p. 16). While this is a major contribution to the field,
Nikolajeva’s (2009) argument works on the presumption of passivity among young
readers; arguing, for example, that children’s literature is created “by the powerful for
the powerless” (p. 16), and working on the assumption that the child reader is unable to engage critically with a text.

Paradoxically, Nikolajeva’s (2009) argument appears to allow for the empowerment of the young reader through the portrayal of aetonormativity in a negative light, particularly in the non-realistic genres of fantasy and speculative fiction: “[a]dult normativity is subjected to scrutiny even if it is still presented as normative. The best children’s literature has the potential to question the adults as a norm” (2009, p. 17). Unfortunately, Nikolajeva leaves this concept unexplored in favour of her continued argument for the passivity of the young reader and the (assumed) intentional oppressive tactics employed by the adult author. While Nikolajeva writes that contemporary children’s literature “has cautiously started subverting its own oppressive function” (2009, p. 16), the most recent text in her discussion, apart from the children’s literature juggernaut Harry Potter, is The Book of Everything by Guus Kuijer (2004). The Book of Everything is, in fact, the only text Nikolajeva makes reference to which was published in the same century in which she is writing.

Nikolajeva’s (2009) argument for aetonormativity and the passivity of the young reader relies heavily on texts published throughout the 1900s, including The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1901), Winnie-the-Pooh (1926), and Pippi Longstocking (1945), with more ‘contemporary’ texts such as Holes by Louis Sachar (1998) mentioned in passing. Nikolajeva’s (2009) reliance on non-contemporary texts to discuss contemporary issues in children’s and YA literature is a common and troubling critical trend. Nikolajeva’s more recent publications (2012; 2011; 2010) indicate a continued reliance on the ‘canon’ (or the academic collection of texts which are frequently called upon during
analysis) with brief forays into obscure contemporary texts for young readers, such as *Forbidden* by Tabitha Suzanna (2010).

Academics reinforce a level of confirmation bias through their choice to focus on older texts that support their preconceived notions of ‘childhood’ as a narrative construct, rather than developing their theories to take account of the contemporary texts available to young people. David Rudd (2013) writes that “criticism of children’s literature often [gives] one a sense of déjà vu” (2013, p. 57) because critics tend to re-visit old texts rather than seeking out new ones. He notes that the academic aversion to contemporary fiction for young people “is hard to escape when discussing children’s literature” (2013, p. 176) because some academics cling to their well-traversed ‘canon’ of children’s literature, making it difficult to engage in the academic discourse without first engaging with the older texts which form its basis. Schwind and Buder (2012) write that confirmation bias can be either defence-motivated or accuracy-motivated, but when a person is approaching knowledge acquirement from a prior perspective – such as, for example, an established canon of texts – then they will privilege information which supports that prior perspective regardless of any counter-arguments which would, logically, render their initial perspective obsolete. It is, cognitively speaking, much easier for individuals to believe in the credibility of information that confirms what they already know, rather than accept information which contradicts it (Schwind, Buder, Cress, Hesse & Preston, 2012; Hernandez & Preston, 2013). This could explain why some children’s and YA literature critics are so invested in older texts that represent the disempowerment of youth at the hands of adult oppressors.

Melrose’s (2012a) counterargument to Nikolajeva’s (2009) theory of aetonormativity states that children are never passive in the literature discourse because they can choose
not to engage, or to stop reading according to their tastes and interest level. Essentially, the child is not a “construction site” (Melrose, 2012a, p. 22), as argued by some academics, where the adult author can establish and cultivate whatever ideals he or she chooses. Instead, the child is a thinking, living individual who, like the adult reader, brings their own experience and context to creating meaning in a text.

Although it is previously stated in this Introduction that the child and the colonised figure occupy different social spaces, if we assume that Nodelman (2008) is correct in his assertion that the child has been colonised, then it stands to reason that the postcolonial strategies employed by authors of texts, such as establishing counter-narratives and depicting colonised individuals with more agency (Delgado, 1997; Rushdy, 1992; Sekora, 1987), would be useful in the children’s and YA literature discourse. Melrose (2012b) argues that if the relationship between the adult author and the child reader is akin to the coloniser/colonised then there is an opportunity, as there were opportunities with other marginalised groups, for the colonisers to “enter the space between” (p. 22) the child and adult and engage in mutual exploration, debate and experience. Children and adults exist in different social spaces (although the child is constantly in a state of transition which will eventually lead to them occupying the same space as adults), but Melrose argues that it would be a mistake to consider one space as being inherently ‘better’ than another. It is simply a matter of different levels of experience. The text can act as an intermediary between the two; creating a ‘between space’ where the child and adult can interact. This interaction is crucial and, Melrose (2012b) argues, unavoidable:

To suggest a child is an ‘outsider’ in the literary process surely suggests that all readers are. That we adult writers are the makers and our readers are the receivers
and that our job is to unashamedly take them in’. But surely we can’t believe that in

any literary relationship? (p. 4)

Here, Melrose is making a discreet reference to reader-oriented theories of texts which
 presumption that the reader is an active participant in meaning-making; a presumption he
 extends to the younger reader as a matter of course. The theory that Melrose is working
 from is that if we assume that the young reader is a thinking, feeling individual as
 opposed to a blank block of clay to be moulded by adults, then we must assume that the
 young reader has the same capacity for literary engagement which we would expect of
 the adult reader. The presumption of the young reader’s passivity is often taken for
 more in-depth analysis of the construction of the young reader in academic discourse
 can be found in the Literature Review.

This thesis argues that adult authors enter the ‘between space’ through non-realistic
 fiction by creating a counter-narrative to the received wisdom which privileges adult
 power. They do not need to address the power holders in society (adults) because the
 marginalised youth will eventually transition into the dominant discourse in the
 adult/child power hierarchy and take these counter-narratives with them. Adult authors
 thus engage with the reader in “‘joint activity’ between the experienced and the less so”
 (Melrose, 2012a, p. 25). I do not argue that this is an intentional response to the
 perceived ‘colonisation’ of young readers – rather, as I will discuss in the Findings &
 Discussion chapter, I consider this to be a natural artistic response to portrayals of
 disempowerment which mimic the colonial. The author, as a product of the
 contemporary social, cultural and political context, and having presumably engaged
 with some postcolonial literature, is responding to traditional ideals of ‘youth’ and
 ‘childhood’ and reflecting a more open-minded, inclusive ideal. I will extend Melrose’s
argument by examining the way that the relationship between children and adults is represented in the fiction itself, and by extension what this could mean for their real-world relationship.

This is a crucial point: the construction and representation of the relationship between the child and adult in fiction. As discussed above, several children’s and YA literature academics (Nikolajeva, 2009; Beauvais, 2012a; Zipes, 2002; 2009; Nodelman, 2008) often identify aetonormative ideals in fiction without analysing their context. How are these themes portrayed? Positively, negatively, or neutrally? As I have discussed elsewhere (Seymour, 2014a), the construction of themes and issues in fiction is crucial to how meaning is conveyed. Of course, the onus is still on the reader to make meaning from these texts, but the presentation of these themes within the text provides an excellent guide for critical analysis and interpretation (Seymour, 2014a).

This thesis’s combination of textual analysis and sociology (where texts are analysed and then used to draw conclusions regarding social and cultural implications) is typical of the research the thesis draws upon. The key theorists informing this discussion often draw sociological conclusions from textual analysis, despite the absence of sociological study, because it is accepted that these texts exist as reflections of the social and cultural context of the author/reader. For example, the final chapter in Nodelman’s The Hidden Adult: Defining Children’s Literature (2008) draws on his analysis of the genre in order to explore how texts should be received by readers, while Zipes (2002; 2009) draws numerous conclusions about the perception of the child among adults in the entertainment industry by observing how children and young people are portrayed in fiction. Drawing sociological and cultural conclusions about the relationship between
readers and authors from observations of literature are common in the academic
discourse (see Lobe et al, 2007; Day, 2012; Bach et al, 2011).

Adult characters are generally constructed in YA narratives as desiring the
subordination of young people in order to mould them into ideal citizens. In fantasy and
speculative fiction, the ideal citizen is submissive to the political regime of the
constructed world. The desire to create a particular kind of citizen reflects the social and
political construction of young people in the real-world as needing guidance as they
mature into adulthood and take on the roles and responsibilities of the power holders in
people are trained from a young age to behave with the expectation that they will be
assuming a role in the social order when they mature: ““Study because it will help you
get a job in the future’, ‘Learn about citizenship because one day it will be a
citizen’…We are, in fact, teaching about ‘active citizenship’ in the most negative way”
(2005, p. 141). This training teaches the young person to associate their youthful
experience with preparation and expectation. There is no intrinsic value to their
behaviours except how they will serve society in the future, and this requires a level of
adult control over the lives and agency of young people so that they will develop
‘properly’ (in accordance with the aetonormative ideal). This control is exercised
through the manipulation of certain aspects of the young person’s life (Holdsworth,
2005; Jacobs, 2005), and this perception of adult control carries through to YA where
adult power holders manipulate society to ensure the development of submissive
citizens. They are portrayed as actively suppressing the agency of young characters
through this manipulation. Power, in YA fiction, is the ability of a character to either
express or suppress agency.
The importance of the account I am seeking to offer in this thesis is that, in spite of academic claims that YA literature has colonised the child, contemporary fiction does not represent young people as being submissive to aetonormative ideals in a narrative. On the contrary, fantasy and speculative fiction in particular portray YA narratives with a clear antagonist, most often an adult or older child, who attempts to enforce their aetonormativity onto the younger protagonist. The young protagonist is portrayed as working directly against this aetonormativity – which, in turn, is portrayed in a very negative, though often disturbingly persuasive and invasive, manner. To that end, the first chapters of this thesis will demonstrate how young people are portrayed in children’s and YA fiction as responding to the aetonormative ideals of the adults in the narrative.

Theoretical Methodology and Structure of the Thesis

My exploratory, evidence-based approach to textual analysis requires recognition of the text as an artefact which I, as the reader, interpret and critically analyse. My methodological framework owes much to the traditions which developed out of New Criticism (see below), but I have chosen a less radical approach that acknowledges the author’s deliberate construction of a text, but ultimately privileges the text itself and the reader’s potential relationship with it for interpretation. From my reading of New Critical debates, I have concluded that the text itself is a construction of the adult’s conscious and subconscious mind, and that finding meaning is a joint activity between the author and the reader. The author, whether intentionally or not, creates the narrative – and the reader, whether subconsciously or not, interprets the work using the tools and knowledge available to them in conjunction with the textual clues the author has given. The main power of interpretation appears to be in the hands of the reader, due to the often-limited presence of the author. While present in the text, the author cannot always
be present to police the reader’s interpretations, and the reader can choose to ignore the author’s perceived intentions if they choose.

My decision to use different theoretical frameworks follows in the tradition of literary hermeneutics, where texts are analysed as parts in the context of a whole and whole texts as the sum of their parts (Malbon, 1983). Approaching each case study as a separate hermeneutic circle with the appropriate theoretical lens, as discussed in the Introduction, allows for a more specific and in-depth analysis than if I were attempting to enforce a single theory on all of them. It also has the added benefit of demonstrating that even though each case study approaches the re-empowerment of children in fundamentally different ways, each case study still fits into the overall contemporary trend of empowering fictional young people. The narratives provide young characters with the tools and abilities necessary to develop and enforce their autonomy in an adult-controlled environment, regardless of the different approaches to power and agency taken (depending on the genre and the social identity of the protagonist). This is reflected in the different theoretical frameworks used to analyse them. This further illustrates my argument that children’s and YA literature, as a whole, is becoming more open to the development of agency and control in its young protagonists, because the change is not confined to a single genre or type of narrative.

New Criticism developed out of the debate as to whether or not authors or readers have the most power over a text. Roland Barthes’s essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968) critiques the assumption that the author is the ultimate source of knowledge, as the author is themselves a product of a language and social culture which predetermines the structure of language and discourse. As mentioned previously, the author’s cultural context is particularly relevant to the production of contemporary YA fiction because it
accounts for the shift towards more empowered portrayals of young characters; the author, as a product of a cultural context which is beginning to accept young people as autonomous individuals, reacts through fiction by writing young characters as autonomous individuals.

The concept of ‘intentional fallacy’ was first coined by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley (1946), who argued that the meaning of a narrative or text does not originate with the author’s intentions. At the time, literary criticism was broadly focused on author-oriented theories, and finding meaning in the biographical context of the producer of the work. Wimsatt and Beardsley’s radical counterargument posited that finding meaning in a narrative could not be settled by privileging the author’s intentions. It is not, they write, what the author means by the work, but the work itself which is most important in meaning-making. The ‘affective fallacy’ works in a similar line, arguing that the subjective affect a narrative or text has on a reader is likewise unimportant in literary study (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1949). The text itself embodies the meaning, and its objective structure is therefore the best reference to use when discovering meaning (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1949).

The concepts of intentional and affective fallacy became an integral part of New Critical discourse, which holds that the object of literary study should be the texts themselves and how they are structured to disclose meaning, rather than what meaning can be divined from a text through familiarity with the author’s background. But there is a relationship of causality between the author and the text that is difficult to ignore. ED Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) rejects the approach of New Critics and Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946; 1949) in particular, arguing that the author’s intention cannot be completely removed from a text because the text itself was intentionally
produced. That is, the author’s desire to produce a narrative is intentional, and the proof of that intention is in the product itself.

Rosemary Maier’s analysis (1970) of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (1946) ‘intentional fallacy’ calls into question the lack of contextualisation given to words like ‘fallacy’ and ‘intention’. Without an explanation of what Wimsatt and Beardsley mean, Maier (1970) writes, it remains unclear whether the article itself “is merely a timely pejorative, or whether it denotes a real perversion of critical logic” (p. 137). Maier, like Hirsch (1967), takes issue with the apparent desire of New Critics to cut the author entirely out of the critical process by arguing that there is a significant difference between the intentions which the author has upon beginning a text and what intentions they have for its meaning once it is complete. Essentially, Maier argues that the author’s plans for the work ought to be considered in the critical process, but that the author should not attempt to control the process of meaning-making or analysis once the work is complete and in the hands of the public. The author’s unrealised intentions for a work have no relevance to criticism because these unrealised intentions are divorced from the actual text being analysed (Maier, 1970).

As the reader may not always have access to the author’s thoughts on the text, the best way to discern any meaning would be through the author’s use of language in the narrative. These meanings, intended or not, are steeped in a tradition of socially constructed language use (Jameson, 2008; Derrida, 1993). Signifiers and words exist in a context or discourse that gives them meaning; in this case, the discourse is the text produced by an author for a reader (Webb, 2009; Derrida, 1993). The reader may not be the intended audience of the text so they may not approach the discourse in the way that the author is expecting, and so they may discern different meanings from the signifiers
used (Sariganides, 2012; Webb, 2009; Derrida, 1993). Emile Benveniste’s (1996) work on the nature of the linguistic sign takes a somewhat alternative route to New Critics who argue for the structuralist perspective to literary inquiry by arguing that there is no ‘universal truth’ to be garnered by signifiers in a narrative; instead, the ‘truth’ is relative to the discourse which constructs it.

So, in children’s and YA literature, although readers may not have the same experience level as the author, by engaging with the known conventions of the genre (such as young protagonists, youth-driven themes, etc.) the narrative can engage with issues and themes which would otherwise be foreign to the reader. If the narrative engages with power structures (adult/child) which are similar to the ones experienced by the reader, then the text is sharing “similar experiences … for the metaphor to be at all effective” (Montgomery, 1965, p. 541), and then the use of new signifiers and tropes, such as the conclusion of the narrative with a child in a position of power, become more readily accessible by the audience. As Waugh (2009) writes, there is no way to analyse a text which will satisfy every reader:

Because no one theory can offer to ‘answer’ a text or lay bare all possible interpretations of a text, the best the interpreter can do is to acknowledge the discourse or combination of discourses used and remain mindful that such an interpretation will not explain everything (p. 7)

As such, my analysis will be based in evidence from the texts and my descriptions will demonstrate my reasoning for each conclusion. As Bean and Harper write in their analysis of representations of masculinity in YA (2007), the organisation of meaning in a text is primarily social. Their analysis focuses “on how the sign of masculinity is marking difference, how, when, and to what end” (2007, p. 19). Likewise, my analysis will be driven primarily by an analysis of the representation of power in the case
studies, how, when and to what end it is exercised, and how it changes hands over the course of a particular YA series. I will be looking at the visible material as well as the meanings, values and norms that are made available to the reader through the symbolic nature of language. In order to locate my analysis in an academic context, I will begin by examining what has been written about children’s and YA literature, and how it has been approached historically. I will also centre my argument for the agency of young readers in audience interaction theory, and locate my understanding of ‘agency’ and ‘power’ in the children’s and YA literature context.

This thesis will devote a chapter of analysis to each case study, with three analysis chapters in total. I chose my case studies as representative of the three major sub-genres of non-realistic YA literature: Fantasy, Dystopia and Science Fiction. Other sub-genres such as Paranormal Romance, made popular by Stephanie Meyer’s (2005) Twilight series, rarely engage directly with the child/adult hierarchy to the extent which the genres studied in this thesis do, and focus instead on relationship dynamics and personal fulfilment. These are important concerns for young readers, as demonstrated by their popularity in fictional form, but they are beyond the scope of this thesis. It could be possible to mount a case that Twilight examines adult/child power dynamics in the context of a romantic relationship (between Edward and Bella), but this kind of potential disempowerment is entirely different from the kinds of relationships which are examined in the scope of this thesis.

The three sub-genres I have chosen deal with these issues, as well as others relevant to the young readership, but the adult/child relationship remains a major theme. The case study chapters will briefly contextualise each series as part of the wider YA literature genre. There will also be a literature review specific to the case study’s genre and the
applicable theoretical frameworks that will support my interpretations. Then the chapters will demonstrate and examine the protagonist’s progression towards empowerment and agency over the course of the series with the New Critical emphasis of textual construction at the basis of my interpretive practice.

I chose my case studies based on three criteria;

1) Each case study must be a contemporary (published in the last ten years) YA series of three books or more. *My Sister’s Keeper* by Jodi Picoult (2003) is a stand-alone narrative celebrating the acquisition of power and agency by a young character through bodily autonomy. While interesting from a theoretical perspective, stand-alone narratives limit the protagonist’s development to a sudden and violent seize of control rather than a gradual shift in the paradigm. This gradual shift interests me because it represents the state of young adulthood as experienced by young readers (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2010). This is reflected most clearly in the series format where the narrative takes time to develop and the acquisition of power is ongoing and recursive.

2) Each case study must be representative of a non-realistic genre of fiction. Non-realistic fiction is very popular among young readers (Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012), and the representation of the power relationship between adults and young people is particularly interesting when the protagonist is offered the opportunity to physically overthrow their oppressor. While this does not reflect the real-world relationship between adults and young people (in Western society), it does offer a fascinating symbolic interpretation of it which will be discussed in more detail in the *Findings & Discussion* chapter.

3) Each case study must reflect an unbalanced power relationship between adults and young people. The case study is not required to overtly address the power relationship
as being unjust in the adult’s favour – in fact, it is very difficult to find YA narratives openly acknowledging the power imbalance – but the ability of a young character to control their life and choices must be a major theme in the story.

Young people, in literature as well as real life, have to work around significant obstacles to become powerful and exercise agency (Holdsworth, 2005; Jacobs, 2005). Those in the privileged position of power (adults) are portrayed in these case studies as having designed the world to support their position and limit the power of young people. Thus, it is not simply the fact that the young protagonists achieve agency that interests me – it is how they do it.

The case study chapters will examine each series through different theoretical lenses; *Harry Potter* through Plato’s Cave allegory, with a basis in mathematical Game Theory; *The Hunger Games* through feminist care ethics and body politics; and *The Hunchback Assignments* through postcolonial theory and the spectre of the face. This hermeneutics-based philosophy towards analysis recognises the place each case study has in the context of the wider YA genre, while also acknowledging that the series exist as whole narratives in and of themselves. I will analyse each case study as an individual narrative, choosing the best theoretical frameworks to acknowledge the different ways in which the case studies approach similar subject matter.

This is a similar approach to other PhD theses that combine feminism and critical theory (Mayes-Elma, 2003), cognitive psychology and literary theory (Waugh, 2009), or theology and a constructionist framework (Lennard, 2007). The flow-on-effect of mixing frameworks in this thesis is an eclectic array of theories to suit each case study’s thematic strengths. As Waugh (2009) writes in her thesis, YA book series “deal with important issues and, because of this, merit the application of such weighty theories and
theorists” (2009, p. 7). To attempt to enforce the same theoretical framework onto each case study would undermine the complexity and thoughtfulness with which each case study approaches the relationship between young people and adults.

This is important because it demonstrates that young characters can achieve agency and power in different ways depending on their abilities and how they are originally disempowered. As discussed above, the Foucauldian approach to analysing power places significant emphasis on the various subversive strategies of the oppressed. The fictional journey of each protagonist is dependant primarily on the construction of the social hierarchy in which the narrative is set and how they are able to react to it. Since each case study presents a unique representation of a non-realistic world, each protagonist’s journey is different and therefore requires a different theoretical framework on which to base my analysis. Each case study offers a different solution to the adult/child imbalance, and this is reflected in the different theoretical lenses I use to examine them.

*The Hunchback Assignments*, with its Victorian England setting and overt comparisons between its protagonist Modo and Indigenous Australians, lends itself to a postcolonial reading with an emphasis on the paternal nature of sovereignty (Branch, 2010; Foucault, 1982; Kelly, 2005), and the spectre of the face in the tradition of Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1993) in order to demonstrate the progression of Modo’s low self-esteem into eventual empowerment. Given the narrative’s preoccupation with physical appearance (through Modo’s deformities) and its links to colonial power (in his relationship with the colonised Rain People of Australia), the use of these theoretical frameworks is appropriate. *Harry Potter* has been frequently analysed through a Platonic lens (Biondi, 2012; Parker, 2008; Williams & Kellner, 2010; Bassham, 2010)
because the emphasis on education and development of youth into perfect citizens is clear throughout the series. This chapter draws on Plato’s theories of knowledge and power, along with the work of mathematical game theorists, to create a complementary framework for analysis to demonstrate how the progression of Harry’s initial reduction to a pawn in the series is born from Dumbledore’s Platonic desire for Harry’s development. I chose Game Theory because it represents a mode of thinking which can be adversarial or mutually beneficial depending on which strategy the players use. Harry’s separation from Dumbledore’s adversarial Game concludes his empowerment. 

*The Hunger Games* has drawn much feminist criticism (Averill, 2012; Miller, 2012), and so I will draw on feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982) and body politics (Gray et al, 2011), to analyse the development of Katniss’s autonomy and her transition from the victimised carer of her younger sister to the leader of a rebellion. Her portrayed narrative relationship with femininity is crucial to her initial objectification by the Capitol, and so it stands to reason that these two theoretical frameworks are best suited to analysing her rise to power over the course of the series.

I have chosen to approach each case study through a different theoretical lens because this analytic strategy allows me to interpret each case study on its own. Enforcing a feminist reading onto *Harry Potter* would limit what I can theoretically accomplish with that case study under the scope of the adult/child relationship; likewise a postcolonial reading of *The Hunger Games* would fail to acknowledge the gendered power at work in the series. A literature review at the head of each case study chapter will locate those series in the academic discourse with increased specificity, and also explain the theoretical frameworks on a case-by-case basis. This thesis is not a mixed methods thesis, because the analytical method of interpretation has its basis in New
Criticism, and will be the same for each case study. Instead, it mixes theoretical frameworks in order to broaden and sharpen the analysis.

The final chapter of the thesis will reconcile my case studies with the current debate in children’s and YA literature by demonstrating their positive portrayals of young people and their position in the adult/child power hierarchy. I will extend my analysis to include a demonstration of the fictional young peoples’ expressions of power in relation to expressions of power available to young readers in the real-world and colonised figures portrayed in other media. This is important because it demonstrates the potential link between the fictionalised relationship between the adult and the child, and the real-world relationship between the adult author and the young reader.

I will also address the thematic concerns which have prompted many adult guardians and gatekeepers to ban or censor fiction for young people; this is a real-world attempt to exercise power over young people’s agency and limit their power of choice. The fact that these narratives have been banned or censored indicates a desire among some authors to challenge the dominant ideologies of their time. Children’s and YA narratives have been banned for teaching children “to lie, spy, talk back, and curse” (Althouse, 2013, para 5), as well as “depicting women in strong leadership roles” (Althouse, 2013, para 14). While this scrutiny of media consumed by young people indicates the desire of adults to control what young readers consume, as the fiction portrays themes and issues which do not conform to the ideologies of the time, this indicates that many adult authors are not attempting to indoctrinate young readers into the dominant ideology.

Children do not fight dragons in real life; but fiction is not meant to reflect every aspect of our lives. Fantasy and speculative fiction are genres well known for their ability to
hold a mirror to the world of the reader by using things that do not happen in the real-world to comment on things that do. By representing young characters as powerful, capable individuals, the adult author is entering the ‘between space’, demonstrating that meaningful engagement has no age restrictions. This portrayal of fictionalised empowerment indicates that passivity and submissiveness are not considered ideal traits for the young reader.
Literature Review

By this point in my argument one thing should be clear:

children’s literature is not simple

Perry Nodelman, 2008, p. 245

The consumption of children’s and YA literature has attracted both critical and popular analysis. Examination of children’s and YA fiction has been published in a wide variety of media: journal articles, books, theses, Internet articles, essay anthologies and popular criticism. All of the texts discussed within this Literature Review were chosen for their relevance to the discussion and, as Anthony Lennard (2007) writes, this necessarily includes some sources that “while published, are not necessarily of a scholarly nature” (p. 34). This being said, the majority of texts discussed in this section have been subject to academic scrutiny and were produced by a recognised author or institution. For clarity and ease of reading, I have divided this chapter into sections for each of the academic themes I explored as part of my research.

Academic analysis of YA literature is not as common, relatively speaking, as analysis of children’s literature (Eaton, 2013; Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012). The rise in the popularity of the genre, however, has led to a surge of academic discourse dealing directly with the narratives consumed by adolescents (or teenagers). The frequency with which YA fiction is consumed makes it worthy of academic study, although the majority of criticism focuses primarily on the social construction of young people in the Western world as opposed to the fiction itself (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009). This often leads to critics relying on their own ideological biases to interpret the ‘meaning’ or values expressed by a narrative.
To clarify: when I write ‘young readers’, I mean the publishing audience of young people between the ages of nine and seventeen. This range can subsequently be split into two groups: the middle reader (ages nine to fourteen) and older reader (ages fourteen to seventeen) according to publishing standards and marketing strategies (Zipes, 2002; 2009). The case studies examined in this thesis are targeted towards a range of reading ages; *The Hunger Games* is marketed to older teens, *The Hunchback Assignments* to middle readers, and the *Harry Potter* series encompasses both groups. It is due to the relatively recent rise of stories targeted of an adolescent audience that YA fiction tends to act as a subcategory of the wider children’s literature genre, and occasionally in academic writings this distinction may be unclear. As such, this thesis draws on children’s literature academia that is applicable to my analysis, as well as the small pool of YA-specific literature.

**The Development of Children’s Literature**

Children’s literature grew out of the folkloric oral tradition of storytelling. Jack Zipes (2007), a specialist in fairy tales and their linguistic roots, writes that it is difficult to determine when the literary tradition of transcribing and distributing folk tales began, but that oral folk tales have existed for thousands of years and were mainly told by adults to other adults. This accounts for the folkloric tradition of darker subtexts, which according to Julie Sanders (2006) includes “incest, familial violence, and monstrousness that might elsewhere be seen as the stuff of dreams and nightmares” (p. 84). Although it is difficult to know where these tales originate from, Steven S. Jones (1987) writes that folklore relates to general preconceptions with human psychology, which is not necessarily culturally specific. To that end, folk tales can be remarkably culturally exchangeable.
When authors began collecting these tales into written volumes, they censored them for a younger audience by sublimating their intrinsically dark and violent nature (Zipes, 2007). Nicholas Tucker (1976) writes that “only a fanatic would wish to preserve every resurrected folk-tale for children, even those the Grimm brothers themselves dropped as too horrifying” (p. 35). Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is an interesting portrayal of the latent horrific content in fairy tales challenges the way that women and violence are represented in traditional stories through an adult-targeted narrative. Although Jones (1987) notes that folklore is generally preoccupied with human psychology, the literary tradition of adapting folk tales into written narratives often places more emphasis on the dominant morality and normativity of the social context in which the transcriber lived. In this manner, the fairy tales became morality tales. Karen Rowe’s (1979) work on feminism and fairy tales argues that dominant ideological conventions are fused into written folk tales in order to exploit younger listeners and indoctrinate them into the dominant morality. Other academics (Bettelheim, 1976; Tucker, 1976; Kimball, 1999) also note the ability of folk tales to instil traditional moralities into younger listeners; again, making a clear connection between what the child engages with in their youth and their moral development. This belief in the remarkable exploitability of young minds is a pervasive theme in academic and social discourse. Jack Zipes’ *Breaking the Magic Spell* (1979) explores the ability of folk tales to further moral agendas – particularly given the Western world’s consumer culture, which insinuates fairy tale motifs into popular culture through homogenised, ‘Disney-fied’ fables.

Narratives targeted towards young people and children have existed since the invention of fairy tales, with the Grimm brothers in particular being notable for censoring the more gruesome tales for the consumption of youth (Zipes, 1979; Tucker, 1976). But the
creation of literature specifically marketed towards children (as opposed to stories rewritten for children) is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the nineteenth century there were books and serials appreciated by young people such as Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Great Expectations* (1861), first written as weekly serials for newspapers and targeted towards adult readers. Other authors such as Robert Lewis Stevenson, Louisa May Alcott and Francis Hodgson Burnett wrote for young readers despite there being no distinguishable market for these types of texts at the time. As children’s literature became more complex and moved towards more secular ideologies, the use of the literature for moral development and education continued. A more intensive analysis on the portrayal of normative ideology in texts produced when there was no identifiable market for young readers can be found in the Findings & Discussion chapter of this thesis.

When the folklore and fairy tale genre morphed into the ‘children’s literature’ genre (as a result of a rise in literacy, a lowering of birth rates and a subsequent romanticisation of youth (Carpenter, 1985)), the use of children’s literature to indoctrinate youth into a dominant morality became the norm. Sir Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies, a Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863) is credited as beginning the trend of infusing particularly religious ideologies into children’s literature (Carpenter, 1985). Bruno Bettelheim’s (1976) seminal analysis of fairy tales and their uses in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* argues that children can derive “[r]ich personal meaning” (p. 17) from fairy tales as a result of their allegorical nature:

No child has to sit among the ashes, like Cinderella, or is deliberately deserted in a dense wood, like Hansel and Gretel, because a physical similarity would be too scary to the child, and “hit too close to home for comfort” when giving comfort is one of
the purposes of fairy tales. The child who is familiar with fairy tales understands that these speak to him in the language of symbols and not that of everyday reality (p. 62).

This predilection towards morality in fairy tales led to a particular type of analytical practice among children’s literature academics who seek out the moral themes of narratives and judge the text by how well they can infer a particular moral ideology from its pages. Julian Hawthorne (1884), one of the first academics to write on ‘Literature for Children’, writes that although there is a practical use for children’s texts, literature ought to encourage enjoyment rather than practical learning. Hawthorne (1884) writes that the “ill effects” (p. 387) of implicit education in narratives can dull a child’s natural curiosity and “the radiance of a beautiful, unconscious intelligence, worth more than the smartness of schools and the cleverness of colleges” (p. 387).

While notable children’s authors such as J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis resisted the idea that children’s literature should try to moralise (Duriez, 2013; Barrat, 2000; Carpenter, 1977), several critics have attributed the recognisable Christian themes in their work to a deliberate desire to teach their ideologies to ‘impressionable’ young minds (McVeigh, 2002; Zipes, 1979; Neal, 2008).

Academics in the Western world have noted contemporary children’s literature as a powerful method for guiding child readers to explore LGBTQ issues (Wickens, 2011), Holocaust representation (Gilbert, 2010), and gendered stereotypes (Barnes, 2010; Mallan 2002). Children’s books feature child maltreatment, themes of retribution and violence, and questions of how to react to the darker aspects of the adult world. While Michael Rosen’s (2009) inaugural speech as visiting professor at Birkbeck College argues that “[s]ex, murder, rape, incest, bloody violence and child abuse are almost entirely avoided in children’s books, unless it is handled folklorically” (p. 16), it appears that the development towards darker, more complex themes has become more
frequent and expected in the fiction – particularly as the targeted reader moves into adolescence (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005; Beauvais, 2012a). As the child matures, they are almost expected to engage in darker themes.

What is Young Adult Literature?

As discussed in the Introduction, defining YA literature is difficult because the term is mainly used to describe a body of work targeted to a specific audience, rather than a particular set of genre conventions. In fact, the umbrella term of ‘YA literature’ can refer to a number of genre styles, such as crime fiction, fantasy and ‘bildungsroman’ (coming of age), and these use the same conventions and storytelling styles as their adult-centred compatriots but are targeted towards younger readers. Perry Nodelman’s (2008) work on adult authorship in children’s literature makes the case that YA and children’s literature can be considered interchangeably as they both involve an “intersection of the qualities of children’s literature with ideas about adolescent readers and various types of adult fiction that turns it into a similar but distinct variation of literature for younger children” (p. 97). Anthony Eaton’s analysis (2013) of the broad concept of ‘young adult’ in marketing and publishing concepts argues against Nodelman’s (2008) notion that YA literature can be considered interchangeably with children’s literature because there is a clear cultural and social distinction between adolescents and children. The shifting of traditional markers of adulthood has, as Eaton (2013) writes, led to some tension within the critical discourse surrounding YA because the concept or construction of the child still permeates that discourse. This is likewise reflected in the fiction targeted towards adolescent readers, although Eaton (2013) notes that there is an “increasing cohort of ‘young adult’ authors who have publically expressed their disregard for any notion of a deliberately constructed ‘young adult’” (p. 9). The construction of young adulthood and its connection to constructions of youth in
general is the main cause for contention among several academics who critically analyse the power and agency exercised by readers of the genre.

The recent rise of YA fiction in publishing can be attributed to the fact that the concept of ‘young adult’ or adolescent is itself a recent phenomenon (Zipes, 2002). As such, the market for books and narratives targeted towards that age range is new (Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012). Before this, texts targeted towards children or adults were consumed based on the reader’s abilities (Carpenter, 1985); after World War II and the birth of the Baby Boomers, young people became a lucrative consumer market, and so goods were designed specifically for them (Carpenter, 1985). Credited as one of the first YA-specific novels ever written (Bickmore & Youngblood, 2014; Bloom 2009; Hayn & Kaplan, 2012), despite its publication at a time when young adult audiences were not directly identified as a consumer group (Flanagan, 2014), Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) uses an adolescent narrator and explicitly examines the transition stage between child and adult that is occupied by the target audience. Following this was S.E. Hinton’s brilliant *The Outsiders* (1967), which is a notable text as Hinton herself was an adolescent when she wrote it. Nikolajeva (2009) notes that the primary concern of children’s literature is the fact that so few texts are written by young people, and while this remains the case it should be noted that their relative absence in the market is not the result of a lack of desire to participate. Publishing, as a business, requires authors to develop skills in reading the market (Zipes, 2009; Laurence, 2007) – these skills require experience and practice, which a younger author may be lacking. As a result, young people contribute infrequently to the genre that is targeted towards them.

Wallace Hildick’s *Children and Fiction* (1970) is a critical study of the artistic and psychological factors involved in writing fiction for and about young people. He argues
that if we assume that identification is key to the enjoyment of narratives, then young
people should logically respond best to stories about other young people. By extension
this means that young adults would identify most strongly with protagonists who are
entering the transitional stage of puberty and young adulthood; hence the popularity of
adolescent narrators. After Salinger there came a surge of popular adolescent fiction,
particularly in the late 1960s (Allen, 2012), which focused on the development of
adolescent protagonists. Amanda K. Allen writes (2012) that after the ‘golden age’ of
1960s, publishers began reprinting YA in paperback form in order to ensure that the
books were cheap enough to be purchased by young readers (their target audience).
This resulted in YA literature becoming associated with lowbrow paperback books, as
opposed to the perceived intellectual content of hardback books (Allen, 2012).

There is an assumption of a lack of sophistication among young readers, particularly
among academics but also among critics, censors and some authors. Zohar Shavit’s
work (1980) on crossover texts, or narratives read by both children and adults,
examines the writer, the reader, and the structure of texts, and concludes that children’s
literature is layered with complexity and sophistication. Shavit (1980) writes that adult
readers can engage with the complete text while young readers, who “are used to
reduced and simplified models” (p. 78) only recognise the surface level of the text:
“[t]hus, the less sophisticated readers totally ignore several levels of the text” (p. 78).
The assumption Shavit (1980) makes is that the older a reader gets, the more they can
engage with sophisticated ideas and complex narrative structures.

This is supported by Caroline Webb’s (2008) examination of the increasing complexity
of the Harry Potter series as the assumed reader ages. As the narratives become more
sophisticated and deal with darker themes, the assumed age of the reader goes up.
According to Webb, the *Harry Potter* series begins as a middle reader, and slowly progresses to an older reader. While there is a recognisable development in the grammar and themes in the series, I remain unconvinced that young people are naturally attracted to more simplistic texts. *The Book Thief* (2013), and *Wonder* by RJ Palacio (2012), are notable cases of younger readers seeking sophisticated texts beyond the YA book shelves. *Wonder* is a middle-grade novel which the publisher, Random House, published for children and adults due to its high level of sophistication and mature themes (Juris, 2012, para. 14). Both of these texts were originally marketed towards (presumably more mature and sophisticated) adult readers, but found an audience among readers with less narrative experience. This is one indication of how the assumed level of youth sophistication is often significantly lower than the reality. The remarkable complexity of ‘youth’ in narrative and popular culture resists the many and varied attempts on the part of critics to enforce a simple ‘youth’ identity. As Mallan and Pearce (2003) write in the introduction to *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images and Identities*:

In a manner similar to the diversity of textual and visual images of youth, youthful identity resists a coherent and stable meaning. The elusiveness of identity is matched by the* shifts in self-image. Consequently, how young people are seen and how they see themselves are not straightforward forms of mediation and knowing; thus, the mirroring of youth in a multiplicity of texts can never be seen as mimetic of an anterior world. Like shards of glass from a broken mirror, the image of youth in contemporary western societies is always fragmented. Thus, youth cannot be seen as a fixed, preexisting entity or a unified image. Rather, it is a complex, mercurial signifier offering mixed messages and resisting a single interpretation or positioning (pp. ix-x).

Mallan and Pearce conclude that the concept of youth is ‘slippery’, and much of academic scrutiny seems to have become preoccupied with understanding what it means through the various lenses of historical, social, physical, and emotional context.
In recent years, film adaptations of YA narratives, particularly the female-centred dystopia, has led to a rise in the popularity of the genre (Beuvais, 2012; Hilton & Nikolajeva, 2012), which has subsequently led to the development of more deeply political and social themes in the literature (Dudek & Johnson, 2011); although this is often implicit in the texts. Whether this is the result of increased desire on the part of the author towards the political indoctrination of young readers, or an increased awareness on the part of readers of the political themes available in texts (and their subsequent desire to engage with them) is beyond the scope of this thesis. A thematic analysis followed with an empirical study would be useful here. As it is, the self-reflexivity evident in YA’s increasing acknowledgement of politically-minded youth has led to more nuanced expressions and analyses of power relationships. Mike Perschon’s (2012) analysis of intertextuality in steampunk describes the self-reflexivity that results in the development of a genre, and argues that as genres develop, patterns emerge in the themes, which they engage with and become known for. As YA became more popular, creators of the genre have begun drawing on and reinforcing the ideological themes already present; particularly social commentaries such as gender equality (Miller, 2012), LGBTQ issues (Crisp, 2009), and environmental issues (Guerra, 2009). Contemporary YA literature has also responded to new social and cultural constructions of young adulthood by exploring the prevalence of drugs and premarital sex among adolescents through children’s literature (Harbour, 2012), despite the apparent hesitance among children’s literature authors to examine darker themes beyond a folkloric exploration (Rosen, 2009).

Contemporary academic analysis explores how YA fiction has responded to new constructions of young adulthood, although it has been slow to recognise the need for academic scrutiny of this genre. Jeffrey Kaplan’s (2010) review of eleven doctoral
dissertations from 2008-2009 concluded that although there has been a surge of YA literature in the last 50 years, subsequent scholarship has been slow to catch up. Kaplan (2010) writes that “[w]hat is needed, though, are papers and research studies that examine the use of young adult books, both fiction and nonfiction, in actual classrooms” (p. 58). This would seem to indicate that there is a desire among some academics for more analysis of YA in an educational context. There have been some empirical studies of YA texts used in educational contexts (Sarigiandes, 2012; Park, 2012), and these often rely on the ability of the young reader to interpret the text for themselves, rather than submit to the interpretation of an academic or critic. These studies are infrequent and often biased in their approach to the education of genders. For example, Jie Y. Park’s (2012) analysis of classroom engagement with the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999) concerns itself specifically with young female students’ reactions to the gender constructions in the novel. There is a need for more adolescent male respondents to these types of studies as the information they gather ignores a large percentage of the young adult market.

My own exploration of YA academia indicates that much of the academic discourse works on the assumption that YA ought to educate and inform, in the same manner that children’s literature is expected to educate and inform (Sarigiandes, 2012; Hayn, Kaplan & Nolen, 2011; Bach, Choate & Parker, 2011). Bean and Harper’s (2007; 2006) work on portrayals of masculinity and freedom in YA describes how ideologies can be used within YA narratives to explore and perhaps demonstrate alternative behaviours. Likewise Soter and Connors’ (2009) work on unpacking the ‘literature’ in YA literature writes that literary theorists ought to use more active methods to gauge the literary quality of YA texts because of their ability to “set forth social political commentaries” (p. 2) through implicit themes.
Knowing the Audience

The development of mass media, first through the refined printing practices of books, then through radio, television, and eventually the Internet, brought with it more long-distance dissemination of texts, and the values and ideas held within. During the early stages of this communication renaissance, many feared that the texts consumed by young people would damage their development into future citizens (Jenkins, 2006; Denzin, 2013; Webb, 2009; Hunt, 2005).

These fears are articulated by Jack Zipes (2009), who writes that despite what he perceives to be the imposition of consumer status onto young people through social and cultural expectations, this status is reinforced by the texts they consume: “the meaning of an individual reading of a literary text by a child depends on the socio-cultural situation of the child… [it] is produced to further adult aims and the power of the market” (p. 4). Zipes (2002) makes the concession that contemporary young readers may not be as passive as he had previously argued in *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (2002), but “it is nevertheless important to grasp the institutional mediations through which knowledge and cultural products are manufactured. Children are not passive victims, but they are also not free creative individuals” (2009, p. 5). This statement is far too dense to unpack here, but I will say this: given the remarkable intertextuality of much of contemporary literature, and the ability of themes such as power, disempowerment and re-empowerment to lend themselves to different stories and storytellers, can we call any reader a free creative individual? Is not every reader a product of the various texts they have consumed?
Nikolajeva’s (2008) ‘Comparative Children’s Literature: What is There to Compare?’ argues that children’s literature is remarkably intertextual, and that “[u]nlike comparatism, intertextuality is dynamic since every line in the dialogue of texts does not only look back at previous texts (retrospective intertextuality) but forward towards new, yet unwritten text (prospective intertextuality)” (2008, p. 31). This is surely the case with all texts. All of contemporary literature, both for the child and the adult, comes from a literary tradition even if the contemporary text critiques or diverts from established expectations. For that reason, all readers are aware of genre expectations and have been taught to expect certain conventions when they engage with a narrative.

Young readers may find themselves on the receiving end of many established genre expectations when they engage with children’s and YA fiction, but what they choose to do with these texts is what ultimately separates them from adult readers. The contemporary YA audience is more actively engaged with texts than any other demographic (Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers, 2013; Wilkinson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). In fact, the contemporary YA audience is one of the first demographics to grow up in a predominantly text-based culture (Curwood et al, 2013). While previous generations relied on oral story-telling, radio and television, the rise in literacy in the western world has led to a surge in text-based communication; which has culminated in a culture where online social networking, (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, etc) and text messaging have become the primary form of communication among young people (Curwood, et al 2013; Wilkinson, 2011).

But it is not enough for contemporary audiences to simply consume texts. Despite assertions by several academics (Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2009; Nodelman, 2008; Hunt, 2005) that the contemporary consumer of YA fiction very rarely engages
with the texts beyond the surface (or simplest level), YA audiences often claim ownership of texts to the point where they consider it their right (or obligation) to develop or transform the text to include aspects of their own experience (Tosenberger, 2008). Nikolajeva and Hilton (2012) argue that the adult writer imposes an ideal of childhood onto the young readers, but young readers clearly reserve the right to annotate or examine these ideals with reference to their own lived experiences.

Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers’s (2013) work on adolescent literacy behaviours describes contemporary youth as engaging with texts in an informative and often transformative manner. Curwood et al (2013) draw on research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, which indicates that while 80% of youth use social networking in online settings, 38% create original work for distribution online, and 21% remix works from existing texts. This is a substantial figure. These transformative works often add an alternative perspective that was overlooked or sublimated in the original. Tosenburger’s (2008) work on fanfiction practices notes that marginalised groups (particularly LGBTQ people) become more active through fan works. These fan works, as Curwood et al note (2013) move away from the traditional ideal of texts created by a producer for a consumer:

[r]ather than being static, linear, individually created, and print based, these texts are fluid, dynamic, nonlinear, and often collaboratively constructed. Moreover, to engage in meaning-making activities with these texts, individuals must simultaneously read a variety of modes of representation … which may occur in diverse, spatial contexts (p. 678)

Essentially, the Internet has brought with it an environment that gives youth the power to engage creatively and critically with texts produced for them by adults. Online texts have the capacity to turn consumers into ‘prosumers’ – receivers of information who
engage with the text as a secondary producer (Seymour, Roth & Flegel, 2015). There is also scope, with the progression of publishing technologies and the rise of ebooks, for young people to be more active in mainstream publishing. Traditional publishers may shy away from teenage authors, so these younger authors can take advantage of inexpensive self-publishing on platforms like Kindle and Wattpad.

The development of adult academics’ expectations of young consumers as passive and inactive has grown, according to Henry Jenkins (2006), out of a desire to talk about young people, rather than to them. Jenkins (2006) notes to conspicuous lack of young people whenever adults gather to discuss the negative impact of media on youth. Jenkins (2006) argues that the discussions about the potential dangers of youth-centred mass media “grew out of the fear adults have of their own children” and points out “how reductive the media effects paradigm is” (p. 193) in understanding the relationship between young people and the media. The reductive effects research paradigm continues to be employed by many children’s literature academics, despite how developments in audience interaction research have effectively rendered this paradigm obsolete (Seymour, Chauvel & Lamerichs, 2014).

The relationship between academia and consumers of media is often fraught with assumptions and misunderstandings (Jenkins, 2006). Research frameworks to analyse and explain audience behaviour are divided in Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) Audiences into three categories, which the authors approach chronologically; ‘Effects research’ being where much audience interaction research began, before evolving into the ‘Uses of Gratification’ paradigm, and then into ‘Incorporation/Resistance’ and ‘Spectacle/Performance’. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) describe ‘Effects research’ – which is a precursor to more contemporary methods – as being mainly
unidirectional with very little reference to audience participation or ethnography. Gierzynki and Eddy (2013) note in their research on the political indoctrination of *Harry Potter* fans, that there is as yet no genuine empirical evidence to suggest a causation between reading practices of youth and the ideological and moral values of adulthood. They write that although moral ideologies in literature may align with the moral ideologies of the readers, there is as yet no proof of a causal relationship between the two. Despite this, there is a presumption that long-term exposure to media will lead to the internalisation of the text’s biases. Formulations that privilege media consumption over human intelligence still assume that audiences are passive sponges instead of cognitive individuals.

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) go on to discuss the ‘Uses of Gratification’ research paradigm, which is similar to effects research, but works on the assumption that audiences *use* media. They are not simply affected by it, as postulated in the Effects research paradigm. They choose to engage in order to satisfy their personal desires, and not out of a mindless drive towards consumption. It is important to note that Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) research is concerned with *all* audiences, not just young readers. As discussed earlier in this section, there is evidence that young readers are more widely engaged with texts than adults (Curwood et al, 2013; Wilkinson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006) The ‘Incorporation/Resistance’ paradigm is a research style which attempts to determine whether the audience internalises an ideology or subverts it through their interactions with a text. This approach assumes that a) the audience will engage with *every* ideological concern in a text (even subtext), b) the audience’s aim when they are engaging in transformative works is to subvert or argue against the original text, c) audience behaviour can be simplified to conform to expected patterns. As written elsewhere; “[t]here appears to a constant assumption of simplicity in the
context of audience participation research – and audiences, being groups of human beings, are never simple" (Seymour, Chauvel & Lamerichs, 2014, p. ii).

The ‘Spectacle/Performance’ paradigm is a less Marxist approach to audience interaction research. Research frameworks within this paradigm position the audience as a group of people to whom a creator is pitching their work. The audience has the power in this paradigm. Research methods in the ‘Spectacle/Performance’ paradigm account for the coexistence of multiple types of consumers who react to and interact with texts in different ways, and that their reactions are personal and contextual. Here we see the chronological shift in audience research from the assumption that the audience is a passive sponge to the assumption that the audience is made up of cognitive individuals. As previously discussed, several children’s literature academics continue to act within the ‘Effects research’ and ‘Incorporation/Resistance’ paradigms.

The Debate

This thesis concerns itself with YA literature because, as discussed in the Introduction, even though the academic debate around the power and agency of young readers is focused on children’s literature, YA has more explicit power relations at its ideological core, and is therefore open to more intense scrutiny. It is a transitional genre, and is therefore more openly concerned with the complex interplay between experience and inexperience – more so, arguably, than children’s literature.

In 2013, I presented a paper at the Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity Conference in Melbourne entitled ‘Power and silence in fiction for young readers’ (Seymour, 2013b). This paper drew on the same methodologies which are used in this thesis, and examined the representations of young characters in picture books aimed towards early readers; including Maurice Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are (2005), Kate Lum’s Princesses
Are Not Quitters! (2005), Gus Gordon’s Wendy (2009), and Michael Foreman’s Newspaper Boy and Origami Girl (2012). These picture books are thematically linked through their depictions of young characters as desiring new experiences and seeking them through the assistance of adult characters. In the case of Newspaper Boy and Origami Girl (Foreman, 2012), an adult character dominates the pictures as a clear antagonist, and the younger protagonists seize power by overthrowing him. These picture books are less concerned with power relationships than the YA case studies in this thesis, but there was still a natural predilection towards the development of characters’ agency through new experiences or new sources of power. There was also a clear connection between these new experiences and a nurturing, supportive relationship between child and adult. In YA literature, the power relationship between young characters and adult characters is more clearly depicted due to the protagonists’ position in the transitional stage of adolescence.

The depiction of real-world relationship expectations portrayed by children’s and YA literature is key to the relationship between the child reader and the adult author as defined within academia. The main controversy in the YA literature discourse is the adult/child power relationship as it is represented in YA texts. Several academics (Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nodelman, 2008) argue that young people are passive within the discourse because they are mainly relegated to the role of consumer – as opposed to the more active role of producer held by adults. These academics often go on to argue that adult authors and producers of material have colonised the child by using children’s literature to glorify adult values and ideals of normality, or aetonormativity as defined by Nikolajeva (2009).
The academic argument that readers are passive in the children’s literature and YA discourse is frequently centred around their apparent apathy when it comes to the media they engage in. Jack Zipes’ (2002) rather pessimistic view that child readers will read anything without understanding or appreciating the substance of a text relies on the assumption that young readers will not articulate their dislike of texts:

Children from two to sixteen tend to be indiscriminate readers. This is not to slight their intelligence or taste, but they rarely voice complaints. They read and view what they like, and unless prompted or forced, they are reluctant to state their critical views except to say they like or dislike something because it’s cool or uncool


Zipes made these statements before *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (2005) was published and the Internet exploded with adolescent-run forums deriding the series as antifeminist, badly written and lacking in substance: sites like AntiTwilight, FanPop, AntiTwilight.Deviantart. There are hundreds of Internet sites dedicated to surprisingly sophisticated arguments either for or against this popular YA series. This appears to argue against Zipes’ construction of the vapid, mindless child consumer.

Zipes (2002) published his analysis of the *Harry Potter* series years before the series was completed, and as a result some of his conclusions lack the necessary context which can be found in the final instalments. For example, he writes “Hermione’s support of house-elves is generally mocked… Is Rowling trying to show that workers have such a low political consciousness that they will not listen to an enlightened leader like Hermione?” (2002, p. 183). This author-oriented analysis fails to take into account the textual portrayal of house-elf slavery and the development of Harry’s own sympathies towards the race over the course of the remainder of the series. The portrayal of house-elves as initially resistant to Hermione’s support is a reflection of the
disempowered group’s internalisation of the dominant narrative of power, and the subsequent development of the house-elves into active fighters in the war against Voldemort represents one of the many counter-narratives to institutional power at work in the series (Seymour 2012). The majority of Zipes’ conclusions about children and their relationship with producers of stories are born from fairytales published by Grimm and Aesop (2009; 2007) and their subsequent adaptations by Disney (2002).

Young people, at least in online communities and forums, have no problem voicing their distaste with texts and offering examples and evidence to convert other readers to their opinions. My personal experience as a high school English teacher can also attest to young people’s willingness to voice concerns when their reading materials are considered boring, sanitised or out of touch. Readers will even go so far as to write their own versions of published works where characters and endings are changed to suit their understanding of narrative and personal tastes. Archives such as Fanfiction.net, An Archive of Our Own and SugarQuill are designed to allow readers the chance to engage on a creative level with published texts by writing fanfiction to alter stories to reflect their worldview and social justice concerns (Tosenberger, 2008; Thomas, 2007). Robin Hoffman’s (2010) reception study assesses real child readers responses to Roald Dahl’s The BFG (1982) using an online archive of children’s book reviews: The Spaghetti Book Club. Far from being passive readers, Hoffman’s (2010) sample of thirty 8-11 year olds demonstrated their “capacity to derive highly personal meaning from the text while simultaneously manifesting self-awareness about their status as children in a larger reading community… these child-reviewers represent themselves as capable of sophisticated negotiations between self and story” (p. 234).
As discussed previously, Nodelman (2008) makes the point that the terms ‘child’ and ‘young adult’ can be used interchangeably, while Eaton (2013) argues that this view is too simplistic given the complexity of cultural constructions of young adults. The child and the young adult reader are both defined by their lack of agency in their reading choices, and their lack of power in the publishing industry – despite the radically different social spaces they occupy and the expectations placed on them by social convention (Melrose, 2012a). Because of this, although the contemporary debate around the agency and power of young people focuses mainly on children, these commentaries often fail to define their concept of ‘child’ in clear terms. By extension, many of the concepts and ideas used in the academic discourse are applied to adolescent readers as well. Nikolajeva (2009) points out that there is no children’s literature specific theory in the way that there are feminist, queer and post-colonial specific theories; instead, children’s literature as an educational vehicle is the most common theory used to examine children’s texts. She goes on to say that constructions of children through literature and other texts are “a reflection of the status of childhood in the society that produced it” (2009, p. 15).

Nikolajeva (2009) argues that children’s literature is, at its core, about othering the child and asserting the adult writer’s authority over the young reader, and proposes the concept of “aetonormativity (Lat. aeto-., pertaining to age), adult normativity that governs the way children’s literature has been patterned from its emergence until the present day” (2009, p. 16). Her concession, that children can be strong and powerful in children’s literature but only briefly, is composed around this apparent child/adult power imbalance. Nikolajeva does not offer any way to address this concern. I agree with Nikolajeva’s argument that children’s literature reflects the status of children in society which is why, in trying to understand the role of power and agency in the
adult/child relationship, I have chosen to study the actual literature engaged with by young people today. Later, in a co-authored introduction to *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture* with Mary Hilton (2012), Nikolajeva asserts that YA novels are also “not about what it is to be an adolescent but are about what it might be or should be, since, perhaps unconsciously, adults want to instruct young people and guide them into adulthood” (2012, p. 8).

Melrose (2012a) responds to the assumption of adult-imposed normativity on the child by arguing that child is not a binary opposite of adult. They occupy a different social space, but this does not make them dependant on adults for guidance and development because they play as much a part in their own development as adults do. Their personal identity construction is an ongoing process, and they are really only set apart from adults by their inexperience: “because I see children as occupying a radically different social space, and probably that is because theirs is contingent and genuinely temporary” (Melrose, 2012a, p. 8). Vanessa Harbour (2012) writes that YA narratives offer vicarious experiences of violence, hatred, sex, law, money and labour. This is a continuation of Melrose’s (2012a) conclusion: “The moral is, storytelling is about giving children wings and acknowledging they will want to fly but both they and the adult creator need to understand the narrative must be explored mutually, not given as gospel” (p. 59).

During my analysis of YA and children’s literature in academia, I have noticed that in-depth, critical engagement with fiction texts is often considered an afterthought despite the many assertions made regarding representation and colonisation. There have, however, been several excellent textual analyses addressing case studies from YA literature and the representation of youth-specific themes. Bean and Harper’s (2007)
work on the representation of masculinity in YA explores the nature and performance of masculinity through the various representations of male characters in YA. Likewise Jessica Miller’s (2012) analysis of gender identities in *The Hunger Games* maps the progression of Katniss and Peeta’s gender performances as they are represented through the series. Stephanie Guerra (2009) explores the portrayals of biotechnology and corporatisation in various YA texts and argues that each narrative constitutes an alternative examination of a common theme: “the biotechnical subjection of human matter to market force” (2009, p. 293). Interestingly, Guerra’s (2009) analysis explores not only the methods of control used by corporations, but the methods of resistance employed by the oppressed individuals in the narratives:

> In many cases in these books, resistance takes precedent from history when an individual or small group stands against a tyrannical regime: non-violent protest, guerrilla tactics, destruction of property, organized rebellion, and escape (p. 290)

This method of examining a power structure through the methods of resistance employed against it will be examined in the next section of this Literature Review. As discussed in the Introduction, Foucault (1982) argues that an examination of resistances to oppressive practices is an excellent reference point for analysing social power because it separates the analyst from the institution of power and focuses more on the technique of oppression, and the methods dissidents employ in their rebellion. In this thesis, the focus of the analysis is on the technique of age-based disempowerment, and how different narratives construct this technique.

While these in-depth textual analyses offer brilliant insight into the representation of various themes in YA literature, they often work on the assumption that the author is aware of what they are putting in the text and that the author is acting out of a desire to
impart wisdom to their young reader. This assumption is, as pointed out by Maier (1970), dangerous because it implies that the author was successful in their initial plans for the text. The most interesting thing about these examinations is that the academics who perform them tend to assume that the young reader will approach the text with a modicum of suspension of disbelief – that is, although they recognise the difference between fantasy and reality, the young reader engaged with a text may choose to temporarily immerse themselves in the fictional world and approach the characters as if they are real people rather than representations. This assumption is made clear by the way some academics describe the narratives as extensions or segments of the real world. Barthes (1968) argues that the desire to impose limitations on the reader’s ability to take meaning from a text is a form of institutional control. For Barthes, reading is a productive practice in which the reader is liberated from the process of discovering, or pretending to discover, what the author intended – and is instead focused on gaining their own unique knowledge from the text.

For example, Robert Bittner (2010) frequently describes the characters analysed in the article as if they were living, thinking beings: “Each young person is struggling to simply live as they feel they should be able to, without have to make a huge statement or revolutionize societal understandings of sexuality and gender” (p. 34). Likewise, Mike Perschon’s (2010) analysis of Captain Nemo, a character created by Jules Verne in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), begins with the premise that the character was a real man:

…this paper employs the “gentle fiction”… playfully imagining “that the events…
‘really took place’ and that the work presents the recollections of real persons”…
permitting a unique academic exercise one part recursive fantasy, one part historical criticism, and one part textual analysis (p. 180)
It is interesting from a theoretical point of view that these approaches have been taken, but it is not surprising. As previously discussed, young readers often claim ownership of the texts they consume, often divorcing the work entirely from the presence of the author. While the narrative is a construction (perhaps with an intended meaning), the text exists in the reader’s mind as a separate entity from the author who created it. This pseudo-New Critical approach assumes that the reader and the text create the bulk of meaning, with the author existing not as a God-like figure beyond the text but as a scribe recording the narrative for the reader’s amusement.

David Rudd (2013) argues that the children’s literature discourse tends to fall back on simple definitions of ‘child’ and ‘childhood’, and that by simplifying the child figure to a passive innocent the bulk of academic discourse has become increasingly obtuse. Interestingly, Rudd (2013) opens his argument with the statement: “we [academics] have become too ponderous in our deliberations about children’s books (we murder to dissect), such that we lose the actual excitement of reading” (p. 1). He draws attention to the tendency among critics and academics to simplify children to innocent beings, and children’s literature to prose texts. He offers a counter-examination which privileges the text’s enjoyability as well as its utility, and re-examines several key texts used by theorists such as Nodelman (2008) and Jacqueline Rose (1984) with his particular ‘heretical’ interpretive approach. In this way, Rudd (2013) demonstrates that children’s fiction is not as hopelessly oppressive as many critics have made it out to be: “it is certainly surprising how many critics continue to see the child as not only a knowable thing, but one that has persisted in its uniformity over space and time, and, indeed, stretches from infancy to adolescence” (pp. 33-34).
Rudd’s (2013) desire to depart from the accepted practice in children’s literature of limiting the child to a “knowable thing” indicates a desire for new approaches to the well-worn tracks of children’s literature academia:

… there is also the sense that, at the end of such analyses, the disassembled texts uncovered nothing more than a number of sociological facets (‘middle-class’, ‘colonialist’, ‘gender imbalanced’, ‘racially stereotyped’), under which they were filed for further reference, often being assigned a score on a scale of political correctness, too… I fear that the excitement of those earlier days has gone, and there is a certain predictability in much that appears in our journals as yet another feminist, postcolonial, ecocritical or ‘fill-the-gap’ reading is undertaken (pp. 2-3)

Rudd’s assertion that children’s literature academics should move away from the traditional ‘canon’ of children’s literature and devote more scholarly attention to new avenues of enquiry is reminiscent of Melrose (2012), and indicates a strong need for research which addresses contemporary fiction in the power/disempowerment debate. Rudd also makes the point that the theorists engaged in this debate tend to construct the young reader as oppressed and colonised without direct reference to the texts. This thesis seeks to address both of these theoretical gaps by examining contemporary texts and how they portray the child/adult power relationship. Melrose’s (2012a) counter argument to the ‘child as passive reader’ assumption outlined by Nikolajeva (2009) and Zipes (2002; 2009) does not offer an in-depth textual analysis to support his claims. Instead, Melrose’s (2012a; 2012b) work is focused on exploring the academic discourse itself and the ‘image of the child’ that has sprung up in universities and research institutions. Melrose (2012a) argues that children’s literature is a lens through which children see potential images of themselves, and that adult authors are entering a discussion with the child reader when they produce a text. The child then approaches the text with their personal assumptions and understandings of the world, perhaps not as
experienced as the adult author, but hardly the blank, media-driven slate described by Zipes (2009; 2002), Nikolajeva (2009), and Nodelman (2008). Their experiences may be different, but no less valuable. Melrose (2012a) writes that:

… childhood is not the opposite of adulthood; it is not solved by adulthood; it is not preparation for adulthood, it is childhood and children (young people, young persons) are children (young people, young persons) not apprentice adults (p. 35)

The active, cultural event of fiction creates a space where the reader, though not a principle part in the production of a text, has the opportunity to engage with it on a critical level.

Melrose (2012a; 2012b) takes an alternative view to the critical discourse surrounding children’s literature by focusing on the positive aspects of the relationship between the child reader and the adult author – particularly the potentially supportive, nurturing relationship, which can be cultivated and maintained through the written text. Melrose (2012b) writes that the text is a kind of mediator in the relationship between child and adult, posing significant questions about the ethics of writing for young people as well as the ethics of constructing the young reader as passively internalising the narrative ideologies. This concept is extended in Here Comes the Bogeyman (2012a) where Melrose takes an in-depth look at the construction of the young reader in academia. He writes that the narrative should exist as a meeting space between the young reader and the adult author:

The story you can tell stands as the mediator at an arrested moment of experience, of something new that will not stand still, for it will never be new for them again, but will always be starting over: Just as it did for the writer, so too will it for the reader. The arrested moment, the meeting between writer and reader, in that brief intercession is the point at which ongoing experience is confronted (p. 72)
Melrose argues that the development of young people is experience dependant, and that experience is gained through joint activity. If adults have colonised the child, then there is an opportunity for them to “enter the space between” (2012a, p. 22) and join the child in a joint experience of narrative. As discussed above, my own analysis of children’s picture books reflects Melrose’s assertions that the child is not marginalised by literature, although Melrose does not provide a comprehensive analysis of texts to support his assertions.

This thesis uses Melrose’s work as a starting point for literary analysis, and represents an original contribution to knowledge because it establishes a clear theme of initial disempowerment and eventual re-empowerment of young characters in children’s and YA fiction. As Melrose (like other theorists examined in this thesis) does not use evidence from children’s and YA literature in his examination of the genre, his work does not fill the gap in the literature which this thesis seeks to address. Specifically, this study has the primary objective of examining how young characters and their relationship with adult power holders are portrayed in speculative fiction for young readers. This thesis’s secondary goal is to investigate how these portrayals reflect the contemporary relationship between authors and readers. The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the initial internalisation and eventual rejection of aetonormativity, as represented in the fiction, is indicative of a larger trend towards the development of a counter-narrative to age-based power structures.

Agency and Power

It is important, when discussing YA fiction or fiction consumed by young people, to distinguish the term ‘power’ in its popular and academic use from ‘power’ as it is used in the context of the children’s literature discourse. Many theorists, notably Michel
Foucault (1982) and James McGregor Burns (1978), approach power as a relational concept dependent upon a myriad of nuanced social and psychological factors. In the children’s literature discourse, however, there is a tendency to limit the usage of ‘power’ to essentially refer to the ability of an individual or group to self-determination (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009; Hunt, 2005). A character has power when they can exercise agency and autonomy in the context of their fictional world – and characters exercise power over others by limiting others’ agency. The key theorists examined in this thesis argue that power is linked with age – the older the character, the more power they wield.

Power, in the children’s literature discourse, can reasonably be defined as the ability of a character to express agency. ‘Exercising agency’ as a concept boils down to freedom of choice, and the ability to act on choices. Agency can be limited in the real world by gender (Butler, 1988), ethnic background (Kumar, 2011), sexual orientation (Bittner, 2010), and socio-economic factors (Atwood, 1972). In children’s and YA fiction it tends to be limited by age, and the relative inexperience associated with it. The younger a character, the more that older characters can exercise power over them and subsequently limit their agency. When a young character is represented as making choices and taking control of their narrative arc, then they are considered ‘powerful’.

Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, Barret and Feldman (2011) performed an interesting empirical study about perceptions of agency in real-world situations. Agency is defined by Gray et al (2011) as “the capacity to act, plan and exert self-control” (p. 1208), and this study concluded that those who are objectified, or reduced to a body focus, exercise less agency and are held less morally accountable for their actions by others than those who behave like a ‘mind’. They compare the reactions of a test group to various
sexualised and non-sexualised images of adults, and conclude that if the responder feels that the image is more body-focused, they credit the individual in the image with less agency. Although children are rarely sexualised in media and texts (in the same manner that adults were sexualised for the experiment) they are often reduced, in academia and in children’s and YA narratives, to empty vessels waiting to absorb information.

The effect of this body/non-agent focus is that the individual is seen as less morally responsible, but more vulnerable to harm with respondents more likely to protect individuals who they see as less experienced or mind-focused (Gray et al, 2011). Melrose (2012a; 2012b) writes that the major difference between children and adults is a matter of experience – with children’s literature acting as a bridge or joint experience between the two. Academics and theorists who reduce children to an inexperienced body-focus divorce them from their agency and power through this perception. The practical benefit of Gray et al’s experiments to my research is that this perception of children in fiction, and occasionally in the real world, as empty vessels is a perception shared by the adult characters portrayed in my case studies. Child characters are viewed and used by the adult characters around them as bodies, vessels or images for a cause rather than actual individuals.

Nikolajeva writes (2009) that children’s literature represents a continual power shift; when child characters are depicted as growing into adults, then they become powerful and oppress the children which they have power over. She notes that this ‘power’ over youth is expressed mainly in the attitude of older characters and how they are represented as treating the younger characters in their care. If a character is depicted as being patronising or overly prescriptive, then they are said to have power over younger characters (or, at least, to believe that they have power). Nikolajeva (2009) argues that
this represented relationship mimics the relationship between real-world adults and young people. The powerful characters, according to Nikolajeva’s descriptions, tend to have the ability to demand certain behavioural standards or make decisions on behalf of their younger fellows. These demands demonstrate a clear limitation of the young character’s choice, and thus, their agency and power.

Isabelle Ross (2010), writes that non-realistic genres such as fantasy and speculative fiction deal heavily with themes of character choice and agency; especially dystopia narratives where characters fight wars over the belief “that people are not fully living unless they are making their choices and in control of their own lives” (pp. 35-36). Freedom of choice as an expression of agency is reiterated by Catherine Coker’s (2011) comparative analysis of feminist ethics of choice in Twilight and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Coker stresses the importance of choice in these narratives; particularly in the case of Bella Swan, whose choice to become a wife and mother at eighteen reflects a more traditional ideal of womanhood that is considered at odds with modern feminism. Whether these choices represent the ideal post-feminist character, Coker (2011) argues that Bella is exercising agency in this instance by choosing a lifestyle that appeals to her regardless of the represented expectations of other characters or the reader.

In the context of YA fiction, the power of choice as a demonstration of agency becomes more important when the power relationship between adults and young people comes into play. Alice Mills’s (2010) anthology chapter on agency and addiction in Harry Potter makes the important point that many choices in the series are made on behalf of young characters. Arguably the most important event in the students’ first days at Hogwarts is the Sorting Ceremony, which determines which house the student will live in while they are completing their education. The houses are portrayed in the books as
being crucial to the students’ physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as their future successes and the way that their fellow students will perceive them. This choice is made for the students by the Sorting Hat, a sentient wizard hat that is charmed to read the minds of students and sort them into the houses based on their personality. It appears that, unless the student has remarkable force of will, they have comparatively no say in the process despite the enormous influence which houses have over the remainder of their educational career. This is just one instance, pointed out by Mills (2010), where younger characters are unable to exercise the power of choice in YA because their adult caretakers have chosen to exercise it for them.

Power and disempowerment also manifests itself in YA as institutional and domestic maltreatment. The apparent desire of adult characters to systematically break down the young characters and rebuild them into the image of the ‘future citizen’ reflects real-world attempts by individuals and institutions to mould youth through a system of often cruel treatments; rationalised as being necessary and ‘for the child’s own good’ to make them ready to take on adult responsibilities (Holdsworth, 2005; Jacobs, 2005). Nigel Thomas (2011) points out that many adults are uncomfortable with the concept of a powerful child, and that difficulties can arise when children attempt to contradict “what adults consider to be in their best interests, but these are issues to be resolved in practice (and generally through dialogue), not by demoting one right and giving precedence to another” (p. 11). This is reflected particularly well when social expectations are used to enforce behavioural modification.

Bob Jacobs (2005) uses the example of ADHD medication to highlight the power adults can wield over young people under the guise of ‘improving’ and ‘benefiting’ them. ADHD, Jacobs (2005) writes, is a disease born from a desire for control; “a case of the
powerful (adults) drugging the powerless (children) because they don’t like the way they act” (p. 142). Since ADHD is diagnosed through the judgements of doctors rather than empirical tests, and often at the request of parents, it is frequently the case that children are diagnosed without an examination of the causes of their behaviour despite the significant risk of damaging side-effects from the medication (Collingwood, 2010; Consumer Reports 2010). They are simply labelled and medicated, without any attempt to understand why they behave in the way they do. Jacobs (2005) writes that the desire to control and censure young people to the point of medication is tantamount to abuse, particularly when the medication and control is meted out because they fail to conform to societal expectations of ‘normal’:

It has been said that some of the worst historical violations of human rights have been perpetrated on the victims ‘for their own good’. In the context of children, it is always possible for adults and caregivers to claim that their actions, regardless of the true motivation, are grounded in the ‘best interests of the child’. The reason that so many atrocities have been committed hiding behind the banner of altruism is that the banner protects the perpetrator. It is much easier to assail a villainous or oppressive political regime than it is to attack a societal structure that purports to be acting benevolently. (p. 134)

Jacobs (2005) writes that when we as a society define ‘disease’ specifically through compliance and noncompliance, adults can exercise power over young people without reference to the child’s desires. This concept is often examined in YA fiction through the narrative technique of extending an idea to ridiculous proportions and then examining the result. In Veronica Roth’s (2011) Divergent series, the young protagonists are frequently medicated to keep them compliant and suppress the impulses in them that the adult characters find undesirable. It is often the case in YA
fiction that young people are repressed or controlled out of a desire to mould their behaviour to societal norms.

Nikolajeva (2009) makes the extremely pertinent observation that as young characters age, they can be portrayed as abusing the same power structures which originally disempowered them; creating a cycle of disempowerment where the elders empower themselves through the oppression of the youngeers and limit their agency under the guise of protection or education. I discuss this phenomenon in more detail during the Findings & Discussion chapter of this thesis, with reference to the representation of aging protagonists in my case studies. For now, it is worth noting that while the ability to exercise power over other characters may be implied by an age difference in the context of a fictional world, the characters are always placed in a position to choose whether to exercise this power. The power of choice, in this particular instance, would be a reflection of the character’s ability to exercise agency in the fictional world. I am not convinced that the ability to exercise power over other characters would necessarily lead to the subsequent oppression of those characters; this is a rather extreme conclusion with very little evidence from contemporary fiction to support it.

Perhaps the adult authors and critics who postulate the empowerment/disempowerment cycle among youth do so because they have learnt to associate power with age, and disempowerment with youth. Bessant, Hill and Watt’s (2005) work on institutional control of young people notes that the construction of the child as requiring guidance is crucial to their continued subordination. This subordination, interestingly, requires a level of complicity on the part of the child. By using social expectations to guide a young person’s behaviour, they assume an expected role:
For many children and young people the identity of child or adolescent as fledgling citizen makes it difficult for them to defend themselves. This is because as a ‘child’, or ‘adolescent’ many young people lack the legal and social entitlements and practical resources to protect themselves. The formation of identities of child or adolescent means that many of the young experience themselves as the property of another, as subordinate, inferior, incapable of making decisions, and not always able to question or resist adult authority (Bessant, Hill & Watts, 2005, p. 112).

If young people read fictional works produced by adults who have internalised the age-based hierarchical ideal, then the young readers will be more likely to assume the expectations of society and behave in the manner which they have been taught is appropriate. If contemporary attitudes towards young people are beginning to change, then there would also be a reflection of these changes in the subsequent fiction. I argue that this shift in cultural attitude and subsequent portrayal through narratives has already begun.

The portrayal of power, agency and young characters in children’s and YA literature is vitally important to the relationship between the young reader and the adult author, because the portrayal of marginalised groups in fiction affects how they see themselves in the real world. Diana Gittins (2008) demonstrates how historians have constructed childhood through texts. In fact, social historians rely on accounts of children and childhood preserved in texts from different eras in order to create a clear picture of how we as a society have constructed, viewed and approached childhood historically (Ruhys, 2014). Richard Delgado (1997) writes that a ‘stock narrative’ is told by the power holders in a culture to reinforce their place in society and create a shared reality in which their superior position is naturalised. This, according to Delgado (1997), is why it takes so long for marginalised groups to become empowered – because the cultural majority of power holders does not view their behaviour as ‘oppression’ and
therefore do not see the need to change: “The dominant group justifies its privileged position by means of stories … Their complacency – born of comforting stories – is a major stumbling block to racial progress” (1997, p. 239). This could potentially explain why adults continue to construct young people as needing correction and assistance despite empirical evidence to the contrary (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010a; 2010b).

Nodelman (2008) writes that if colonialist thinking tends to construct people as colonisable because they are childlike and lack the experience and wisdom of their colonisers, then this ‘childlikeness’ would apply most aptly to the children themselves: “children’s literature might be best characterized as that literature that works to colonize [sic] children by persuading them that they are as innocent and in need of adult control as adults would like to believe” (p. 163). The connection between colonialism and the adult/child relationship within the academic discourse is clear. It stands to reason that post-colonial practices and techniques could be used to develop the child out of these constructed expectations. Steven W. Patterson (2004) writes in his analysis of house-elf slavery in *Harry Potter* that marginalised groups that suffer from long-term oppression start to internalise the prejudices directed at them. Patterson (2004) writes that “[o]ver time, the self-image of these groups comes to resemble the image of them held by those that keep them in bondage, and the resulting lack of self-respect does more than any chain to maintain their state” (p. 111). He argues that if marginalised groups are constantly told, in their own literature, that they are not powerful beings then they will eventually start to believe it. Likewise if they are shown, even through non-realistic lenses such as fantasy and speculative fiction, that they are capable of choice and agency, then their self-perception will begin to change. Delgado (1997) concludes that the best way to counteract the stock narrative of the powerholders is by introducing a ‘counter-narrative’ which uses an example to argue against the mindset of the power
holders, much like YA fiction beginning a contemporary trend of powerful, competent young people.
Harry Potter

Phoenixes burst into flame when it is time for them to die and are reborn from the ashes… Fascinating creatures, phoenixes. They can carry immensely heavy loads, their tears have healing powers and they make highly faithful pets.

*Chamber of Secrets*, p. 155

At the *Brand of Fictional Magic* conference at the University of St Andrews, the first academic conference dedicated to *Harry Potter* scholarship, Clementine Beauvais (2012b) gave a keynote address examining the Platonic themes in the series. Harry Potter’s education under Albus Dumbledore was thematically connected to the paideia of the Philosopher-King in Plato’s *Republic* (Williams & Kellner, 2010; Parker, 2008; Biondi, 2012). Beauvais argued that this education should have enabled Harry to become a great leader in the Wizarding world. Instead, she went on, Harry’s decision to remain out of the public eye and devote himself to family is a waste of his potential and an ultimate betrayal of Dumbledore’s plans for him. The *Harry Potter* series does raise some interesting questions about the relationship between education, nurture and choice, as well as how young people are trained into citizens in a conservative Western context. While Harry Potter’s education is designed to construct him into the perfect weapon against Voldemort, this reduction of the Boy Who Lived into a pawn in Voldemort and Dumbledore’s games represents the child as a useful tool with little agency.

The *Harry Potter* series follows the title character as he attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and learns the skills necessary to save the Wizarding world from the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry is prophesied to kill Lord Voldemort, and Harry spends the series attempting to fulfil the prophecy as Voldemort, who sees Harry as a threat, tries to eliminate him. The prophecy (made prior to Harry Potter’s birth) states...
that a child with the power to destroy Voldemort will be born at the end of July to parents who had thrice defied him, and that either Voldemort or the child must die at the hands of the other. In the narrative, the Wizarding world exists in the same universe as the reader, with wizards hiding just beneath the surface of the non-magical, or Muggle, world. The Wizarding world is constructed in the narrative as a mirror to the Muggle world, incorporating many Muggle issues such as institutionalised and inherited bigotry, social class disputes, and disputes over the education of youth. Professor Dumbledore runs Hogwarts and clashes with often with the Ministry of Magic officials who attempt to oversee the education of young people in the Wizarding world and hold Hogwarts accountable for the citizens it produces. The narratives follow a ring-composition style of storytelling; Harry spends the beginning of each year with his Muggle relatives, leaves them to attend Hogwarts, and battles a major villain – either Voldemort himself or one of his henchmen – during the climax, before returning to the Muggle world at the end of the book.

My analysis shows how Harry Potter is disempowered in the fictional Wizarding world and demonstrates how he develops agency in response to the domestic and institutional disempowerment he encounters. Although Harry is portrayed as being abused by his family and the Ministry of Magic, the abuse is never acknowledged with anything beyond detached irony on Harry’s part, and the reader is guided towards the abandoned orphan trope to account for Harry’s remarkably resilient character. He holds a lot of power in the Wizarding world, thanks to the prophecy made before he was born, which stated that Harry would be the one to defeat Voldemort. Dumbledore, recognising the power Harry holds, is shown training Harry in the Platonic tradition, which creates a Philosopher-King arc within Harry’s character. Dumbledore then builds a Game strategy around Harry’s position in the narrative as a martyr, eventually planning for
Harry to allow himself to be killed by Lord Voldemort. Dumbledore’s educational philosophy follows the Platonic model of “physical training for the body and cultural education to perfect the personality” (Laws, 7.795d-796a), which is crucial because Dumbledore’s strategy requires Harry’s personality to have a certain emphasis on compassion and tolerance in order to make him more willing to die to protect others. Harry is kept deliberately ignorant of his place in Dumbledore’s plans until the moment when he cannot back out. This limits Harry’s agency by giving him no choice but to die at Voldemort’s hands.

This case study will employ a mixture of theoretical frameworks, drawing from the Cave allegory described by Plato in the Republic, as well as Game Theory, to examine the texts. Game Theory is a mathematical concept with philosophical applications (Lewis, 1969). As a mathematical concept, Game Theory is used to determine who will win when two or more people are in an adversarial situation (Arce & Sandler, 2005; Nash, 1951; 1950). The players in a Game develop strategies based on the information they have available; a player’s chosen strategies are called ‘equilibria’ (Nash, 1950). A ‘Subgame’ is a Game strategy within the larger Game, designed to support or take over the larger Game if something goes wrong (Skyrms, 1996). Dumbledore’s and Voldemort’s Game is a simultaneous-move Game similar to the Prisoner’s dilemma described by Skyrms (1996); it is a strategic, simultaneous Game where prisoners must make decisions based on limited information, deciding whether to act based on what they assume the other prisoner will do.

Game theorists employ the term ‘equilibria’ to refer to a game strategy, although this can be confusing from a literary studies perspective because ‘equilibria’ is the plural form of ‘equilibrium’. I would argue that in mathematical Game theory there is really
no space for equilibria to take control of the Game. However, because I am employing these theories in a philosophical, interpretive discourse, the equilibria are personified and are therefore able to act independently of the Game. Harry Potter is the personification of Dumbledore’s equilibria (and therefore sentient) and so there is scope for him to develop the agency necessary to take control of the Game in a meaningful way.

I would argue, however, that while Voldemort is shown strategizing according to the Prisoner’s dilemma, Dumbledore’s portrayed participation in the Game is more in line with the Stag Hunt. The Stag Hunt is a Game scenario in which two players are hunting; the players can choose to hunt a stag together or a hare separately (Skyrms, 1996; Lewis, 1969). In the Stag Hunt, players are aware of the strategies of the other players and can make a decision according to their best interests (Skyrms, 1996; Lewis, 1969). Lewis’s (1969) seminal work on game theory in philosophy described the Stag Hunt scenario as each player choosing “what to do according to his expectations about what the others will do” (p. 8). Dumbledore’s equilibria rely on complete information because he is mostly aware of Voldemort’s strategies and end-game, while Voldemort is constantly working with incomplete information. Dumbledore’s position is a situation Lewis (1969) describes as ideal when the game is strictly competitive and every gain represents a loss by the opponent, but it does rely on the enforced ignorance of the other players.

Harry becomes disenchanted with several authority figures in the series; Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, his father, and eventually Dumbledore himself. However, despite his portrayed disenchantment with Dumbledore, he still plays out the role Dumbledore assigned to him. This indicates the depth of esteem Harry holds for his mentor, and the
degree to which Harry has internalised Dumbledore’s aetonormativity, because his disenchantedment with the other authority figures in the series led to Harry’s immediate rebellion. Dumbledore’s plan to keep Harry ignorant and feed him information gradually through the narrative is reminiscent of Plato’s allegory of the Cave (Republic, 7.514a-517e). The Cave allegory describes how prisoners are tied to a wall with dancing shadows on it, and eventually come to believe that the shadows are the real world. One prisoner escapes and runs outside, is blinded by the light (a metaphor for knowledge) and, once his eyes adjust, returns to the cave and attempts to liberate his fellow prisoners. This allegory is a common component in narratives that follow the ‘prodigal son’ tradition, where the protagonist must come full circle to gain knowledge and develop as a character (Parker, 2008; Biondi, 2012). Speaking metaphorically, Dumbledore wishes to avoid blinding Harry with the light of knowledge because he fears that complete knowledge will render Harry useless to him as a potential weapon.

Biondi’s (2012) paper on Platonic structure in Harry Potter writes that Harry’s journey throughout the series constructs the character as a Philosopher-king figure whose education is carefully guided by the Platonic Dumbledore. Biondi (2012) emphasises Harry’s ability to choose whether to fight Voldemort; but I will argue that Harry’s ‘choice’ is represented in the narrative as being carefully guided by Dumbledore who, acting in his capacity as Harry’s educator, withholds information from Harry so that his choices are predictable and misinformed.

Biondi also makes the important distinction, often overlooked by Harry Potter scholarship, between Harry’s Horcrux and Post-Horcrux states. A Horcrux is a vessel used to house a piece of Lord Voldemort’s soul – for the majority of the narratives, Harry acts an unwitting Horcrux for Voldemort. He undergoes a significant transformation in Deathly Hallows when he destroys the part of Voldemort’s soul
residing within him, and this leads to a new ability to exercise agency and autonomy. While Dumbledore is showing Harry to the light, he utilises Plato’s other educational teachings to ensure that Harry embodies the necessary character traits to be a ‘guardian’:

“at once gentle and great-spirited” (*Republic*, 2.375c), which is the result of wisdom, a love of the state, and, crucially, an ability to love and care for those in his charge. The power of love is a fundamental theme of the *Harry Potter* series, and Harry’s presence in the narrative is a direct result of the protective love between a mother and son. Dumbledore is shown carefully nurturing that side of Harry. Plato notes the importance of watching over the youth and teaching them through experience: “Or have you not observed that imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and (second) nature in the body, the speech, and the thought?” (*Republic*, 3.395d). Plato also emphasises the importance of humility in youth, something which Dumbledore models for Harry during the later stages of the narrative when Harry begins straying from the path designed by Dumbledore.

The characterisation of Harry Potter shares many traits with the phoenix, as it is described in the series – a powerful bird that can heal injuries, carry heavy loads, and remain loyal to its master. Harry’s pain (and eventual death during *Deathly Hallows*) protects and heals others, he can carry the burden of Dumbledore’s Game strategy, and he remains faithful to Dumbledore’s plans despite the temptation to stray. Once he completes Dumbledore’s strategy, however, Harry rises from death as a stronger, more autonomous version of himself. He is portrayed as using a failed Subgame of Dumbledore’s and manipulating it so that his own agency, and crucially his own philosophy towards knowledge sharing and ignorance, is able to defeat Voldemort. Harry is eventually shown renouncing his Philosopher-King training by choosing a
quiet life with his family rather than a life of power and prestige as a leader in the Wizarding world.

*Harry Potter* presents an interesting perspective on the social construction of children in the Western world because the Platonic thought that infuses the series demonstrates the influence of Plato’s philosophies on Western thinking. Assuming JK Rowling did not deliberately include these philosophies in the narrative, and there is no evidence that she did, the presence of Platonic themes in the series indicates their presence in the Western consciousness. Our education systems are designed to create the best possible citizens (Thomas, 2011; Sorin, 2005). Harry’s education is likewise portrayed throughout the series as being designed to construct the best weapon against Lord Voldemort, but I would argue that the series does as much to critique the education of future citizens as it does to reflect it. Children’s literature, like all literature, reflects the social context of the world in which the narratives are written. *Harry Potter* is a good example of how the empowerment of young people is negotiated by authors who wish to create powerful child characters, and also reconcile this power with their constructed understanding of children and childhood.

The scholarly literature surrounding *Harry Potter* is vast. Although some theorists such as Jack Zipes (2002) argue that the series is superficial, its bricolage style of incorporating multiple allegories, myths, and conventions create a density to the narrative which invites multiple readings and interpretations; including reading for religious themes (Senland & Vozzola, 2007; Sehon, 2010; Neal, 2008), gender representation (Wolosky, 2012; Mayes-Elma, 2003; Cherland, 2008), and narrative structure (Cantrell, 2011; Webb, 2008; Granger, 2009). The following chapter has
drawn on the multiple readings of the series, specifically those scholarly works related to agency and Platonic education in the series, as well as genre-specific literature.

Williams and Kellner (2010) explain that Dumbledore must act through Harry to defeat Voldemort because Dumbledore cannot trust himself to wield the power necessary to compete beyond a superficial level. Throughout the series, Dumbledore is shown maintaining a Platonic relationship with power, which is described by Williams and Kellner (2010) as “ingeniously simple: power should never reside in the hands of those who lust for it. Rather, it should be granted only to those who would prefer to occupy themselves with other matters” (p. 129). During Deathly Hallows, Dumbledore admits to being corrupted by power in his youth, and chooses to avoid it in his adult years to ensure that he is not tempted again. This means that his character must assume the role of teacher, and work through Harry to wield the power necessary to stop Voldemort; while simultaneously ensuring that Harry himself does not become corrupted by it.

Dumbledore’s perceived ‘ultimate goal’ of creating a leader out of Harry Potter, as discussed by Beauvais (2012b), reflects the purpose of the Academy in training philosophers and thinkers for eventual inclusion in government during Plato’s time. Given the philosophical links between Dumbledore’s and Plato’s style of education, it is fair to assume that Dumbledore eventually intended that Harry become a leader. During their discussion in King’s Cross, Dumbledore is shown telling Harry: “Those who, like you, have leadership thrust upon them, and take up the mantle because they must, and find to their own surprise that they wear it well” (DH p. 575). Parker’s (2008) analysis of Platonic themes argues that Dumbledore has achieved the fourth stage of knowledge outlined in Plato’s allegory by returning to the Cave to liberate the other prisoners, and that would seem to be the case in his education of Harry Potter. Plato’s Cave allegory
can be broken down into four stages: living in darkness; blinded by light; gaining knowledge; the Philosopher-King, who returns to liberate his fellow prisoners. The Platonic Cave allegory is reflective of Dumbledore’s education of Harry Potter, which allows for the maintenance of Harry’s ignorance. Harry is used as an equilibria in Dumbledore’s Game during the narratives, as opposed to an active agent, and it is not until he destroys the Horcrux within him that he completes Dumbledore’s Game and is able to enter the Game as a player.

Arce and Sandler’s (2005) article on Game theory in terrorism prevention argues that terrorists often have “targets that attract a disproportionate share of attacks” (p. 196) and that governments can coordinate their strategies to take advantage of these favourite targets by organising to defend them and capture the terrorists. In *Harry Potter*, the main target of Voldemort and his Death Eaters is Harry Potter, and so Dumbledore is portrayed as building his strategy, his Game, around Harry and the Horcrux inside of him. In keeping with the Platonic ideal, Dumbledore is shown to allow Harry to come into harm’s way as a way of developing his critical thinking skills and showing him some of the dangers that he will be facing.

In *Philosopher’s Stone*, when Harry is eleven, Dumbledore allows him to discover the secret of the Mirror of Erised because he knows that Harry will attempt to retrieve the philosopher’s stone and wants to furnish him with the tools to do it. When Harry is recovering from his injuries after saving the Stone from Voldemort and his minion Professor Quirrell, he explains to his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger: “I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help… It’s almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could” (*PS* p. 219). Although Dumbledore is frequently unwilling to
give Harry too much information about his quest, he is willing to allow an eleven-year-old to face the greatest dark wizard in history as a way of gaining practical experience.

The position of player in the social order affects the types of Game that they can play (Arce & Sandler, 2005); Dumbledore’s permanent position in Hogwarts as the Headmaster allows him to play the long-run Game, as opposed to the short-run Game played by politicians in the Ministry due to their limited tenure. Harry Potter is the personification of Dumbledore’s Game Strategy. As a result, he acts as a game piece at the same time that he behaves as the embodiment of a strategy. Dumbledore develops Harry as an equilibria over the course of several years by controlling his education. When Harry learns his part in the Game, as a pawn in Dumbledore’s larger strategy, he has the opportunity to become an active player but only if he cooperates with Dumbledore’s established Stag Hunt scenario. As Skyrms (1996) notes, cooperation in the Stag Hunt pays off every time. Harry, in his Horcrux-Harry stage, reflects that in order to achieve the best outcome he needs to cooperate rather than defect, even when his cooperation limits his agency to the confines of Dumbledore’s plans. It is only when Harry enters the Post-Horcrux stage of the narrative that he is able to begin negotiating his own Game with Voldemort.

The abuse Harry suffers at the hands of his Muggle family is arguably some of the most cruel and overt in recent fantasy fiction. John Granger (2009) writes that Harry’s position in the narratives as an abused orphan harkens back to the folkloric, Dickensian tradition of naturalised child abuse, which engages the reader’s sympathies. Maria Nilson (2012) continues this recognition of Harry’s abuses as fitting into a folkloric tradition by comparing Harry to fairy-tale heroines such as Cinderella:
The thing with Cinderella isn’t really that she is passive, it is that she is described as powerless… Harry, despite the fact that he lives in a spider-infested cupboard and have[sic] no parents, doesn’t seem to be too unhappy… He constantly ridicules Dudley… and he looks on his aunt and uncle with a kind of almost ironic detachment (p. 5)

The connection between Harry and Cinderella is apt because Harry never stops being active in the series, but his activity does not reflect a sense of agency. His continued cohabitation with his Muggle relatives, the Dursleys, despite their abuse indicates the degree of powerlessness he has over the situation. In keeping with the folkloric tradition of naturalised child abuse, Harry accepts the situation with the Dursleys with “ironic detachment” (Nilson, 2012, p. 5), which sets the series apart from other contemporary YA narratives, which engage with child abuse in a cautionary manner.

Many contemporary YA narratives do deal directly with child abuse and neglect, but these are often ‘problem novels’, a sub-genre of YA fiction that centres exclusively on teen issues in a realistic context. Abuse and neglect are very common in realistic novels, such as Call Me Hope by Gretchen Olson (2007), Burned by Ellen Hopkins (2006), and Room by Emma Donoghue (2010). But the presence of domestic abuse in fantasy or non-realistic fiction is so common that it borders on a trope. Most of the protagonists in Roald Dahl’s oeuvre, for example, were the victims of neglect or abuse; notably Matilda in Matilda (1988), James in James and the Giant Peach (1961) and Sophie in The BFG (1982). Other notable examples of abuse are Charlie in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964), Boy in The Witches (1983), and Roald Dahl himself in the semi-autobiographical Boy – Tales of Childhood (1984), who were either physically or emotionally violated by the adults in their lives. Dahl’s stories still remain popular among young readers despite their gruesome depictions of adult power.
Neglect and abuse are often used as facilitators in the young protagonist’s journey – necessitating that the protagonist leave the home or find some outlet to assert their control. Artemis in the *Artemis Fowl* series (Colfer, 2001) uses his lack of parental supervision to begin building up a portfolio as a criminal mastermind, while Annabeth Chase in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005) ran away from home at age seven to escape her parents’ emotional neglect and join the other demigods at Camp Half-Blood. In fantasy and speculative fiction, child abuse is naturalised to the point that young readers expect some negative interaction between the young protagonist and their family; otherwise there would be no necessary narrative drive or push to leave home and begin the protagonist’s quest.

When Harry leaves the Dursleys at the beginning of each novel in the series, he enters the Game where Dumbledore and Voldemort work through him to achieve their ends. This necessitates the limitation of Harry’s agency by Dumbledore, who keeps him ignorant to ensure the best outcome for the Wizarding World. He does, however, allow Harry to engage with Voldemort and his henchmen as an adversary in order for him to develop the necessary skills and complete his Platonic education. Harry leaves Plato’s metaphorical Cave under Dumbledore’s tutelage, but his return to the Cave is a demonstration of his own autonomy and power of choice. Having fulfilled his obligation to Dumbledore, Harry’s ability to pick up one of Dumbledore’s failed strategies and manipulate it to accommodate his own power demonstrates Harry’s agency in the Wizarding world.

**Disempowerment**

Harry Potter spends his childhood as an unhappy resident of the Dursley household. The domestic abuse depicted in *Harry Potter* is particularly interesting from the
perspective of this thesis because it is depicted in a (relatively) realistic narrative context. That is, the construction of Hogwarts and the magical world as a secret world within *Harry Potter* necessitates the construction of a ‘normal’ or ‘real’ world where Harry lives before he is offered the chance to escape. The ‘real’ world inhabited by the Dursleys is structured within the narrative to reflect the world of the reader, adding to the reader’s immersion because Hogwarts could potentially exist beneath the surface of their world; a magical alternative to the reader’s comparatively mundane reality. In that case, the abuse Harry suffers at the hands of his aunt and uncle could potentially happen to a real child – as opposed to the abuses suffered by the protagonists in the other case studies, who exist in radically fantastical worlds removed from the reader’s experience.

Although the narrative world is set up as identical to the world inhabited by the reader, the adult characters in *Harry Potter* are not held to the same child protection standards which adults in the real world are held to. As John Granger (2009) notes in *Harry Potter’s Bookshelf*: “the Dursleys and their borderline sadistic treatment of him lock in our sympathy and our curiosity about how he will turn out” (p. 19):

> Readers love the underdog, the nobody who fights all odds and comes out on top. The traction of this kind of story is in our immediate sympathy for the little guy, the disadvantaged person, the poor, the minority, and the disenfranchised. Unless the marginalized protagonist is a real loser, just the fact that he or she lives on the periphery, outside of an in crowd, means the reader will wave pom-poms on the sidelines of the playing field (p. 16)

It also distances the narratives from the problem narrative tradition of focusing on and dealing with abuses. *Harry Potter* is a fantasy series, and the abuses and maltreatment Harry suffers with the Dursleys are depicted as an inconvenience to be endured until Harry’s yearly adventure takes him away (Granger, 2009).
Harry Potter’s domestic life is portrayed as disturbingly abusive. In keeping with the folkloric, Dickensian theme of orphan maltreatment, Harry is neglected (occasionally starved), verbally and emotionally abused, beaten, and confined to a cupboard. The third person limited narration establishes Harry’s treatment through various flashbacks at the beginning of *Philosopher’s Stone*, which includes deliberate humiliation, violence and general maltreatment. By placing these flashbacks at the beginning of the narrative, Harry is constructed as a metaphorical punching bag for the Dursleys to abuse, and the reader’s sympathies are engaged as a result (Granger, 2009; Zipes, 2002). The Dursleys ignore their son’s physical assaults on Harry, despite physical evidence of his abuse; “Dudley’s favourite punch-bag was Harry... He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape because of all the times Dudley punched him on the nose” (*PS* p. 20), and the Dursleys openly encourage their son, who is bigger and stronger than Harry, to hurt Harry when he annoys them or speaks out of turn: “Poke him with your Smeltings stick, Dudley” (*PS* p. 30).

Despite the physical evidence of Harry’s broken glasses, and the possible bruising that should have resulted from Dudley’s many beatings, the third-person limited narrator never mentions any incidents where a teacher or other adult notices Harry’s problems. On the contrary, before the events of the narrative Harry is described as being suspended for hiding from Dudley and his gang on the roof of the school. Although the Dursley’s behaviour towards Harry is recognisably abusive to the reader, the abuse is not acknowledged in the context of the narrative. Characters acknowledge that Harry has suffered, but no attempt is made to correct the Dursley’s behaviour, punish them for their crimes, or find alternative living arrangements for Harry beyond occasionally allowing him to spend some holidays at Hogwarts or with the Weasley family. The Dursleys’ abuses do not actively disempower Harry; instead, they reinforce the sense
that the reader gets in the beginning of the series that Harry is powerless. He cannot act with any agency and is reduced to making sly remarks to Dudley in order to exert some control over his life. He cannot be disempowered in this context because he was never powerful to begin with.

Because the physical abuse and emotional abuse is naturalised, Harry responds to it with detached irony. This is consistent with the character’s representation of the abandoned orphan trope from folklore. However, when Harry discovers that the Dursleys have lied to him regarding his parents’ deaths, the reader sees what is apparently Harry’s first emotional response to their treatment: “Harry had gone very white. As soon as he found his voice he said, ‘Blown up? You told me they died in a car crash!’” (PS p. 53). It is not their abuse that causes this outburst; it is the deliberate ignorance they imposed upon him: “Don’t ask questions – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys” (PS p. 20, emphasis in the original). In the Harry Potter series, knowledge is power. The most powerful characters in the series are acknowledged to be powerful because they are wise, which creates a significant narrative contradiction later when the Hogwarts education system demonises intelligence. Harry views the lies and deceit as being more dangerous and hurtful than the physical abuse. During the same scene, when Uncle Vernon says that his magical ability is “probably nothing a good beating wouldn’t have cured” (PS p. 56), Harry is not afraid because this sort of threat is established as a common occurrence in his relationship with the Dursleys. Harry instead fixates on the information which the Dursleys had refused to share with him: “‘You knew?’ said Harry. ‘You knew I’m a – a wizard?’” (PS p. 53). This emphasis on knowing and not knowing creates a causal relationship in the narrative between ignorance and vulnerability that is developed in Harry’s relationship with Dumbledore.
Harry’s character follows the abused orphan tradition by remaining pleasant, somewhat naïve, but strong in his convictions despite a difficult childhood (Granger, 2009). Much of his behaviour in the narratives can be attributed to his upbringing; for example, when Harry meets Draco Malfoy in *Philosopher’s Stone*, he is “strongly reminded of Dudley” (*PS* p. 77) and refuses to befriend him. He is also very generous with his money because he “had never had anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share it with” (*PS* p. 102), and during *Chamber of Secrets* Harry tricks Draco Malfoy’s father into freeing their house-elf Dobby because, after meeting Dobby, Harry is shown thinking that the abuses Dobby suffers are worse than his own. He says that Dobby’s abusers make the Dursleys look “almost human. Can’t anyone help you? Can’t I?” (*CoS* p. 15). This appears to be the crux of Harry’s characterisation; a desire to help those who are disempowered and abused – as he was. While this supports his hero journey and assists Dumbledore’s attempts to train him into a Philosopher-King and manipulate him through the Game, Harry’s maltreatment does not appear to have any adverse effect on his personality, ability to cope, or his ability to forge friendships and trust people. Dumbledore expresses surprise at how well adjusted Harry appears given the circumstances of his formative years:

‘Five years ago, then,’ continued Dumbledore, as though he had not paused in his story, ‘you arrived at Hogwarts, neither as happy nor as well-nourished as I would have liked, perhaps, yet alive and healthy. You were not a pampered little prince, but as normal a boy as I could have hoped under the circumstances (*OotP* p. 737)

This can probably be attributed to the fantasy/folkloric tradition of the abused orphan that naturalises the abuses Harry suffers and negates most of the potentially negative effects on his characterisation. As John Granger (2009) notes, the fact that Harry is able to endure such abuse and remain quite likable serves to further reinforce the reader’s
empathy for him. Harry’s portrayed capacity for love and trust, despite his knowledge of how terribly humans can treat each other, becomes the centre of his character arc over the series.

While the Dursley’s mistreatment should, at the very least, have realistically made Harry wary of strangers and suspicious of adult authority figures (as previously noted, none of his teachers noticed his abuse), the narrative device of the abused orphan creates an opportunity for Harry to engage meaningfully with Dumbledore’s plans. Dumbledore is able to exploit Harry’s love for others and his desire to protect them from disempowerment and neglect in order to ensure that Harry will continue fighting Voldemort:

Imagine, please, just for a moment, that you had never heard that prophecy! How would you feel about Voldemort now? Think!... He thought of his mother, his father and Sirius. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat. ‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’ (HBP p. 478)

It is through this connection between Harry’s desire for the protection of others and the destruction of Voldemort that Dumbledore manipulates Harry into believing that he is behaving with a level of agency when he makes choices: “It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high” (HBP p. 479). While Harry is depicted as believing that he is acting with agency, it is clearly easier for Dumbledore to manipulate his choices. During Deathly Hallows, when Harry realises the extent to which Dumbledore has manipulated his life towards a confrontation with Voldemort, he chooses to continue along the path Dumbledore laid for him in order to finish the war. It
is only after Harry becomes an active player in the Game that he is able to exercise agency by dissolving the narrative connection between protecting the weak and destroying Voldemort, offering Voldemort an alternative in the hopes of sparing his life. This idea will be expanded upon in later in this chapter.

The Dursleys’ portrayed treatment of Harry constructs his character into the abused orphan trope; rendering him into an almost ready-made victim for similar disempowerment when he enters the institutional setting of Hogwarts. The institutional disempowerment experienced by Harry, and other young characters in the series, comes from two sources: Albus Dumbledore (and by extension, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry) and the Ministry of Magic. By allowing a culture of ignorance to blossom among the young people of the Wizarding world, and deliberately avoiding the facilitation of healthy, active citizens, Dumbledore and the Ministry are portrayed as disempowering the young people in the narrative by cutting off their ability to make informed choices. This extends to Harry because, although his behaviour has the appearance of autonomy and he frequently makes choices and acts on them, his agency is limited in the narrative to the scope of Dumbledore’s designs for him. Dumbledore needs Harry to perform a certain way so that his desired Game outcome (the destruction of the Horcruxes and the murder of Lord Voldemort) can be achieved. In order to ensure that Harry performs according to Dumbledore’s strategies, Dumbledore is depicted as gradually feeding Harry pertinent information and holding back the most crucial knowledge until a task comes up which requires Harry to have it. In essence, Dumbledore treats Harry like a pawn, rather than an active, autonomous character.
When young people are accepted to Hogwarts at age eleven, they enter an education system where teachers are depicted as frequently cruel and verbally abusive to their students, dangerously incompetent, or failing to engage their classes to the point where students regularly fall asleep. Professor Snape, in particular, is often so cruel to his students that at least one, Neville Longbottom, is portrayed as developing anxiety as a result. Snape also uses classes as an excuse to physically terrorise students, as seen in *Half-Blood Prince* when he is shown attacking Harry during a Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson:

> He turned his wand on Harry so fast that Harry reacted instinctively… ‘He tried to jinx me, in case you didn’t notice!’ fumed Harry. ‘I had enough of that during those Occlumency lessons! Why doesn’t he use another guinea pig for a change? What’s Dumbledore playing at, anyway, letting him teach Defence?’ (*HPB* p. 171)

Instead of addressing these issues and reprimanding his teachers, Dumbledore is shown defending his employment of Severus Snape and other subpar professors, and allowing them to engage with the students in their care in any way they see fit. Two professors turn out to be Death Eaters (servants of Voldemort) in disguise, and Professor Umbridge in *Order of the Phoenix* is shown using corporal punishment during her detentions; forcing students to write lines with a magical quill which cuts the words into the back of their hand until they are permanently scarred.

Dumbledore is portrayed throughout the narrative as being concerned with the wellbeing of minorities, particularly house elves and werewolves (Seymour, 2012). However, Hogwarts is not depicted as having an anti-bullying policy to protect minority students. Students with Muggle backgrounds are frequently verbally abused and physically assaulted by other students over the course of the narratives. Hermione
Granger, in particular, is depicted being attacked by other students in front of Professor Snape, who refuses to punish the students responsible and insults Hermione instead:

[Ron] forced Hermione to show Snape her teeth – she was doing her best to hide them with her hands, though this was difficult as they had now grown down past her collar… Snape looked coldly at Hermione, then said, ‘I see no difference.’ Hermione let out a whimper, her eyes filled with tears, she turned on her heel and ran, ran all the way up the corridor and out of sight (GoF p. 263)

The punishment of students appears to be at the discretion of the Professors, and no Professor is depicted as feeling compelled to punish hate crimes despite the obvious damage they do to the self-esteem of the students at Hogwarts. Bigotry and race-based hatred is a central theme in the *Harry Potter* series, but there does not appear to be any policy in Hogwarts to protect minority students from race-based abuse, despite Dumbledore’s portrayed desire for tolerance. This leaves many students on the receiving end of debilitating verbal abuse, and their abusers – Draco Malfoy in particular – are often physically attacked in response to these racial slurs. Without adult intervention, the young people in the series attempt to exercise agency by defending themselves and meting out punishment. The Professors punish these physical retaliations. This is seen in *Order of the Phoenix* when Harry Potter gets into a fistfight with Draco Malfoy.

Professor McGonagall argues that Harry should have left it “to Madam Hooch to sort out” (GoF p. 367), but Harry’s past experience at Hogwarts indicates the lack of support available to bullying victims. No student is ever punished for bullying at Hogwarts, but the victims are punished for retaliating, further indicating the political stance taken in Hogwarts policy: disempowering the victims by facilitating their abusers.

The portrayal of education at Hogwarts has been a source of intense scholarly debate, particularly with regards to child development theory and the role education plays in the
development of informed citizens. As Bassham (2010) points out, Hogwarts bases its educational theory in vocational training, with many students being given magical powers without being trained in how to recognise or interact with moral obligations and dilemmas. As Plato points out in his *Republic*, the education of youth is an important factor in the development of a healthy nation (2.375). Most contemporary school curricula in the real world have a ‘Moral development’ requirement – meaning that modern real-world educators are required to attend to their students’ moral education while providing them with the vocational tools to enter the workplace. The portrayed education system at Hogwarts provides the vocational tools, but it fails to develop students morally, and so young people in the Wizarding world are given the power to transfigure or charm any object without the emotional tools to determine when and how this is acceptable.

An example of the failure of Hogwarts, as the only magical educational institution in Rowling’s fictional Britain, to produce morally competent adults can be seen in the number of incidents Arthur Weasley relates to Harry about witches and wizards who enjoy charming objects so that they will harm Muggles. Arthur Weasley is presented in the narrative as a bumbling father-figure to Harry, and his character is presented to the reader as loveable, but ultimately ineffective in reining in his rowdy sons and protecting Muggles from magical attack. The witches and wizards Mr. Weasley complains about are not presented in the narrative as particularly evil, just engaging in “Muggle-baiting” or sport designed for harmless fun. These witches and wizards are simply unable or unwilling to recognize the potential damage they can inflict on people who are not as powerful as they are. Arthur Weasley, as a Magical enforcer whose job is to capture these witches and wizards, demonstrates the particular evil of Muggle-baiting later in the narrative when his sons, Fred and George, are shown giving magical candy to
Dudley Dursley. Dudley, who fears wizards to the point of nervous weight-loss, has his
tongue swollen to almost four feet long. Harry describes the encounter as “fun” (*GoF* p.
48), but Arthur Weasley is “angrier than Harry had ever seen him” (*GoF* p. 50):

> ‘It isn’t funny!’ Mr Weasley shouted. ‘That sort of behaviour seriously undermines
wizard-Muggle relations! I spend half my life campaigning against the mistreatment
of Muggles, and my own sons –’ (*GoF* p. 50)

While Fred and George reply indignantly that they had not attacked Dudley because he
was a Muggle, their portrayed failure to recognise that their attack could cause Dudley
to choke on his own tongue is a recognition of the danger inherent when magical
practitioners are not emotionally or morally developed to deal with its consequences.
There is a demonstrable difference between the moral development of Muggle-born
witches and wizards in the narrative (who receive a moral education as part of their
Muggle education before they turn eleven and attend Hogwarts) and the moral
development of pure-blood witches and wizards (who are home-schooled before
Hogwarts and often have minimal contact with the Muggle world) (Seymour, 2012).
This can be seen most clearly in the moral choices made by Ron and Hermione, who
clash over House Elf slavery and the rights of wizards to dominate non-magical beings
(Seymour, 2012).

The education system in the Wizarding world portrays an apparent lack of willingness
on the part of Hogwarts educators to protect and instruct the students in their care.
Instead, the “cancer of racial intolerance and elitism” (Bassham, 2010, p. 222) is
allowed to spread and infect minority students, who are disempowered by being
prevented from defending themselves from racial abuse when teachers refuse to do so.
By ignoring the moral development of young people, Hogwarts is shown
disempowering them by limiting their ability to make sensible decisions about their
behaviour. Again, this is a situation of young people acting without understanding or
appreciating the effects of their actions because they are ignorant.

While Harry himself is recognisably tolerant and supportive of minorities, he still fails
to appreciate the dangers Dudley faces when he interacts with the Wizarding world and
often resorts to physical retaliation when bullies at Hogwarts insult him or his friends.
Luckily, Harry’s moral education is attended to by Dumbledore in private – either at the
conclusion of each school year when they are shown contextualising the climax of the
novel through dialogue, or during their private lessons in *Half Blood Prince*. This is not
a privilege extended to other students at Hogwarts, however, which perhaps indicates
Dumbledore’s lack of awareness or interest when those students do not appear directly
in his Game strategies.

The educational structure of Hogwarts is troubling, but this is further exacerbated by the
Ministry’s apparent desire to train passive, compliant citizens. The Ministry’s portrayed
attempts to intervene in Hogwarts by placing Professor Umbridge in the school during
*Order of the Phoenix* are immediately identified as a deliberate intrusion by Hermione
Granger at the welcoming feast:

> How about: “progress for progress’s sake must be discouraged”? How about:
> “Pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited”? I'll tell you
> what it means… It means the Ministry’s interfering at Hogwarts (*OotP* p. 193)

Since Hermione has been presented throughout the narrative as a character with
impeccable judgement and understanding, the reader is alerted to the danger present in
the Ministry’s attempts to intervene in Hogwarts. Umbridge is placed at Hogwarts to
ensure that the students there are not being turned into weapons for Dumbledore’s
cause: “‘Our information from inside the Ministry is that Fudge doesn’t want you trained in combat.’ ‘Trained in combat!’ repeated Harry incredulously” (OotP p. 272). The Ministry’s desire to control the youth of the Wizarding world is exacerbated by their fear of Dumbledore. By reducing children to the equivalent of weapons, essentially objectifying them, the Ministry is shown actively disempowering them to ensure that they do not pose a threat.

Umbridge’s first act as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher is to outlaw practical defensive spells in the classroom. Umbridge’s presence in the narrative as a meddlesome Ministry witch (later shown to be so deeply bigoted that she thrives in Voldemort’s anti-Muggle regime) symbolically reiterates the importance of practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge. This is already established in the series by the continued assumption that all theoretical subjects, such as Divination and History of Magic, are boring and useless. Despite Hermione Granger’s enthusiasm for theory, by depicting Umbridge’s mania for a passive student body as a promotion of dangerous ignorance the series demonstrates a social and educational culture in Hogwarts which values practical knowledge over theory, philosophy or moral education. This intrusion serves to thrust Harry into a leadership role by facilitating his foundation of Dumbledore’s Army (DA), a student club dedicated to learn spells and prepare for the coming war: “we’ve gone past the stage where we can just learn things out of books… We need a teacher, a proper one, who can show us how to use the spells and correct us if we’re going wrong” (OotP p. 291). Harry agrees to teach his fellow students, passing on his knowledge in a similar manner to Plato’s Philosopher-King in the Cave allegory, and Harry is able to express this agency in setting up the DA because he is well trained in defensive spells. Thanks to the Platonic ideal of learning through practice advocated by Dumbledore, Harry has the practical experience, as well as the experience of making
judgement calls during battle, which his fellow students lack: “‘Harry,’ [Hermione] said timidly, ‘don’t you see? This … this is exactly why we need you … we need to know what it’s r-really like … facing him … facing V-Voldemort” (OotP p. 293).

Harry’s desire to lead his (metaphorical) fellow prisoners out of the Cave is met with staunch opposition from the institution of the Ministry; whose power over the citizens of the Wizarding world relies on a certain level of ignorance. The Ministry recognises Harry as a potential threat during Order of the Phoenix, and his attempts to liberate the youth of Hogwarts with knowledge are violently suppressed. The Ministry scapegoats Harry by running a media campaign to turn public opinion against him and draw attention away from the real issues. This is a very common political tactic in the modern Western world; a method of removing power from rivals by attacking their image (Burns, 1978). Interestingly, Harry’s age and relative vulnerability do not preclude the Ministry’s vicious attack. Umbridge, in her portrayed capacity as a de facto carer at Hogwarts, attacks Harry directly through corporal punishment (forcing him to cut the words I must not tell lies into the back of his hand) to discourage him from continuing his attempts to educate the public, while the Ministry undermines him through media slander so that the citizens of the Wizarding world will not believe him. This is a very heavy-handed reaction to a fifteen year-old boy, which reiterates Harry’s overall importance in the narrative as a saviour of the Wizarding world. The Ministry’s attacks are ultimately met with the same detached irony as the Dursley’s abuse, indicating its use in the narrative to support the abused orphan trope; reinforcing Harry’s vulnerability as well as the compassionate character traits which make him more susceptible to Dumbledore’s plans for him.
While most of the students at Hogwarts need to rely on outside influences for their moral and philosophical education, Harry Potter receives a sporadic education from Dumbledore himself throughout his years at Hogwarts. This education is tempered by Dumbledore’s continued insistence that Harry is too young for many of the concepts he needs to master before he is able to defeat Voldemort: “When you are older … I know you hate to hear this … when you are ready, you will know” (PS p. 216). This is not an indication of Harry’s incompetence or unwillingness to learn. Dumbledore is shown acknowledging that Harry is more clever and resourceful than many grown wizards, and Harry himself questions the desire of the adult wizards to ‘protect’ him when he has proven his abilities in battle: “Why was he still trapped here without information? Why was everyone treating him like some naughty kid?” (OotP p. 43). Considering how much emphasis is placed on practical knowledge in the series, Harry’s portrayed frustration when his physical abilities prove to be insufficient to get adults to treat him with respect is in line with his characterisation and the priorities of the narrative world. It serves to disempower him by sending mixed messages – he is physically powerful, which is enough to earn him respect with his peers because they have been taught to value physical ability, but his ignorance limits how much agency he can exert in the world of adults because they do not trust him to act on his own.

Harry’s desire for knowledge is evident in the first book of the series, when Harry asks the question which drives the plot: “But why would [Voldemort] want to kill me in the first place?” (PS p. 216). Dumbledore begs off the question, citing Harry’s age as the reason that he cannot have the information: “Not today. Not now… put it from your mind for now, Harry” (PS p. 216). I will discuss how Dumbledore’s Game Theory strategy relies on Harry’s ignorance later in this chapter, but for now it is worth noting that Dumbledore does admit in OotP that his strategy does endanger Harry, and
excuse that Harry was too young for the information is spurious at best. However, this admission does not alter Dumbledore’s plans for Harry’s Platonic education; an education which would keep Harry as a Game piece for the majority of the series.

I am not arguing that Dumbledore’s portrayed treatment of Harry is malicious or intentionally cruel, and an argument could be made that these necessary limitations placed on Harry’s ability to learn are meant with the best of intentions. Ultimately the outcome was positive. They certainly demonstrate an effective way to liberate a prisoner from the cave without blinding them with too much knowledge and light. I am arguing that in keeping Harry ignorant, Dumbledore is shown committing himself to limiting Harry’s power of agency and choice in the context of the Wizarding world. The excuse that Harry is young is, by Dumbledore’s admission, foolish and myopic. Dumbledore’s intentional misleading of Harry throughout the series is an effective Game strategy, but it is not a healthy way to raise a child, as Dumbledore notes in *Order of the Phoenix* when Harry finally confronts him over his ignorance: “‘It is time,’ he said, ‘for me to tell you what I should have told you five years ago, Harry. Please sit down. I am going to tell you everything’” (*OotP* p. 735). This is a lie. Dumbledore still needs Harry to perform certain tasks, and for Harry to perform these tasks he can’t have a complete knowledge of his part in the Game.

When Dumbledore uses Harry in his Stag Hunt Game, he is objectifying him and disempowering him by rendering him incapable of making rational choices because he does not have all the facts. Harry’s position in the narratives as a messiah figure – the saviour of the Wizarding world, the Boy Who Lived – gives him political and symbolic power, but his greatest strength lies in the power he has over Voldemort. Voldemort is
obsessed over defeating Harry, and this obsession makes him vulnerable; Dumbledore manipulates Harry into using this power to ensure the successful outcome of the Game.

**Manipulation**

Harry is presented to the reader within the first few pages of *Philosopher’s Stone* as a saviour of the Wizarding world and an important figure: “He’ll be famous – a legend – I wouldn’t be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in future… every child in our world will know his name!” (*PS* p. 13). Harry is portrayed exerting a certain level of power in the narrative thanks to his image and his name, which extends towards the Ministry in the early stages of the series. Before Harry becomes a political threat, the Ministry is shown perpetuating his power by continually reinforcing his image as the powerful child responsible for the destruction of Voldemort. Although Harry is not allowed complete freedom in the Wizarding world, as demonstrated in *Chamber of Secrets* when he is reprimanded for using magic in front of Muggles, he is considered a particularly important individual worthy of VIP protection during *Prisoner of Azkaban*. When Sirius Black escapes Azkaban, the Wizard prison similar to Alcatraz, the Ministry’s portrayed reaction to Harry’s use of underage wizardry is lenient because they are “so relieved to find him alive” (*PoA* p. 55). They provide Harry with protection at Hogwarts because they believe that Black will target him. Ron points out that this leniency is almost certainly because of Harry’s fame: “‘Probably ‘cause it’s you, isn’t it?’ shrugged Ron, still chuckling. ‘Famous Harry Potter and all that. I’d hate to see what the Ministry’d do to me if I blew up an aunt’ (*PoA* p. 47). Ron is often used in the narrative to illustrate the extent of Harry’s fame because Harry is presented as a very modest character, partly to reinforce the abused orphan trope through his humility, and he barely recognises the good treatment he receives. Ron, however, is depicted as very self-conscious and jealous of Harry’s fame; Harry’s image is consistently presented to
the reader through Ron’s eyes because the third person limited narrator makes it difficult to see the power Harry has over citizens of the Wizarding world until Ron points it out.

The main power holders in the series are Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort. While Lord Voldemort is shown attempting to manipulate Harry, particularly in *Order of the Phoenix* when he discovers that they share a telepathic connection, these manipulations do not rely on appropriating the power Harry represents. Instead, Voldemort’s plan is to disempower Harry by destroying him. Dumbledore’s more subtle manipulations are shown to disempower Harry by ensuring his complicity in Dumbledore’s Game and removing his agency. While Harry’s perceived power over the Wizarding world and its population is great, Dumbledore’s interest lies in the power Harry holds over Voldemort. Specifically, Dumbledore’s interest lies with Harry’s ties to the Dark Lord through the Horcrux contained inside of him.

Harry’s position in the narrative as a foil for Voldemort is established in *Chamber of Secrets* when Harry meets a younger version of Voldemort in a memory. The two boys are described in narration as being very similar physically, and later Dumbledore explains that they share many character traits as well. However, Dumbledore is shown arguing that Harry and Voldemort are ultimately different because of the choices they make: “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (*CoS* p. 333). This sentiment is reiterated throughout the series. Harry and Voldemort are both orphans, and Harry notes that they both considered Hogwarts their one true home “He and Voldemort and Snape, the abandoned boys, had all found home here” (*DH* p. 558). Harry’s power over Voldemort lies in their similarities because, as
Dumbledore notes in *Order of the Phoenix*, Voldemort marked Harry as an equal when he tried to kill him as a baby. Dumbledore tells Harry:

> He chose the boy he thought most likely to be a danger to him… He saw himself in you before he had ever seen you, and in marking you with that scar, he did not kill you, as he intended, but gave you powers, and a future, which have fitted you to escape him not once, but four times so far (OotP p. 742)

When Voldemort failed to kill Harry as a baby, it triggered a vendetta in that character which would last Harry’s entire adolescence. Dumbledore, as an astute strategist, recognises the psychological power Harry holds over Voldemort. Knowing that Voldemort would not rest until he had killed Harry, Dumbledore begins planning his Game strategy to ensure that Harry’s perceived power over Voldemort can be used to end the war.

Dumbledore is shown to have planned his Game around the assumption that Harry would try to defeat Voldemort. Harry notes in *Philosopher’s Stone* that Dumbledore had allowed him to enter the trapdoor and battle Voldemort; this is part of Dumbledore’s Platonic educational strategy, but it is also part of his Game strategy. By allowing Harry to face Voldemort multiple times, he ensures that Voldemort is motivated to kill the boy, and also that Harry and the reader see repeated examples of Voldemort’s cruelty to ensure the belief that destroying Voldemort is morally justified. Harry’s protective character is developed for through these confrontations with Voldemort, and the fear he has for the safety of others:

> He thought of his mother, his father and Sirrus. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat. ‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’ (HBP p. 478).
Dumbledore’s Platonic education to develop Harry’s morals builds on the existing abandoned orphan trope by reinforcing the protective power of love in the fictional war: “You are protected, in short, by your ability to love!” (*HBP* p. 477). Although Harry is protected from Voldemort by the sacrificial love of his mother, and his own love for others which prevents Voldemort from possessing him without “enduring mortal agony” (*HBP* p. 478), it is this capacity for love which Dumbledore is ultimately shown appropriating to ensure Harry’s complicity in his de facto suicide at Voldemort’s hands:

> And Dumbledore had known that Harry would not duck out, that he would keep going to the end, even though it was his end, because he had taken trouble to get to know him, hadn’t he? Dumbledore knew, as Voldemort knew, that Harry would not let anyone else die for him now that he had discovered it was in his power to stop it. (*DH* p. 555)

Dumbledore’s Game strategy requires that Harry die at the right moment, and by emphasising traits already embodied in the abused orphan trope, Dumbledore ensures that Harry’s character recognises the importance of love and compassion in order to steer him towards his own demise. Harry’s agency is completely removed from the situation, although it appears as if he is making the choice of his own free will, because Dumbledore has conditioned Harry to consider any alternative choice as abhorrent.

When Harry learns, through the memories of Severus Snape during the final battle of *Deathly Hallows*, that Dumbledore’s Game strategy had relied on Harry’s eventual death, there is a brief pause in the narrative as the third person limited narrator explains to the reader:

> Dumbledore’s betrayal was almost nothing. Of course there had been a bigger plan; Harry had simply been too foolish to see it, he realised that now. He had never questioned his own assumption that Dumbledore wanted him alive. Now he saw that
his lifespan had always been determined by how long it took to eliminate all the Horcruxes. Dumbledore had passed the job of destroying them to him, and obediently he had continued to chip away at the bonds tying not only Voldemort, but himself, to life! How neat, how elegant, not to waste any more lives, but to give the dangerous task to the boy who had already been marked for slaughter, and whose death would not be a calamity, but another blow against Voldemort (DH p. 555)

This narration suggests that Harry, who is still processing this new information, is more impressed with Dumbledore’s plan than angry. He is represented as recognising the level of strategic skill necessary to pull the Game off and commends Dumbledore on his ability to tie everything together so well. As mentioned above, the narrator also acknowledges that Dumbledore had ensured that Harry would not back out of his obligation because he had been trained in the importance of compassion, and could not allow Voldemort to continue killing people “now that he had discovered it was in his power to stop it” (DH p. 555). Now that Harry knows that there is a way to end the war, he must continue.

In this way, Dumbledore is shown working through him, manipulating the power inherent in Harry’s body and mind, and limiting Harry’s agency by giving him no choice in the matter. Harry even begins to think like Dumbledore as he walks to his death. When he meets Neville Longbottom in the grounds of Hogwarts, moments before meeting Voldemort for the last time, Harry explains a portion of the plan to Neville. He charges Neville with killing Voldemort’s snake, the last Horcrux once Harry is dead: “this was crucial, he must be like Dumbledore, keep a cool head, make sure there were back-ups, others to carry on” (DH p. 557). Neville Longbottom operates in the narrative as a secondary or ‘back-up’ Harry. The prophecy that states that Harry is destined to kill Voldemort is vague, and could have applied to Neville under the right
circumstances, but it is Voldemort’s selection of Harry that marks him as the subject of
the prophecy. Neville takes Harry’s place in the social structure of Hogwarts while
Harry is destroying Horcruxes, by educating students in Defence Against the Dark Arts
and engaging in guerrilla warfare with the Death Eaters at the school.

When Harry chooses to confide this last piece of information in Neville, he is shown
following Dumbledore’s Game strategy and ensuring that there is a suitable
replacement for himself once he is dead: “Dumbledore had died knowing that three
people still knew about the Horcruxes; now Neville would take Harry’s place” (DH p.
558). It is noteworthy that Harry is also shown following Dumbledore’s strategy of
limiting the information available to his followers; telling Neville to kill the snake, but
not giving an explanation as to why. He is metaphorically leading Neville to the edge of
the Cave, but not allowing him to leave. This is a further example of Harry’s
internalisation of Dumbledore’s Game tactics. Harry’s power and autonomy can only be
properly exercised when he begins resisting Dumbledore’s tactics and employing his
own.

Empowerment

After Harry dies, he is sent to a ghostly version of King’s Cross Station where
Dumbledore is waiting. There, Harry is shown confronting Dumbledore about all the
secrets which were kept from him throughout the series and Dumbledore furnishes
Harry, and the reader, with the remaining missing information and context. Camille
Parker’s (2008) thesis focuses exclusively on the symbolic relationship between Harry’s
education under Dumbledore and the cave allegory discussed in Plato’s Republic. While
Parker (2008) writes that Harry is portrayed entering the fourth stage of the Cave
allegory and gains “the highest form of knowledge” (p. 5), I would argue that Harry
Harry’s faith in Dumbledore is tested throughout the series. This is an extension of the ideological underpinnings of the fictional magical world, which is essentially structured around faith: faith that running into the wall between platforms nine and ten will not
hurt, faith that stepping into the fire will not burn, and faith that waving your wand will not make you look like a fool. The witches and wizards portrayed around Harry Potter reinforce the faith that the Wizarding world has in Dumbledore, and which Harry needs to emulate, by continually arguing that Dumbledore had never steered them wrong and that they should therefore follow his plans without opposition:

‘Has is not occurred to you, my poor puffed-up popinjay, that there might be an excellent reason why the Headmaster of Hogwarts is not confiding every tiny detail of his plans to you? Have you never paused, while feeling hard-done-by, to note that following Dumbledore’s orders has never yet led you into harm?’ (OotP p. 438)

It is unclear in the narrative whether or not the witches and wizards who advocate for complete faith in Dumbledore are aware of the mistakes Dumbledore has made in his Game strategies, or the extent to which his Games depend on the wilful ignorance of the people around him. It should be noted that during Half Blood Prince, when Dumbledore is killed by Snape, the Order is less surprised that Snape is a murderer than they are by the fact that he had tricked Dumbledore: “‘What musta happened was, Dumbledore musta told Snape ter go with them Death Eaters,’ Hagrid said confidently” (HBP p. 566), “I always thought Dumbledore must know something about Snape that we didn’t” (HBP p. 574). When the Order hears that Dumbledore has been murdered, it is their faith in his omniscience that is shaken.

Harry’s faith, however, was constantly in flux – particularly in Order of the Phoenix and later in Deathly Hallows. When Dumbledore is shown withdrawing from Harry’s life in Order of the Phoenix, Harry begins to question his received wisdom about Dumbledore’s infallibility. Platonically speaking, Harry is grappling with the theory of Forms and questioning his own ignorance, and he allows Voldemort’s thoughts to
involves his mind in *Order of the Phoenix* in order to gain the knowledge that Dumbledore has kept from him. When Dumbledore is shown delegating Harry’s Occlumency (the art of blocking mental attacks or telepathic links) lessons to Snape instead of teaching Harry himself, Harry develops a negative relationship with the lessons as a result of his negative relationship with Snape. The reader begins to associate Occlumency with hours of abuse at the hands of the one character who has consistently victimised Harry throughout the series. Harry is also portrayed resenting the enforced ignorance that Occlumency represents, and begins to cautiously encourage the telepathic link between himself and Voldemort.

This is an excellent example of a child who, when forced into ignorance, tries to find knowledge outside of the ‘joint activity’ which typifies Melrose’s (2012a; 2012b) understanding of comprehension. When Dumbledore is shown refusing to illuminate him, Harry finds his answers elsewhere by allowing Voldemort to invade his mind. This autonomous action leads to the death of Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather, and in this way the narrative reinforces the importance of following Dumbledore’s Game strategy. Harry is in a similar position to Voldemort with respect to their relative positions in Dumbledore’s Game; they are both ignorant. Voldemort attempts to lure Harry into the Ministry in order to make him steal a copy of the prophecy so that Voldemort can study it in order to develop a Stag Hunt Game strategy and place himself on equal footing with Dumbledore.

The difference between Harry and Voldemort is that Voldemort is an active player in Dumbledore’s Game, while Harry is an equilibria, or a personified Subgame. The Subgames in *Harry Potter* are represented in the narrative as subplots. Dumbledore is portrayed as having many Subgames running at once, and many fail. One such
Subgame is the Elder Wand. The Elder Wand is the most powerful wand in existence; which Dumbledore won in a duel with the dark wizard Grindelwald. In *Harry Potter*, when a wizard beats another wizard in a duel, the wand of the losing wizard switches allegiance to the winner. When Dumbledore orders Snape to kill him, he does so with the intention that the wand will switch allegiances to Snape. Later, Harry learns that Dumbledore’s Game strategy was that Snape would eventually use the Elder Wand to kill Voldemort, but this strategy fails when Draco is shown disarming Dumbledore moments before he is killed; defeating him in a duel and thus winning the Elder Wand for himself. It is this failed Subgame which Harry takes advantage of once he is in his Post-Horcrux stage.

While Harry is a Horcrux he is the personification of Dumbledore’s plans to destroy all of Voldemort’s Horcruxes. He is constructed as the perfect weapon for Voldemort’s downfall. In this respect, Harry is not the one Dumbledore intends to finish Voldemort, because Dumbledore structures his plan to ensure that Voldemort will kill Harry and destroy the Horcrux inside of him. I would speculate that Dumbledore’s behaviours throughout the series would indicate that he planned to kill Voldemort himself, and that when he learns that he is dying during *Half Blood Prince* he alters that Subgame to place that responsibility onto Severus Snape. In Harry’s Horcrux stage, Harry is unable to behave as an active player until he has seen Dumbledore’s Game through. He could, conceivably, throw in the Game and turn his back on the Platonic education Dumbledore had provided for him, but he will not because it does not align with his characterisation. Dumbledore’s training, coupled with Harry’s own disempowerment at the hands of the Dursleys and the Ministry, pushes Horcrux-Harry towards the collectivist ideal of the Philosopher-King.
At ‘King’s Cross’, the ethereal space where the reader finds Harry after he dies, Harry is given the opportunity to “board a train” (DH p. 578) and make his death permanent. Dumbledore encourages Harry to return to Hogwarts instead, although he offers no strategy to defeat Voldemort, which demonstrates to the character and the reader that once Harry returns he will be working without a Game strategy to support him. Once Harry is in the Post-Horcrux stage, he returns to Hogwarts as an active player in a new Game; indicating his new-found power and autonomy outside of Dumbledore’s plans. At this point, Harry shifts away from the strategies Dumbledore has employed – controlling the amount of information his opponent has, ensuring that the liberation of his fellow prisoners is gradual – and Harry approaches the Stag Hunt with a more equitable mind than Dumbledore’s.

Harry is shown adopting a policy of full disclosure, explaining his Game strategy to Voldemort immediately upon returning to Hogwarts so that he and his opponent can make the best decisions with the information available to them: “I know things you don’t know, Tom Riddle. I know lots of important things that you don’t. Want to hear some, before you make another big mistake?” (DH p. 591). This goes against Dumbledore’s teachings because, while Harry offers Voldemort the opportunity to repent and save himself from a broken, sickening afterlife, Dumbledore is very open about his desire to destroy Voldemort, both physically and spiritually: “Merely taking your life would not satisfy me, I admit… your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness” (OotP p. 718). Here, Harry is shown demonstrating his capacity for compassion and support for those who are disempowered by offering Voldemort the chance to live, despite Dumbledore’s plans for his destruction. This clear separation between Dumbledore’s endgame and Harry’s further indicates Harry’s shift into an active agent.
Harry’s Game strategy involves a re-appropriation of one of Dumbledore’s failed Subgames; his plan to have Snape become master of the Elder Wand and defeat Voldemort in Dumbledore’s absence. His strategy centres on a seemingly insignificant scene earlier in the *Deathly Hallows*: Harry stealing Draco Malfoy’s wand at Malfoy Manor. The scene itself is very brief, with the actual theft written as a side-note in a paragraph with a different focus:

As Ron ran to pull Hermione out of the wreckage, Harry took his chance; he leapt over an armchair and wrested the three wands from Draco’s grip, pointed all of them at Greyback and yelled: ‘Stupefy!’ The werewolf was lifted off his feet by the triple spell, flew up to the ceiling and then smashed to the ground (*DH* p. 383)

By portraying this brief battle for supremacy over the wands as insignificant, the narrative is structured to minimise the importance of that scene. This creates dramatic effect later on, but it also serves to remind the reader that Dumbledore could never anticipate that outcome of this failed Subgame. When Draco disarms Dumbledore in *Half Blood Prince*, he does not take the Elder Wand for himself because he does not understand that it has switched allegiance. Later, Voldemort is shown robbing Dumbledore’s grave to steal the wand from his corpse. But Draco is its true master, and when Harry steals Draco’s wand in *Deathly Hallows* the ownership of the Elder Wand is understood to have transferred to Harry. Dumbledore could never have built a Game strategy around that seemingly inconsequential moment. Harry is able to take advantage of it because, in his Post-Horcrux stage, he has all of the relevant information which had been kept from him during Dumbledore’s Games, is able to make informed choices, plans a meaningful strategy; a sharp contrast to his autonomous actions as a Horcrux which, among other things, led to the death of Sirius Black.
When Harry returns from ‘King’s Cross’, he has symbolically returned to the Cave after gaining the last of the knowledge that Dumbledore had kept from him, which Plato’s allegory indicates is the final stage of the enlightenment of the prisoner. Harry’s return does not signify that he is a liberator. On the surface, it seems that this is the case because he is shown defeating Voldemort. Importantly, Harry defeats Voldemort without killing him. Harry uses a disarming spell while Voldemort employs a killing curse – the Elder Wand, recognising Harry as its true master, allows Harry’s disarming spell to penetrate Voldemort’s defences and turns the killing curse back on him. Harry is portrayed repeatedly offering Voldemort the opportunity to use the information Harry has given him to rethink his strategy. He offers the chance for liberation from the Cave, but ultimately Voldemort refuses to take it.

During their duel, Harry shouts so that all the bystanders can hear about the truth about Snape’s loyalties; furnishing them with the same information he has at the same time that he deploys his Game strategy. But it is important to recognise that Plato’s prisoner would have been required to ‘liberate’ the other prisoners in order to be considered a true Philosopher-King. Harry, in contrast, gives no indication that he plans to take the prisoners into the light by, as Clementine Beauvais (2012b) points out, utilising Dumbledore’s training to secure a leadership role in the Wizarding world. He shows his fellow prisoners the way out of the cave, but he does not help them into the light.

After the final battle, Harry is exhausted by the peoples’ desire to keep him in the spotlight: “They wanted him there with them, their leader and symbol, their saviour and their guide, and that he had not slept, that he craved the company of only a few of them, seemed to occur to no one” (DH p. 596). Harry finishes this section of the narrative by returning the Elder Wand to Dumbledore, eschewing the power it represents, and
“wondering whether Kreacher might bring him a sandwich” (*DH* p. 600). The epilogue, set nineteen years in the future, centres on Harry’s family life as he sees his youngest son onto the Hogwarts Express. If Harry had remained consistent with Dumbledore’s Platonic teachings then he would have become a Philosopher-King like Dumbledore himself; remaining in isolation and working for the collective, rather than succumbing to his individualist desires for family and love.

In the epilogue, Harry continues his Post-Horcrux strategy of full disclosure, remaining open and honest with his family and furnishing his youngest son with all the information he asks for, preaching choice and agency as the most important power in a young person’s life. When Harry’s son worries that he might be put into Slytherin, Harry assures him that his parents had not planned for him to be in a particular house: “if it matters to you, you’ll be able to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin. The Sorting Hat takes your choice into account” (*DH* p. 607). It is established in *Philosopher’s Stone* that families are generally sorted into the same house, and that magical parents generally have an expectation of what house their child will be in when they send them to Hogwarts, but Harry has forgone this practice. Harry extends the power of choice to the young people of the next generation by creating an environment where their choices are more important than adults’ expectations.

During the series, Harry empowers himself through family. This is a direct contradiction to the Philosopher-King arc, which demands his solitude. While Dumbledore needs Harry to develop a capacity for love in order to achieve his Game, Harry recognises as he walks to his death that the final task must be completed in isolation: “There would be no goodbyes and no explanations, he was determined of that. This was a journey they could not take together, and the attempts they would make
to stop him would waste valuable time” (*DH* p. 556). Throughout the series, Harry surrounds himself with voluntary family to supplement the maltreatment he receives from the Dursleys. When Harry first arrives at Hogwarts, he creates a family out of his peers; establishing Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger as surrogate siblings. All of the students at Hogwarts are encouraged to consider their housemates as “something like [their] family” (*PS* p. 85). Harry’s voluntary family also extends to the Weasleys in *Chamber of Secrets*, who are favourably compared to the Dursleys during narration in order to establish their desirability to Harry as a surrogate family. Harry is eventually shown marrying a Weasley in order to secure his place in the family. The voluntary family of the Order of the Phoenix allows Harry to make peace with the Dursleys at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*. During *Order of the Phoenix*, the Order are portrayed threatening the Dursleys to ensure that they will not mistreat him over the holidays, but this occurs after five books of maltreatment and the damage has been done. Instead, the actions taken by Harry’s voluntary family indicate the symbolic shift in power that Harry commands in the Wizarding world. From that point in the series, the Dursleys no longer have the same influence over the narrative as a whole; instead they represent a tie to the Muggle world that is effectively severed in *Deathly Hallows* when Harry sends the Dursleys into hiding to protect them from Voldemort.

In the early stages of the narrative, when Harry’s surrogate families do not interact with his biological one, Harry’s life is ruled by the whims of his biological family. He is locked in his bedroom in *Chamber of Secrets*, endangering his ability to return to Hogwarts, and his Wizarding tools are taken from him in *Prisoner of Azkaban* so that he is unable to complete his homework over the holidays; driving a wedge between him and the Dursleys which leads to his dangerous mental state and the blowing up of Aunt Marge. In *Order of the Phoenix*, a Dementor attack on Dudley Dursley facilitates the
beginning of the Ministry’s scapegoating campaign against Harry by giving them an excuse to expel him from Hogwarts. However, after the Order threatens the Dursleys over their treatment of Harry, they become a plot point to show Harry’s power in the latter half of the series. Harry is able to leave the Dursleys and stay with the Weasleys over the summer in *Half Blood Prince* without incident, and in *Deathly Hallows* he extends his power to protect them from Voldemort by leaving them in the care of Order members.

Harry’s voluntary family protects him during his Horcrux stage, but in his Post-Horcrux stage he is able to protect them. Harry’s portrayed love for the surrogate family members he has accumulated throughout the series leads him to die for them, and this act casts the same protection over them that his own mother cast on Harry when he was a baby. This makes it impossible for Voldemort to hurt them, and allows Harry the opportunity to focus on giving his fellow prisoners without getting distracted when they are in danger. As Voldemort points out, Horcrux-Harry never had the power to protect the ones he loved: “Who will you use as a shield today, Potter? ... you crouched and snivelled behind the skirts of greater men and women, and permitted me to kill them for you!” (*DH* p. 591). But Harry, in his Post-Horcrux stage, is able to respond to these taunts with absolute authority: “You won’t be killing anyone else tonight” (*DH* p. 591).

His immediate concern is the safety of his family. It is a collectivist ideal, which is what Plato would have advocated, but it is a collectivist ideal born from Harry’s individual, arguably selfish desire, to cast a protective spell over the people he cares for – and not the Death Eaters or Muggles Voldemort would have attacked if he had won their duel.

The caring relationship he has with his surrogate family gives him more power than he would have had if he had followed Dumbledore’s teachings and relinquished his immediate concerns in favour of the absolute.
As Beauvais (2012b) points out, Dumbledore’s Platonic teachings would have made Harry an effective leader of the Wizarding world; but Harry’s choice to secure a family and name his children after dead relatives reiterates his individualism. In the forest, before Harry is killed, he uses the Resurrection Stone to spend time with his dead mother, father, and two deceased father figures and take comfort in them rather than the living friends and family he was leaving behind. This is explained by the narrative as Harry being afraid that seeing his living friends would break his resolve, and that he would not be able to allow Voldemort to kill him if he saw his friends beforehand: “He felt he would have given all the time remaining to him for just one last look at them; but then, would he ever have had the strength to stop looking? It was better like this” (DH p. 557). As a Horcrux, Harry denounces his living loved-ones, choosing to take comfort in his dead relatives moments before his confrontation with Voldemort: “There would be no goodbyes and no explanations, he was determined of that” (DH p. 556). However, in his Post-Horcrux state Harry is portrayed embracing the selfish desire to retreat from the public life and devote himself to his wife and three children during the epilogue to the series.

Although Harry does eventually take on the role of Head of the Auror department at the Ministry (The Author, 2007), indicating some level of ambition on his part, this information is only available outside of the narrative canon in author commentary. The narratives themselves do not give any indication of Harry’s career or working life during the epilogue; it focuses solely on Harry’s family and his emphasis of choice in his discussions with his son. Nikolajeva (2009) argues that “[t]he Harry Potter books firmly ascertain adult normativity, and the epilogue, in which Harry is grownup and prepared to oppress his own children, once again demonstrates the self-reproduction of power” (p. 18). The argument that Harry plans to ‘oppress his own children’ has no
basis in the portrayal of these characters in the text. My reading of the evidence is, instead, that Harry is shown to advocate freedom of choice for his children. He encourages his second son Albus to join whichever Hogwarts house he feels is the best fit for him, and to disregard family tradition if he needs to: “It doesn’t matter to us, Al” (DH 607). The only evidence that Harry is ‘oppressing’ his children comes when he makes the decision that his two sons cannot share a room. This is not aetonormativity at work; this is a parent defining clear boundaries for his children. This is not oppressive, and is certainly not portrayed as being on the same level of abuse and disempowerment which Harry suffered at the hands of the Dursleys. Harry’s experience of destructive aetonormativity in his youth allows him to make more inclusive decisions when he is in a position of age-based power.

Harry’s choice, as Post-Horcrux Harry, is to move away from the upbringing enforced on him through Dumbledore’s Game strategy. As Post-Horcrux Harry, he is an active player in the Game, and is therefore able to make autonomous choices in a way he could not while Dumbledore and Voldemort were playing with him. By the end of the series, Harry has retreated from the celebrity he had enjoyed in his youth in order to appreciate the family he has created for himself.
The Hunger Games

A mockingbird is just a songbird. A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn’t counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn’t anticipated its will to live.

_Catching Fire_ p. 112

_The Hunger Games_ follows the popular dystopia convention of interrogating the power of choice and agency in the context of a fictional, totalitarian regime. Dystopia narratives structure the will to live as secondary or superfluous to the will to live autonomously; a desire for moral, mental and physical agency that transcends the act of simply existing. Ross (2010) (cited in Galdón Rodríguez, 2014) writes that a hallmark of modern dystopia narratives, particularly narratives for young adults, is that “people are not fully living unless they are making their own choices and in control of their own lives” (p. 36). The main character, Katniss Everdeen, is a sixteen year-old girl who faces constant identity construction and reconstruction by authorities, the removal of her bodily agency, and age-based discrimination that objectifies her and her fellow young people to the point where they are no longer human. Instead, they are represented as tools and weapons to ensure complicity within the ruling regime of Panem.

Katniss Everdeen lives in the dystopian world of Panem, which used to be North America – although it is never shown in the narrative what triggered the re-organisation of the US or whether other countries around the world are structured similarly. In the series, Panem is isolated from the rest of the world and split into twelve districts. The Hunger Games are an annual televised fight to the death where the Capitol, the privileged elite, randomly select one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and
seventeen from each district. This is described as being necessary to punish the districts for their attempted uprising 74 years before the events of the narrative. The districts are portrayed as starving, riddled with disease and living under the totalitarian regime enforced by the Capitol and President Snow, Panem’s self-appointed leader. The children, or tributes, are placed in an arena with various weapons and tools, and forced to kill each other. The adult Capitol citizens can sponsor a tribute by sending them food or weapons during the Games, and the winner is allowed to go home to a life of luxury in their district. When Katniss’s younger sister, Prim, is reaped (chosen) for the Games, Katniss is shown volunteering to take her place at the beginning of the narrative. The series follows Katniss as she performs in the Games, falls in love with her fellow tribute Peeta, and leads a rebellion to hold the Capitol morally accountable for the horrors of the games.

This case study chapter will examine how Katniss is shown engaging with both the Capitol, led by President Snow, and the rebellion, led by District 13 and President Coin, with varying expressions of autonomy and power. Katniss is shown to be disempowered by her mother, who neglects Katniss and her sister, which in turn makes it easier for the Capitol’s institutionalised methods of disempowerment to affect them. The institution of the Capitol is designed to disempower young people by objectifying them, turning them into weapons against the Districts, and making it impossible for Katniss herself to consider ever having a family or becoming a mother because she fears what the Capitol would do to her children. Over the course of the series, Katniss is portrayed being empowered by the Capitol and District 13, who continually remake and reappropriate her image for their personal agendas. Image, as a construction, is a very important theme in the series and made more overt by the reality television narrative device, which by its nature critiques the concept of ‘reality’ in television.
While Katniss is able to wield her power, she can never do so autonomously because her image is always contingent on operating within the fictional power structure, which privileges the adults. There is a clear difference in YA fiction between power and agency. While Katniss appears to hold a lot of power in the relationships she has with the adults in the narrative, this power is tempered by the recognition that she is unable to wield it for her own purposes. She has no agency in these relationships until the later stages of the narrative when her feminist care ethic requires that she find a way to express agency or remain morally accountable for the acts performed by the adults using her image. Essentially, the more Katniss is shown to be caring and engaging in caring behaviours, the more she is shown feeling that it is necessary to perform as an active agent and make herself morally accountable for the choices she makes. Katniss becomes a symbolic representation of the Mockingjay – a hybrid songbird, born from the jabberjay (a genetically-altered Capitol invention) and wild mockingjays, whose power and resilience lie in their ability to form lasting connections with other species and thrive in a new form.

One of the main themes in _The Hunger Games_ is representation, imagery and audience, which are all hallmarks of reality television; where the ‘reality’ is twisted and edited to achieve a particular version of reality that suits the creators of the show (Huff, 2006). Richard Huff’s (2006) work on reality television and the perception of reality analyses the apparent discrepancy between representation and truth, and this is a particularly pertinent theme in _The Hunger Games_. Katniss’s survival in the games relies on her portrayed ability to construct a reality that will please the viewers, which eventually extends to pleasing a rebellion. Helen Day (2012) writes that Katniss’s perceived strength in the narrative comes from her ability to recognise that she is always a part of the games, and thus vulnerable to the manipulations of those around her: “In _The
*Hunger Games* trilogy, image is manipulated by everyone, used to disguise the real, hijack the real, reveal the real, and finally become the real” (p. 177, emphasis in the original). The power holders and authority figures in the narrative – the Capitol, District 13, and Haymitch – all reconstruct Katniss’s image to achieve their goals. In doing this, the authority figures must imbue Katniss with the necessary power to maintain their image and by extension their own position in the social hierarchy. Katniss herself is shown internalizing these representations and interpretations of her character in the early stages of the narrative. The power holders keep her under strict control and ensure her complicity in her own disempowerment by carefully constructing her as a lesser moral agent.

A lesser moral agent is described, in Gray et al’s (2011) study on the perception of moral accountability and objectification, as “less morally responsible… but more sensitive to harm” (p. 1207), and having less agency and responsibility as perceived by observers because they are objectified, or subjected to a ‘body focus’. As discussed in the Literature Review, Gray et al (2011) define agency as “the capacity to act, plan and exert self-control” (p. 1208). The fictional world of Panem represents children as body-focused objects, to be used by the Capitol for sport or correction. They have no agency or autonomy while they are still considered children, which, in the narrative context of *The Hunger Games*, refers to anyone up to age eighteen. This body focus, internalised by the young people in the narrative through years of repeated experience, creates a barrier between them and exercising agency by objectifying them and rendering them morally neutral. Katniss’s portrayed moral neutrality evolves over the course of the narrative as she begins to construct herself as a moral agent capable of autonomy. The character spends the majority of the narrative negotiating and challenging the various
representations of herself, which requires a “redistribution of perceived mind” (Gray et al, 2011, p. 1207).

The portrayed moral development in the main character is gradual and directly relates to the relationships Katniss cultivates over the series. Katniss’s relationships and her personification of Carol Gilligan’s (1982) feminist care ethic was analysed in Lindsey Averill’s (2012) ‘Sometimes the World is Hungry for People Who Care: Katniss and the Feminist Care Ethic’. Averill’s analysis demonstrated that Katniss’s extension of care slowly encapsulates more people as the series progresses and she cultivates more relationships. I will call this extension of care the ‘care circle’. In the beginning of the narratives, Katniss’s care circle is shown to be limited because she has internalised the body focus outlined by Gray et al (2011) which keeps her morally unaccountable. Her care circle contains her sister, Primrose, her mother and her best friend Gale. Her care ethic is described by Averill (2012) as “natural” (p. 171), a spontaneous concern felt for loved ones, which is generally biologically related. As the narrative progresses, Katniss’s care circle is shown widening as she finds herself negotiating, and eventually outright challenging, the body focus projected onto her by the power holders and she becomes more morally accountable to more people. These emotional connections motivate action and the more Katniss cares, the more autonomous she becomes as she reclaims her image from the people controlling her.

Although dystopia, as a branch of science fiction, has been widely critically analysed, the recent surge in YA dystopia has certain conventions that are not typical of the genre when pitched to an older audience. Scholarship dealing directly with YA dystopia does not have the same breadth of scholarly research as sub-genres which came before it. There has been some significant work in the past few years with regards to dystopian
themes in children’s literature (Dudek, 2005; Bradford, Mallan, Stephens & McCallum, 2008), and, even more recently, YA (Dudek & Johnson, 2011; Averill, 2012; Day, 2012; Braithwaite, Hutton, & Miller, 2012; Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013). Basu et al’s (2013) edited collection of essays on YA dystopia fiction pays particular attention to the tension between the institution and the individual; importantly, their collection of essays questions whether the institution itself is flawed, or whether the individual characters have directed the institution to nefarious purposes. I would argue that it is both.

Although the institution may be portrayed as beginning benevolently, benevolence becomes disempowering when it relies on the subjugation of individuality – which is something adult characters are portrayed as geared towards institutional practices towards. The adult individuals may be shown actively disempowering younger individuals, but they can only do so because the fictional institution affords them that power.

The popularity of The Hunger Games has prompted a surge of female-centred dystopia series, generally taking the form of trilogies, and using the dystopian tradition of reminding readers of “how woefully naïve the present is” (Larson, 1997, p. 60) using plot devices which are relevant to the young audience; such as gender and marriage inequality, environmental catastrophe, biological warfare, etc. Interestingly, global outreach campaigns targeting school-age women have become common in the last decade, particularly in the areas of science and economics (Morrow, 2013). This could account for the sudden and swift rise in the number of dystopia/action novels featuring young women as the main protagonists.

Female protagonists in YA dystopia tend to speak through a first person narrative voice. The protagonist is typically in her late teens (14-17) and, although she may have a few close friends, remains fairly distant from her social group. This is true in the case of
Tris Prior in the *Divergent* series (Roth, 2012) and Tally Youngblood in the *Uglies* series (Westerfeld, 2005). Surliness, brooding, hyper intelligence (or street smarts) and an unwillingness to recognise her own physical attractiveness are also common character traits for females in YA dystopia; Rosie in the *Rosie Black Chronicles* (Morgan, 2010), June in the *Legend* series (Lu, 2011), Cassia in the *Matched* series (Condie, 2010) and Lena in the *Delirium* series (Oliver, 2011) are all established as socially ‘othered’ in the early stages of their narratives. This narrative position as outsider allows the female protagonist the opportunity to critically engage with the social hierarchy, usually through a catalysing event that takes place early in the narrative, such as a family tragedy, which sets the young woman on the path to re-organising the regime. She will be assisted in her quest by a male lead (usually there will be several male leads for her to choose from) and the narrative will conclude with an assurance that their romance will continue in the context of the new social order which she instigates.

It is important to note that these YA dystopia series generally make their catalysing event an issue that directly relates to the oppression or segregation of young people in the narrative world. In Teri Terry’s *Slated series* (2012) young people’s memories are erased if they commit certain acts of rebellion, and in Ann Aguirre’s *Enclave series* (2011) young people are not named and their personhood is not acknowledged until they are socially conditioned into one of three roles: breeder, builder or hunter. Dudek and Johnson’s (2011) work on adult-centred dystopia argues that these narratives reflect “warnings about where Western countries – and particularly the US – are heading” (p. 186), it is important to note that contemporary YA dystopias centre around threats to young people’s agency; threats which usually come from adults.
The role Katniss plays in the re-organisation of her fictional society’s social order hinges on the image which she presents to the world, either as a tribute in the Games, as a leader of the rebellion, or as a young woman in love. She is portrayed as occupying and embodying many roles because they are required of her, but none of these roles can really be considered her own identity. Her personal identity construction is initially overshadowed by the body focus enforced upon her, and Katniss’s negotiation between the identities authority figures have created for her determines how much agency she can exercise in the narrative world. As the series progresses and Katniss is shown widening her care circle to accommodate more people, she begins to hold herself morally accountable for their well-being, which in turn prompts her desire to actively lead the rebellion. Her feminist care ethic becomes the catalyst for her rejection of the body focus and her expressions of agency in the narrative.

**Disempowerment**

While the narratives begin when Katniss is sixteen, flashbacks during the first several chapters outline her character growth in the events before the narrative opens. Katniss is born into a position of relative freedom with a strong relationship with her father who died when she was eleven. Her low socio-economic status exposes her to many physical dangers, but her relationship with her father, outlined through flashbacks, is characterised as positive and nurturing; her father taught her survival skills, which would be her greatest strength throughout the rest of the narrative, and they also shared a love of singing. The narrative is told from first-person perspective, and these flashbacks are interspersed within the main action to contextualise Katniss’s strong personal emphasis on survival – prompted by her father’s lessons and her mother’s neglect.
Although mothers are constructed in Western society as having “the principal responsibility for the child” (Holton, 2008, p. 1031) the flashbacks Katniss describes centre the positivity in her childhood on her father’s position in the family as provider. During the narrative Katniss’s internal monologue never names either of her parents because they are not represented as characters in their own right, but rather aspects of Katniss’s childhood. Katniss’s father represents the relative autonomy Katniss exercises in her youth. Katniss is unique among the case studies in this thesis because, while the protagonists in *Harry Potter* and *The Hunchback Assignments* begin life in a position of disempowerment, Katniss is allowed a small amount of agency, which is followed by the period of disempowerment after her father’s death, and centres almost entirely around her mother’s neglect.

Katniss is represented at the beginning of *The Hunger Games* as having gained agency in her family by bypassing her mother entirely. She is shown engaging with the role of mother for Prim and herself, but this power only extends to her ability to keep her sister from starving to death. She has no power outside of her immediate family because her body focus remains her primary identity construction when she is not playing the role of mother. It is an extension of the feminist care ethic within her care circle that allows Katniss to exercise power in that context.

The death of Katniss’s father when Katniss was eleven triggered a period of sudden, severe neglect at the hands of her mother. The trauma Katniss describes is not unique to her family, because according to narration many children, including her friend Gale, lose their fathers in the mines. Katniss and Prim’s trauma, however, is depicted as being exacerbated by their mother’s neglect. Katniss’s portrayed reaction to the sudden emotional distance of her mother is typical of real-world neglect cases where, as Ricky
Greenwald (2005) explains in the *Child Trauma Handbook*: “children are exposed to trauma, they learn that parents and others cannot be relied upon for protection… the child exchanges the healthy (if irrational or naïve) optimism for survival orientation” (pp. 14-15). During Katniss’s internal monologue before and during the reaping, she describes her personal transformation after her father’s death. Katniss “took over as head of the family” (*HG* p. 32) to keep herself and her sister alive, and develops a problem-focused coping strategy, which is described by Kimberley (2009) as “confronting a problem in order to solve it and include actions such as getting information, looking for alternative solutions and evaluating the costs/benefits of a response” (p. 268). Katniss learns, using the skills her father taught her, to provide for her sister and is shown to be deeply practical in her approach to survival. This is a characteristic trait of Katniss’s character for the rest of the series.

Notably, Katniss loses her desire to sing because it is “somewhere between hair ribbons and rainbows in terms of usefulness” (*HG* p. 255) and this expression of the freedom she is depicted feeling under her father’s care is not of practical use in her current circumstances when the narrative opens. Peeta, who is set up in the narrative as an empathetic foil to Katniss’s pragmatism, describes Katniss’s hairstyle as being two braids instead of one when her father was alive. Elizabeth Gitter’s (1984) work on hair styles in fiction indicates the symbolic importance attached to how female characters wear their hair in popular culture; Katniss’s shift from two braids (an expression of innocence and youth in popular culture) to one braid is an indication of her utilitarian worldview – exchanging frivolity and freedom for practicality.

Katniss assumes the mother role in the family; buying food, cooking it, and trying “to keep Prim and myself looking presentable” (*HG* p. 32) in order to avoid being placed in
the community home, the Panem equivalent of institutional childcare. Tower (1993) writes that “[e]ach family member is given or assumes a series of roles” (p. 26) in the family context, and that these roles can enhance the functioning of the family. Katniss’s assumption of the mother role is typical of her character arc; it has been constructed through Western narratives as typical and expected of young females when their biological mother is no longer capable of filling the role herself, because “women’s mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labor … women’s mothering has been taken for granted” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 3). This relationship between power and care becomes more overt over the course of *The Hunger Games*, and becomes particularly useful for Katniss herself in developing agency.

Although Katniss assumes the role of mother in her family, she “recoil[s] at even the suggestion of marriage or a family” (*CF* p. 310) because she fears seeing her own children fight in the Games and being unable to protect them the way she protects Prim by volunteering to take her place. Katniss’s portrayed desire to avoid motherhood is atypical of contemporary YA fiction, and in constructions of young women in Western media in general. Whelehan (2000) writes that second and third wave feminism, while advocating for bodily autonomy, finds it difficult to reconcile with the social expectation of women as biological mothers, writing that in order to ‘have it all’ a woman must be a mother or on her way to becoming one. Logan (2013) extends this biological construction of femininity by pointing out that the inability to become pregnant has been constructed on a social and cultural level as a problem “requiring high-technology medical treatments” (2013, p. 36). In Gilligan’s (1982) analysis of the feminist care ethic the relational extension of care is particular of women perhaps
because of this biological and social connection to offspring; writing that “[p]regnancy itself confirms femininity” (p. 77)

In modern YA fiction the ideal of motherhood is further perpetuated, with children and family-orientation generally being constructed as a site of pleasure and power, “ignoring individualism in place of affiliation” (Allen, 2012, p. 267). This is seen particularly strongly in the popular *Twilight* series (Meyer, 2005), although my own peer-reviewed work has found that most YA narratives which contain female characters centre on a romance or relationship which is presumed to result in children after the events of the narrative (Seymour, 2013a). Katniss’s mother is constructed as an emotionally distant woman, and Katniss’s own experience of mothering her sister out of necessity rather than desire portrays the overall perception of motherhood in the narratives as undesirable and ultimately disempowering. Motherhood cannot not be a site of pleasure for Katniss because she cannot see children as human; even Prim is depicted in Katniss’s internal monologue as a vulnerable dependant in need of constant protection. When Katniss thinks of children, she only sees what harm can be done to them under Capitol rule because children are actively reduced to body focused lesser moral agents, or weapons, through the Games.

Lindsey Averill’s (2012) analysis of Katniss as the embodiment of the feminist care ethic concluded that Katniss’s moral choices “seem to be guided by a kind of favoritism [sic], or strong personal attachment to particular people” (p. 163). At first, when Katniss’s care circle is limited to Prim, she is able to hold herself in a morally neutral position. Averill’s (2012) analysis of Katniss’s feminist care ethic differentiates between two types of care ethics: natural caring and ethical caring. Natural caring, Averill (2012) writes, is “the spontaneous concern we feel for our loved ones, such as
the caring a mother has for her child” (p. 171), which is typical of Katniss’s portrayed moral attitudes in the early stages of the narrative. Ethical caring goes a step further, allowing memories of natural caring to “help us to recognize the goodness of caring relationships” (Averill, 2012, p. 172) and extend the care ethic beyond immediate loved ones.

When Katniss is being held in the Capitol before the Games, she recounts to Peeta how she and Gale had allowed a pair of lovers who had hidden in the woods to be captured by Capitol hovercrafts. She explains how the girl “locked eyes with me and called out for help. But neither Gale or I had responded” (HG p. 101). When Katniss is confronted by the girl, now an Avox (a Capitol slave with her tongue cut out), she apologises to her while recognising the impotence of the apology when she had “let the Capitol kill the boy and mutilate her without lifting a finger” (HG p. 104). Katniss, regardless of her portrayed guilt, justifies her decision not to interfere with the lovers’ capture because Katniss “would just have ended up an Avox, too” (HG p. 144). In this instance, practicality outweighs any duty of care Katniss may have felt to help the girl, and Katniss is shown attempting to absolve herself of moral accountability. Katniss’s ability to move beyond natural caring to ethical caring – remaining firmly in the feminist care ethic while becoming more accommodating and inclusive – is only possible when the character begins to acknowledge her moral accountability beyond the parameters set by her own internalised body focus. In short, only when Katniss is shown no longer considering herself an object without agency is she able to extend her moral accountability beyond her immediate circle.

In the beginning of the narratives Katniss is shown to see value in herself as she can be of use to Prim. This can be problematic from a feminist care perspective, as Gilligan
(1982) points out in her treatise on the subject. The feminist care ethic establishes relational accountability that is often constructed, by women more so than men, as a moral accountability which applies to others before the self, effectively preventing the female voice from “taking a stand” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 66). The construction of caring for oneself “falls prey to the old criticism of selfishness” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 87), and while Katniss is occasionally portrayed as not willing to keep herself alive (“let me die right here in the rain” (HG p. 34, emphasis in original)), she will not allow herself to die because then she would leave Prim alone. If an action could result in danger to Prim, even if it could ultimately benefit more than one person, Katniss will not take it. Katniss’s represented desire to protect Prim at her own expense stems from the body focus which Katniss projects onto Prim.

As Gray et al (2011) write, the body focus “does not diminish the attribution of all mental capacities but, instead, leads perceivers to infer a different kind of mind… less morally responsible (i.e., lesser moral agents) but more sensitive to harm” (p. 1207). Prim’s role in the family as cared-for dependant exempts her from the responsibilities of keeping the family functioning, and through the construction of Prim as “[s]weet, tiny Prim who cried when I cried before she even knew the reason, who brushed and plaited my mother’s hair before we left for school” (HG p. 33), Prim’s agency and autonomy is limited outside of her role as the soul recipient of Katniss’s care ethic. By reducing Prim to the body focus and, arguably, projecting all of her own vulnerabilities to starvation and pain onto Prim, Katniss is able to rationalise her desire to extend her care circle to only a handful of other characters, as well as account for her disassociation with the moral dilemmas around her.
Katniss’s externalisation of problems onto Prim is a representation of a coping technique often used by powerless individuals, and described by Nancy Chodorow’s (1978) work on the construction of motherhood as a person assuming “that others have qualities which are in fact their own, of that they have a relation to another which is in fact an internal relation of one part of the self to another” (1978, p. 43). By constructing Prim as helpless, Katniss necessarily assumes the duty of protecting her and distances herself emotionally from any potential moral dilemmas which may arise from her own impotence: “My family is safe. And if they are safe, no real harm has been done” (HG p. 131). She takes greater risks for Prim, risking “a bullet in the head” (HG p. 20) which is the punishment for hunting in the woods, in order to feed her. Katniss also notes during Catching Fire that, had she been older, she would have become a prostitute and joined the “starving young women” who would “earn a few coins to feed their families by selling their bodies” (CF p. 139).

Katniss remains firmly in a victim cycle by constructing Prim in the dependant role, effectively cutting herself off from any possibility of agency and moral action outside of her role as protector. Her projection of the body focus onto Prim, and her own feminist care ethic, require Katniss’s character to remain in the care identity and avoid any rebellious actions. When Gale is shown suggesting that he and Katniss run away from the oppressive regime, her internal monologue quickly dismisses the idea: “how could they live without us? ... How could I leave Prim?” (HG p. 11). Her body-focused mindset and mothering role make any attempt to define herself, or exercise agency and power outside of her care circle, very difficult.

Katniss is portrayed reducing herself to a position of disempowerment in order to justify her own inaction against the Capitol’s cruelty, citing her feminist care ethic.
tempered with her trademark practicality: “But what good is yelling about the Capitol in
the middle of the woods? It doesn’t change anything. It doesn’t make things fair. It
doesn’t fill our stomachs” (HG p. 17). Katniss’s internal monologue contains constant
reminders about the necessity of food and physical safety, which indicates her firm
body focus even within the feminist care perspective. She cannot hold herself morally
accountable for anything outside of her family as long as she remains a perpetual
victim.

It is important to recognise that Katniss’s bad experiences, according to her internal
monologue, stem from her mother; she is depicted identifying emotionally with her
father and describes her dealings with her mother with negative language:

I kept waiting, waiting for her to disappear on us again. I didn’t trust her. And
some small gnarled place inside me hated her for her weakness, for her neglect,
for the months she had put us through. Prim forgave her, but I had taken a step
back from my mother, put up a wall to protect myself from needing her, and
nothing was ever the same between us again (HG p. 64)

Katniss’s rejection of her mother explains Katniss’s apparently deliberate distance from
traditionally feminine attributes. During the opening chapter of The Hunger Games,
when the reader is introduced to Katniss through her first-person monologue, the first
indication of her gender is the “long dark braid” (HG p. 4), which is mentioned only
after Katniss finishes describing her attempts to drown Prim’s cat several years
previously because he was “swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. The last thing I
needed was another mouth to feed” (HG p. 4). Her personality in centred in pragmatism
and reason, eschewing emotion except where Prim is concerned and distancing herself
from feminine traits like the desire to have children (“I never want to have any kids”
(HG p. 11)) and romantic attachments, using Gale as an example. Katniss’s internal
monologue says that Gale “won’t have any trouble finding a wife… It makes me jealous, but not for the reason people would think. Good hunting partners are hard to find” (HG p. 12).

Katniss’s distance from traditional gender performance indicates the “role training or cognitive role learning” (Chodorow, 1978, p. 31), which is depicted as being skewed in favour of her father’s gender performance because her mother’s behaviour is constructed negatively in the narration. Katniss’s backstory indicates that she was taught to value survival as a result of her mother’s neglect, which nearly costs Katniss and her sister their lives, and became more androgynous in her performance of gender as a result of this distrust. Hunting, a traditionally masculine activity, horrifies Prim because she is constructed through comparisons to Katniss as a natural carer: “I tried to teach her a couple of times… whenever I shot something, she’d get teary and talk about how we might be able to heal it if we got it home soon enough” (HG p. 42). Katniss, however, kills a lynx she is fond of because it scares away game, only noting that she “almost regretted it because he wasn’t bad company. But I got a decent price for his pelt” (HG p. 8). There is no emotional connection to this creature because it has no use to her and her family – at least, not while it is alive. In the early stages of the series the narrative voice of Katniss’s internal monologue is typically dystopian, registering the horrors around her in a dry, sardonic tone which implies her own detachment from anything which is not relevant to her problem-based coping strategy.

Although Katniss distances herself from performing femininity, she is depicted as valuing and applauding the performance of traditional feminine roles in her sister and, occasionally, their mother. She is portrayed as respecting Prim and her mother’s ability to heal the sick. This is demonstrated through flashbacks of Prim tending to an injured
goat and her mother, the local healer, tending the victims of mining accidents and they are depicted in Katniss’s internal monologue as positive. Katniss reflects in the arena, as she is attempting to treat an injured Peeta, that Prim would be of more use to him because Katniss has “neither the skill nor the courage” (HG p. 310) to heal him. Katniss notes that while she can care for Prim when she is sick, she usually leaves the house whenever anyone else needs treatment because she does not enjoy sickness as embodied by people outside of her care circle. This reiterates the relationship between power and care by showing the reader that Katniss values the ability to heal others.

Katniss’s mother’s neglect is portrayed as making Katniss more susceptible to the Capitol’s disempowerment of young people. The Capitol constructs the children of Panem as body-focused weapons to ensure the districts’ obedience:

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy… Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you” (HG p. 22)

Kruttschnitt, Ward and Sheble’s (1987) findings indicate that the neglect or parental rejection experienced by subjects “had the most devastating impact on the child” (p. 504) because it disrupted the traditionally safe space of the family. At the time of Katniss’s father’s death, Katniss is already in a dangerous position within the narrative because her name is down to compete in the Hunger Games. The death of her father places Katniss in another dangerous social position: a position of poverty.

As Enns (2010) writes, the “interaction of multiple identities and social hierarchies contributes to oppression” (p. 335), and this is particularly true of Katniss’s
predicament. The Hunger Games is structured to include a tesserae system. Children can place their names in the reaping multiple times in exchange for extra food. This is portrayed as a method to sow mistrust in the districts because “it’s hard not to resent those who don’t have to sign up for tesserae” (HG p. 16). Day (2012) writes that “trust and friendship are enemies of the state” (p. 173), and so by creating a cycle of poverty where the most vulnerable learn to mistrust those who can avoid the tesserae system. Despite recognising that she is risking a horrific death at the hands of other children by putting her name down for the Games three times more frequently than necessary, Katniss nevertheless procures multiple entries in the Games to take advantage of the extra food. It is an interesting irony that the Capitol is shown playing on the starvation and neglect experienced in the districts by offering children the opportunity to put themselves in even more danger in exchange for protection against starvation. Katniss cannot sell her body at age eleven, but the Capitol provides her with a different type of prostitution – tripling her odds of being reaped in exchange for her family’s food.

Gray et al’s (2011) study shows that people who are seen as body focused, as opposed to mind focused, are perceived as less morally accountable but more sensitive to harm. This makes the children of Panem the perfect weapons for the Capitol’s revenge because they are constructed in the narrative as typically body focused. Children are often reduced to the body focus in the real world as well as fiction; as shown in this thesis’s literature review, children have been constructed through literature and culture for many generations as blank slates that require guidance and correction (Morrow, 2013; Sorin, 2005; Woodhead, 2009). It is only in recent years that the theme of moral agency in literature for young readers has become clearer and more overt. The child characters in The Hunger Games are used as tools to settle the Capitol’s old scores and
maintain the system of power which President Snow, the leader of Panem, has constructed.

Stephen Clark’s (1989) *Frameworks of Power* writes that “[a]ny generally applicable theory of power must also be a theory of organization [sic]. Much of the theory of power in organizations has been oriented towards the explanation of how organizational (sic) obedience is produced” (p. 17). President Snow’s power is depicted as relying on the organisation of Panem which subordinates the districts through the construction of children as body-focused cannon fodder, and maintains enough intra-district mistrust to ensure that the people of Panem cannot organise themselves into any meaningful rebellion. The Capitol is shown using the children as weapons against the districts, and by constructing them as body focused lesser moral agents, they are attacking the individuals who the districts most desire to protect, “[f]or although people may act to protect those who are characterized [sic] as bodies from harm, doing so strips them of their self-determination” (Gray et al, 2011, p. 1218). The children remain unaccountable for their actions in the Games because they are described as being conditioned to believe that any murder they commit is necessary for their own survival, and are rewarded with a “life of ease back home” (*HG* p. 22) if they win the Games by eliminating their competition. Through the above-mentioned tesserae system and the projection of powerlessness and unaccountability onto children, the power hierarchy is structured as being self-perpetuating.

When Katniss is reaped, she describes through her internal monologue how the Capitol stylists will likely dress her in a degrading or humiliating way. Before the Games, tributes are paraded around the Capitol showing off their beauty or fashion, and Katniss describes a past year when the District 12 tributes “were stark naked and covered in
black powder to represent coal dust” (HG p. 80). Since no tribute is above the age of seventeen, this sexualisation of underage children portrays the Capitol’s understanding of the tributes as entertainment rather than actual human beings. Any attempt to know the tributes on a deeper, emotional level (the pre-games interview) is carefully planned to ensure a certain kind of external impression that coincides with the Capitol’s limited expectations of tribute personalities:

“Are you going to be charming? Aloof? Fierce? So far, you’re shining like a star. You volunteered to save your sister. Cinna made you look unforgettable. You’ve got the top training score. People are intrigued, but no one knows who you are. The impression you make tomorrow will decide exactly what I can get you in terms of sponsors,” says Haymitch (HG pp. 140-141)

Huff’s (2006) work on the reality television phenomena argues that ‘reality’ TV is an oxymoron since heavy editing actively distorts the audience’s perception of contestants, with some contestants deliberately altering their performances and personalities “just to gain air time” (p. 171). Katniss is portrayed as using this reality distortion to her advantage in the arena, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. As a method of institutionalised disempowerment, the reduction of tributes to stereotypes further serves to perpetuate the body focus onto young people in the narrative.

At the beginning of the narrative, before Katniss has learnt to use the Game structure to her advantage, she finds it difficult to fit the assigned roles the Capitol offers:

“Apparently I’m too “vulnerable” for ferocity. I’m not witty. Funny. Sexy. Or mysterious. By the end of the session, I am no one at all” (HG p. 143). Katniss is again portrayed as internalising the projections of the Capitol; if she cannot play a role assigned to her, she has no identity. Other tributes appear to play their roles perfectly: Glimmer from District 1 “look[s] provocative in a see-through gold gown… she’s sexy
all the way” (HG p. 151) and younger tributes like Rue, age twelve, are not openly sexualised but they are reduced to a state of childish innocence which allows the Capitol to construct them as meek and vulnerable before they are sent to their death in the arena. Rue’s interview dress is embellished with gossamer wings, and she is described as fairy-like, “flutter[ing] her way to Caesar. A hush falls over the crowd at the sight of this magical wisp of a tribute” (HG p. 152). By enforcing certain codes of behaviour and dressing the tributes in provocative or juvenile costumes, the Capitol is portrayed as maintaining its body focus on the children of Panem and exerting control over the districts; disempowering young people by objectifying them. In learning to perform in predictable ways Katniss begins to gain power in the fictional context, but this power is frequently usurped and manipulated by the adult characters who threaten her care circle.

**Manipulation**

Each power holder, working through their particular organisational scheme, uses Katniss as a weapon to maintain their control. To do this, they are depicted redesigning her image throughout the narrative. The power holders of Panem are President Snow, who controls the majority of the country and runs the Hunger Games, and President Coin who controls District 13 and the rebellion. President Snow constructs Katniss as a beautiful victor who acts out of love for a select circle of loved-ones rather than out of any rebellious design, rendering her as a body without moral agency or intention; while President Coin constructs her as the Mockingjay, a powerful warrior who fights for the freedom of the districts from President Snow’s cruel regime. They are portrayed as relying on Katniss’s complicity to maintain their control and, by authorising their power, Katniss internalises their various images of her until she is unable to act with autonomy under the constraints of the organisation system which she is part of. This is
similar to the way Sekora (1987) describes how colonised individuals and slaves would internalise and authorise their own disempowerment by performing in the manner which the power holders expect them to. Katniss is continually reconstructed and projected onto the people of Panem as an image, with her intentions and desires made available to the reader through her internal monologue.

Katniss’s beauty and novelty gives her power among the citizens of the Capitol, but this power comes from the image that is built as part of her participation in the Hunger Games. Katniss plays the role of a beautiful tribute, a star-crossed lover and a happy victor even though she admits that she is terrible at acting. After noting during the early celebrations of the Games that the people of the Capitol adore her, she becomes more active in perpetuating the roles which she knows will endear her to the crowd: “A hundred hands reach up to catch my kiss, as if it were a real and tangible thing… I can hear my name being called from all sides. Everyone wants my kisses” (HG p. 86). This gives her a limited amount of power, but that power does not equate to agency as is ultimately usurped by President Snow. Katniss’s beauty is emphasised by the clothes she is made to wear. She is shown submitting to the whims of her stylist, Cinna, trusting that he can appropriate her image to suit whatever performance the Capitol requires of her and describes his ability to transform her into whatever image is necessary. After Katniss wins the Games the people of the Capitol are portrayed appropriating her image, particularly the mockingjay pin she wears in the arena, which is shown being worn on Capitol lapels, belts, watches and tattoos: “Everyone wants to wear the winner’s token” (CF p. 96). By appropriating her symbol and image the Capitol is shown to simultaneously empower Katniss through their admiration, and disempowers her by reducing her to an object.
Katniss is depicted as complicit in this disempowerment once again by internalising these projections of the body focus and allowing herself to be objectified. According to models of objectification, “viewing someone as a body induces dementalization [sic], stripping away their psychological traits” (Gray et al, 2011, p. 1207). After initially resisting, Katniss is shown succumbing to the objectification because it gives her more power than if she had fought for a mind-focused image, which the organisational scheme within the narrative cannot support in the beginning. At first, the Capitol’s use of Katniss’s physical appearance is shown to work in Katniss’s favour. Gray et al’s (2011) study indicates that when a body focus is applied to an individual, they have “an increased perceived capacity for harm” which “may lead others to protect this person from additional pain” (p. 1215). Katniss’s self-reduction to a beautiful, unassuming young woman allows the Capitol to project a body function onto her and establish her as a tribute worth sponsoring.

In the beginning stages of the narratives, Katniss has authorized the power the Capitol has over her by reducing herself to an appearance of detachment. Later, during the pre-game interviews, Katniss recognises that her connection to Prim and her links to the feminist care ethic is actually swinging the audience in her favour, and so she changes her performance accordingly. This, again, gives her power but not agency, because her behaviours are confined to working within the constraints of the perceived expectations of her oppressors.

Katniss’s portrayals of gender during the Games further link her to the feminist care ethic (by virtue of her femaleness), but it is not her choice to change her gender performance; instead, a new gender performance is enforced on her in binary opposition to her fellow tribute, Peeta Mellark (Miller, 2012). Jessica Miller (2012) writes that
even though girls and boys participate equally in the Games, Katniss’s femininity is emphasised when the Capitol pairs her with Peeta, an equally androgynous character whose masculinity is emphasised through his relationship with Katniss. In order to ensure public favour, Haymitch portrays Katniss in a romantic relationship with Peeta without Katniss’s consent. Katniss argues that this connection makes her look weak, but Haymitch counters her argument by saying that “[h]e made you look desirable… It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived” (HG p. 164). This performance of gender endears Katniss to the audience by placing her in a “star-crossed lovers” (HG p. 164) performance which the viewers of the Capitol recognise easily. By enforcing this gender performance onto Katniss, the Capitol is depicted limiting her power of choice even as her gender performance brings her sponsors and ensures her survival in the Games. Peeta understands the desires and whims of the Capitol, “has the audience from the get-go” (HG p. 157), and is able to work the system of the Capitol in his and Katniss’s favour. In doing this Peeta is portrayed perpetuating the system that disempowers the tributes and the children of Panem.

The power of choice and the deliberate removal of autonomy remains a continuous theme in Katniss’s relationship with the Capitol. Choice, according to Catherine Coker (2011), is the defining characteristic of autonomous female characters in literature and film. Given that there are so many ways to perform femininity, particularly with regards to the feminist care ethic and how female characters demonstrate their care perspective (Coker, 2011), the power to choose how to perform her gender is crucial to Katniss’s expressions of agency in the narratives. In order to maintain the Capitol’s organisational power, President Snow enforces the gender performance, which Katniss uses in the arena. Katniss assumes during her internal monologue that President Snow “will insist we have children” (CF p. 56) to continue her charade of romantic attachment to Peeta,
and she assumes that “[g]iven all the trouble I’ve caused, I’ve probably guaranteed any child of mine a spot in the Games” (CF p. 56). So by insisting that her connection with Peeta remain publicly visible, Snow is portrayed as maintaining his power over Katniss through a kind of reproductive terrorism – empowering her biological gender while making pregnancy both terrifying and beyond her control. President Snow is depicted as recognising the power which Katniss’s image has over the people of Panem and rather than attempt to erase her power, he enforces her complicity in order to quell rebellion in the districts: “Katniss Everdeen, the girl who was on fire, you have provided a spark that, left unattended, may grow to an inferno that destroys Panem” (CF p. 27). He is shown threatening Katniss’s family in order to ensure her compliance, before sending Katniss and Peeta into the districts on the yearly Victory Tour with well-planned speeches. Any deviance from these performances is met with violent correction.

The idea of unavoidable, male-enforced pregnancy and reduction of the female to her biological imperative while ignoring her status as a thinking human being is very common in science fiction and dystopia; it was famously explored in The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood (1985) and more recently in Dan Wells’s dystopian YA series Partials (2012). Reproductive freedom is a contemporary feminist concern which often finds its way into dystopian cautionary tales, which are, as discussed by Sutherland and Swan (2008), usually “specifically linked to the society of its creator: the dystopic society carries tendencies from current society to their logical, and usually terrifying, extreme” (p. 91). While Gilligan (1982) discussed the links between the feminist care ethic and pregnancy, for now, it is only important to remember that the power of Katniss’s biological gender is portrayed as being appropriated by the Capitol and President Snow in order to maintain power. There is no opportunity for her to
express her agency. During *Catching Fire*, Peeta is shown attempting to appropriate the power President Snow has over Katniss by using Katniss’s gender performance to gain support for them both, just as he did during their first Games:

… it sends accusations of injustice and barbarism and cruelty flying in every direction. Even the most Capitol-loving, Games-hungry, bloodthirsty person out there can’t ignore, at least for a moment, how horrific the whole thing is. I am pregnant (*CF* p. 309)

This ploy, again performed without Katniss’s consent, “confirms femininity” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 77) and creates more power for Katniss and her cause, but in doing so it reduces her agency and power of choice in a way that directly attacks her biology.

District 13, led by President Coin, uses Katniss’s image in a similar way to President Snow, but she is shown attempting to construct Katniss as a rallying point for the districts by providing them with a symbol: the Mockingjay: “I am the mockingjay. The one that survived despite the Capitol’s plans. The symbol of the rebellion” (*CF* p. 466). Katniss “must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution… to blaze the path to victory” (*M* p. 12), and to do that, President Coin is portrayed as requiring a different type of performance from Katniss and a different type of complicity. President Coin ensures Katniss’s submission to the Mockingjay identity by employing a similar approach to Snow; threatening Katniss’s care circle.

President Coin imprisons Katniss’s prep team from the Games for a minor crime and leaves them “[h]alf-naked, bruised, and shackled to the wall” (*M* p. 55) for Katniss to find, in order to show “who’s really in control and what happens if she’s not obeyed” (*M* p. 60). Rather than approaching Katniss and explaining her terms, the way President Snow did, President Coin is shown using more passive aggressive methods to guarantee
Katniss’s complicity – methods which, while infuriating Katniss, do so in a way which subtly impresses upon her that she and President Coin are supposedly on the same side. The prep team works with Cinna to perfect her image before each Games. As Gale points out: “they’ve spent the last year pretty-ing you up for slaughter” (M p. 64) and “[s]he probably thought you’d see it as a favour” (M p. 65). By othering the Capitol citizens that Katniss cares for, Coin is depicted extending her power over Katniss while giving the appearance of support and a common enemy. President Coin also ensures that she has complete power over Katniss’s image by exchanging immunity for Peeta (imprisoned in the Capitol and branded a traitor by the rebels) and the other victors whom Katniss has included in her growing care circle in exchange for the right to use Katniss’s image in any way Coin chooses. Once Coin has that power, she is able to direct Katniss’s performance and external identity towards the revolution’s goals.

President Coin instructs Katniss’s prep team to clean her up, then “damage, burn and scar [Katniss] in a more attractive way” (M p. 71) in order to present the Mockingjay as a symbol of war, rather than the caged songbird which President Snow presents to Panem. She is also depicted taking steps to ensure that Katniss’s gender performance remains in line with the idealised femininity that captured the Capitol’s audiences and proved so powerful when Katniss was in the arena. When Katniss asks that Gale remain with her during the rebellion, out of a recognition that her care circle is crucial to her mental wellbeing, President Coin reduces her care ethic to body focus by stating that Peeta should continue to be presented as Katniss’s lover because “[a] quick defection from Peeta could cause the audience to lose sympathy with her” (M p. 47). Katniss refers to this reduction in her internal monologue as “demeaning” (M p. 48), but President Coin speaks without “any particular malice – quite the contrary, her words are very matter-of-fact” (M p. 47). Katniss’s image as a star-crossed lover with Peeta is
what originally captured the audience of Panem, and although the Mockingjay needs to be a fighter, President Coin cannot afford to relinquish any of the power Katniss already holds over audiences. Her gender performance, again, is depicted as being emphasised through her relationship with Peeta, even in his absence (Miller 2012) and Katniss is further reduced to an object of affection. It is only when Katniss is portrayed as performing her gender for her own purposes, cutting herself off from the performances which the power holders project onto her, that she begins to portray recognisable agency.

**Empowerment**

Katniss begins to grow in power as her emotional attachments become stronger. As she begins holding herself more morally accountable throughout the series, her strength lies in her ability to pull herself from the body focus enforced upon her by the Capitol and District 13: “[t]o show them that I’m more than just a piece in their Games” *(CF* p. 292). Nel Noddings (1998) writes in her work on the language of care ethics, that although “philosophers have long denigrated emotions and put a high valuation on reason, most have recognised that emotions often motivate action” (p. 135). I argue that while Katniss is portrayed as having the capacity for intense emotion, her careful control of those emotions in favour of the practical, pragmatic approach to survival outlined earlier in this chapter initially limits her ability to act autonomously because she does not believe it is necessary to act beyond what is required to keep her sister alive. Her represented engagement with the feminist care ethic allows her to become more morally accountable to herself and to the people in her growing care circle, and this empowers her by forcing her to act as a moral agent.
It is acknowledged fairly early in *Mockingjay* that Katniss can only reach the audience on an emotional level when she is behaving autonomously – reacting from a care perspective rather than the morally neutral perspective of the Capitol’s puppet, the ‘body’ version of Katniss, or the Mockingjay working for the rebellion’s cause. The power she is portrayed as having over the people of Panem, coveted by both Snow and Coin, is only effective when she has her own goals in mind. During a meeting between the various coordinators of Katniss’s image, Haymitch is shown offering several examples of Katniss’s behaviour in the arena that engaged her care perspective and resonated with audiences:

> The moments begin to come thick and fast and in no particular order. When I took Rue as an ally. Extended my hand to Chaff on interview night. Tried to carry Mags. And again and again when I held out those berries that meant different things to different people. Love for Peeta. Refusal to give in under impossible odds. Defiance of the Capitol’s inhumanity (*M* p. 89)

Whether she is attempting to quell rebellion in the districts, or shooting a propo (propaganda spot) for District 13, Katniss is perceived as only being believable when her care perspective is triggered – convincing Finnick of her genuine love for Peeta, earning bread from District 11 for singing Rue to sleep, and coining her rebellion’s catchphrase after witnessing a hospital bombing: “*Fire is catching! And if we burn, you burn with us!*” (*M* p. 125, emphasis in original).

Upon first entering the arena during *The Hunger Games*, Katniss cannot extend her care ethic beyond her immediate care circle but, as Averill (2012) notes, she does have a moral centre which requires her to extend reciprocal care within the constraints of the justice perspective. The justice perspective is described by Averill (2012) as “the abstract, impartial framework for moral reasoning” (p. 167). Abstract ideals of justice
are not a concern for Katniss for the most part, because she does not hold herself morally accountable to people to “ensure fairness in interaction” (Averill 2012: 167). This is seen on the first night in the arena Katniss, while hiding in a tree, notices another tribute lighting a fire nearby and immediately begins planning how best to murder them: “Stupid people are dangerous. And this one probably doesn’t have much in the way of weapons, while I’ve got this excellent knife” (HG p. 192). Katniss identifies the threat and devises ways to remove it, in the same way that she would identify the threats to her family and remove them using the problem-focused coping strategy outlined above (Kimberley, 2009) and removing any moral accountability from herself by justifying her actions as necessary: “obviously this person’s a hazard” (HG p. 192).

Katniss does believe in contractual reciprocity, which is described in Nel Noddings’s (2012) ‘The Language of Care Ethics’ as “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” (p. 53), which is a familiar staple of traditional ethics of reciprocity. This is seen clearly in her portrayed tendency to spare or save the lives of people when she believes that she owes them a debt. As Averill (2012) explains, Katniss is “faithful to the abstract principle that favors [sic] must be repaid. Notice that this principle is abstract and universal because it says nothing about to whom the favor [sic] is owed” (Averill, 2012, p. 167, emphasis in original). This is the reasoning of the justice perspective, not the care perspective (Averill, 2012), which Katniss only extends to those individuals to whom she feels morally accountable. While the “the term gift seems to imply something freely given, subtle strings and expectations always seem to be attached” (Culver, 2012, p. 92); in the early stages of the narrative, the thought of care extended beyond her immediate care circle is so strange to Katniss that she rationalises it as a favour which needs to be repaid. This sense of reciprocal care prompts her to save Peeta in the arena.
Katniss recognises that although she has no direct obligation to care for Peeta when he is injured, his gift of bread when they were children has created a duty of reciprocal care which she needs to honour: “I never seem to get over owing you for that,” (HG p. 356). Not only does the bread Peeta gives her save her life, it saves Prim and her mother by kick-starting Katniss’s independence and reminding her of her father’s teachings: “To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope” (HG p. 39). Katniss is portrayed as still behaving from the justice perspective during Catching Fire when she tries to “avoid incurring any debts” (Culver, 2012, p. 95) with her fellow tributes because she does not want to risk owing a tribute whom she will eventually have to kill: “I could easily shoot [Finnick] in the back as we walk. It’s despicable, of course, but will it be any more despicable if I wait? Know him better? Owe him more?” (CF p. 332).

Katniss’s care perspective is portrayed as being triggered by Rue, who stands in the narrative as a double for Prim, providing Katniss’s character with an emotional outlet and further humanising her as she competes in the Games. Rue also represents an extension of Katniss’s own care perspective. While Rue is constructed as being similar in demeanour and size to Prim, her characterisation is similar to Katniss in that she has dependants. Rue is “the oldest of six kids, fiercely protective of her siblings, who gives her rations to the younger ones, who forages in the meadows in a district where the Peacekeepers are far less obliging than ours” (HG p. 255). In engaging with Rue, Katniss’s care perspective is depicted as being extended beyond a dependant relationship because Rue’s character mirrors Katniss’s character.
Rue’s position in the narrative as a stand-in for Prim and a personification of Katniss’s own care ethic triggers Katniss’s introspection and her own desire for moral accountability; both for the Capitol and, significantly, for herself.

I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can’t own. That Rue is more than a piece in their Games. And so am I (HG p. 286)

When Katniss avenges Rue’s death by killing the older, male tribute who stabbed her, Katniss begins to feel some moral responsibility; particularly when she considers the care relationships the male tribute might have been a part of and how her actions may have affected people she’s never met: “I killed a boy whose name I don’t even know. Somewhere his family is weeping for him. His friends call for my blood. Maybe he had a girlfriend who really believed he would come back” (HG p. 294). Katniss’s internal monologue describes her immediate reaction to seeing Rue in danger: “[t]he boy from District 1 dies before he can pull out the spear” (HG p. 282), but once he is dead Katniss describes the death as “inadequate” (HG p. 284) because her ethical care perspective has been triggered and she now sees her fellow tributes as inhabiting their own care circles, and by extension she feels a sense of moral responsibility for them. This moral accountability is hindered by the restraints the Capitol and District 13 place on Katniss, which are explained earlier in this chapter, and Katniss needs to learn how to negotiate the power hierarchy before she can exercise autonomy.

The portrayed progression of Katniss’s moral development is gradual, mirroring the real-world moral development of young people as described by Piaget, Kohlberg and particularly Vygotsky, who argued for a sociocultural theory of moral development in which children learn morality and culturally specific ways of thinking by engaging with
“more knowledgeable members of society” (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2010, p. 51). The knowledgeable members of Panem’s fictional society are all portrayed as advocating for Katniss’s position as a lesser moral agent. Katniss’s character development through *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* centres around her challenges with these authority figures and her own desire for autonomy within the narrative universe.

Katniss, as a victor, exercises some level of power in the context of the narrative’s social power hierarchy. When she is reaped a second time in *Catching Fire*, she is placed in direct opposition to older, more experienced victors. This actually places her in a more powerful position within the fictional hierarchy of victors because the Games were designed to objectify youth and beauty; two traits Katniss embodies and which most of her opponents are portrayed as lacking. Katniss and Peeta share the title of youngest victors, and the older victors are described in Katniss’s internal monologue as “grotesque” (*CF* p. 265); “Kids in costumes are silly, but ageing victors, it turns out, are pitiful” (*CF* p. 264).

The Games are depicted as being designed for the specific purpose of disempowering young people, belittling them to a body focus in the eyes of Panem’s audiences, and establishing them as weapons to be used against the districts. However, because the Games were designed for youth, they actually support Katniss and Peeta more than the adult tributes by reducing her *more easily* to a body focus while her fellow tributes, as adults, are less vulnerable to the demeaning Capitol machinations and instead come across as out of place. It is interesting that Katniss and Peeta, when presented to the audience as younger tributes are described in Katniss’s internal monologue as “looking so young and strong and beautiful in [their] brilliant costumes. The very image of what tributes should be” (*CF* p. 265). Katniss has recognised that her power in the Capitol
lies in her body-focused image and uses it to her advantage, empowering herself by appropriating the image which was meant to control her.

Once a tribute wins the Games they are rewarded with luxuries and a life of leisure; however the victors remain the Capitol’s tools and are never allowed to exercise genuine autonomy. During Mockingjay, the reader learns that Finnick Odair, the most beautiful victor to win the Games in years, is forced by the Capitol to prostitute himself to rich citizens “as a reward” (M p. 198) when they perform services for the president. Finnick is depicted as “someone bought and sold. A district slave” (M p. 199) who is kept under President Snow’s control with, as usually seems the case in this narrative, threats to his care circle: “I wasn’t the only one, but I was the most popular … And perhaps the most defenceless, because the people I loved were so defenceless” (M p. 199). Miller (2012) points out that Finnick’s position in the narrative as a sexualised victim serves to further disrupt the traditional gender roles enforced on Hunger Games victors.

Katniss’s internal monologue describes the way that beauty translates to power in the games by recounting how the best-looking tributes get the best sponsors; a belief later personified in Finnick, whom Katniss describes as an “extraordinary beauty” (CF p. 250). While traditional Western beauty norms are not portrayed in the narrative world of Panem, the use of beauty is in itself a method of control over the victors who have loved ones – rendering them as body-focused lesser moral agents without autonomy in the context of the power hierarchy, and using them as gifts or prizes. Finnick’s position in the narrative as sexual victim makes the disempowerment of young people (Finnick was fourteen when he won the Games) more universal; less of a feminine concern and more of a concern for young people in general. Katniss recognises that she, too, would
have been made a Capitol prostitute if her romance with Peeta had not protected her from that particular method of disempowerment: “Why not? Snow could have got a really good price for the girl on fire” (M p. 201). In this way, her relationship with Peeta empowers Katniss by protecting her, but it does not give her agency because she is still dependant on the image designed by the Capitol (a star-crossed lover) for that protection.

Katniss appropriates the image of the Mockingjay over the course of the series to empower herself and give herself the opportunity to act without fearing the worst consequences. The more beloved she is by the people of Panem, the more protection she has. In the early stages of the narrative, before Katniss begins seeing herself as a moral body with agency, she connects the mockingjays with her father and takes comfort in her mockingjay pin. During the arena, when Rue tells Katniss: “I like to see [the mockingjay pin] on you. That’s how I decided I could trust you” (HG p. 256), Katniss recognises the connection between the symbol and her personal power, and incorporates the symbol into her image. Katniss spends the majority of the narratives being depicted as attempting to reconcile the competing representations of herself which she has internalised over the course of the series in order to establish a complete identity; during Catching Fire she fixates on her first act of defiance – her attempted suicide in the arena – as the best example of herself, and adopts President Coin’s ideal of the Mockingjay as a rebel leader because she believes that this is the most commendable:

The berries. I realize the answer to who I am lies in that handful of poisonous fruit. If I held them out to save Peeta because I knew I would be shunned if I came back without him, then I am despicable. If I held them out because I loved
him, I am self-centred, although forgivable. But if I held them out to defy the Capitol, I am someone of worth (CF p. 143)

Katniss is depicted as further idealising this image of herself as the rebellious Mockingjay with a feminist care ethic focused on with Rue and Prim, her body-focused dependants, “[b]ecause what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice [but to keep fighting]” (CF p. 149). Day (2012) writes that simulation is portrayed as a temporary state in *The Hunger Games*, and so Katniss is shown to temporarily adopt certain identities when they are useful to her. The defiant Mockingjay becomes Katniss’s most powerful incarnation, although she still fails to exercise autonomy because that incarnation remains under the control of President Coin.

As the narrative reaches its climax, Katniss begins to extend her duty of care in a more universal manner. Her care ethic is triggered when she sees Gale, one of the few original members of her care circle, internalising the body focus of the Capitol and relinquishing any moral accountability for himself. He adopts an ‘eye-for-an-eye’ mentality which results in his ability to create weapons which Katniss describes as “[c]ruel, but to the point” (M p. 217). In adopting and celebrating his own body focus, Gale is portrayed as limiting his own moral accountability. He exploits the feminist care ethic modelled by Katniss by creating a weapon that directly attacks the helpers, carers and healers at war:

At some point, Gale and Beetee left the wilderness behind and focused on more human impulses. Like compassion. A bomb explodes. Time is allowed for people to rush to the aid of the wounded. Then a second, more powerful bomb kills them as well (M p. 216)
This weapon is eventually used to kill Prim, Katniss’s sister, whose abilities as a healer and carer make her a target for Gale’s desire for moral neutrality.

During the attack on the Nut, a command centre inside of a mountain in District 2, when Gale suggests destroying the entrance to the mountain and killing everyone inside, Katniss’s care ethic is triggered because the explosion is depicted as reminding her of her father’s death in the mines: “I can’t condemn someone to the death he’s suggesting” (M p. 239). Averill’s (2012) analysis of Katniss’s care ethic notes that Katniss’s extension of care to “this suffering stranger” is what “opens her eyes to the true horror and injustice of the attack on the Nut” (p. 173). Katniss’s internal monologue extends her care circle to include the people in the Nut because they remind her of her father in the same way that she extended it to include Rue in the arena during her first Games. Her reaction to the care ethic and body politics Gale engages with triggers a re-evaluation of her own expressions of autonomy and how to better express her moral accountability; clarifying Katniss’s various images and perceptions of herself by indicating, through Gale’s example, that the extension of care should not be limited to relational concerns, and that inaction is as bad as outright attack when that inaction comes from a place of moral neutrality.

Katniss is portrayed as doing two things to express agency by the end of the series – she reclaims her voice, both her singing voice and her capacity for choice, and she becomes a mother. Both of these actions link back to her original disempowerment, which was outlined earlier in this chapter, and further links her thematically to the image of the mockingjay, because the mockingjay symbolises the ultimate re-appropriation of power. Significantly, the mockingjay is portrayed as a result of two species of birds breeding to form one resilient species. The mockingjay defies Capitol control through
the act of reproduction and forming lasting relationships; and it is Katniss’s ability to form relationships and build her care circle that ultimately makes her an autonomous agent.

As previously noted, the Capitol’s main punishment for traitors is to remove their tongues and turn them into slaves, or avoxes. In essence, divergent characters are silenced and re-appropriated for the Capitol’s uses. Both the Capitol and District 13 are depicted as removing Katniss’s voice, or her ability to rebel, by turning her towards their respective agendas and ensuring her complicity in their goals. Voice, in the narrative context of series, is linked symbolically to image, perception and power. Katniss’s singing voice is a site of pleasure for others, particularly disempowered individuals like Rue and the avoxes, but after her father’s death Katniss herself is depicted as finding little pleasure in it. Throughout the narrative, however, her singing becomes a way for the character to centre her identity. For example, when the Capitol asks her to sing on television after she has wins the Games, she refuses because she feels that her talents are too personal to allow the Capitol to exploit. She does, however, sing to an avox during Mockingjay and uses her voice to attract birds and surround him with music because he enjoys the whistling. Here, the voice is used as a symbol for action and comfort; two things Katniss wants to offer others but is often unable to.

The rebels quickly discover during Mockingjay that Katniss’s voice, when triggered by her ethic of care, is a powerful rallying call. When Katniss coins the phrase ‘If we burn, you burn with us’ following the bombing of a hospital it is immediately appropriated into pro-revolutionary propaganda. Later, President Coin is shown sending a hijacked (brainwashed) Peeta into the battle field with Katniss hoping that he will kill her, silencing her voice forever and giving the rebellion “a martyr to fight for” (M p. 311),
because she fears that Katniss’s rallying voice could be turned against her. Her image, on the other hand, can still be relied upon as a rallying point. During the dialogue which follows Peeta joining Katniss and the other rebels on the battlefield, Katniss’s superior officer, Boggs, is shown telling her that she ought to want Coin to be leader of Panem: “[i]f your immediate answer isn’t Coin, then you’re a threat” (M p. 310). Coin is able to silence Katniss completely by sending Katniss’s sister into a building to help injured Capitol children, and then blowing it up with Gale’s bombs. With the loss of her sister, the crux of her feminist care ethic, the centre of her care circle, Katniss is depicted as becoming “a mental, rather than physical, Avox” (M p. 410), unable to speak out of grief and effectively neutralised as a political entity.

By the end of the narrative, Katniss is depicted as speaking through actions and reclaiming her voice through silent body politics; killing President Coin instead of President Snow and taking control of her uterus back from those who had reduced her to her biology. Killing Coin also represents Katniss’s ultimate rejection of the body focus imposed upon her and every other young person in Panem. Coin’s plan to hold one final Hunger Games using Capitol children follows the same line of thinking as the Hunger Games run by the Capitol using District children: the children are disposable tools of vengeance and control. Coin’s name aptly reflects her narrative relationship to President Snow – they are two sides of the same coin and, as Katniss reflects, a regime controlled by President Coin will be no different to one controlled by President Snow: “[n]othing has changed. Nothing will ever change now” (M p. 432). When Katniss kills Coin, she is depicted as acting out of a desire to protect the children of Panem from the objectification and disempowerment inherent in the Games. In this feminist care ethic, Katniss finds power in autonomy and acts on behalf of all young people in the narrative when she removes the threat to their safety.
Immediately after killing President Coin, Katniss is depicted attempting to kill herself through gradual painkiller overdose, attempting to exercise bodily agency by ending her life. This fails, however, when she finds her voice again:

I’m a couple of days into the plan, making good progress, when something unexpected happens. I begin to sing… My voice, at first rough and breaking on the high notes, warms up into something splendid. A voice that would make the mockingjays fall silent and then tumble over themselves to join in (M p. 439)

Katniss’s voice connects her with the relative autonomy she experienced as a child, and creates a thematic link to the autonomy she now exercises. Her voice is not portrayed as a weapon; it is a comforting practice, which drives her to continue living. When Katniss returns to District 12, she is shown reuniting with Buttercup, Prim’s cat, and when she tells him that Prim is dead a “new sound, part crying, part singing, comes out of my body, giving voice to my despair” (M p. 450). Katniss’s voice becomes a site of pleasure and comfort in the narrative, no longer something unimportant or something to be suppressed or manipulated. This is supported when, during the epilogue, Katniss’s internal monologue describes how she sings to her children now that she and Peeta are free to have them without fear of what the Capitol will turn them into.

Children and motherhood remain abhorrent to Katniss throughout the narrative as the men in her life attempted to control her image through her womb, as discussed previously. This reproductive terrorism, as well as Katniss’s described experiences with mothers, constructs motherhood in the narrative in very negative terms. Although Katniss recognises that the pregnancy ploy used by Peeta in Catching Fire to gain sponsors is a brilliant tactical move, it is Katniss and not Peeta who is portrayed as having to deal with the ongoing consequences of the deceit and her reduction to a reproductive body in the eyes of the people. During Mockingjay, Katniss has to
continue the ruse of her pregnancy but invents a miscarriage to explain her lack of belly. The effect this has on the rebels she meets causes her to re-evaluate what she originally thought was a necessary lie to gain sympathy:

I do my best to sound positive about our future, but people are truly devastated when they learn I’ve lost the baby. I want to come clean and tell one weeping woman that it was all a hoax, a move in the game, but to present Peeta as a liar now would not help his image. Or mine. Or the cause (M p. 107)

Pregnancy and motherhood continue to be problematic for Katniss, and her relationship with both concepts remains negative while the Capitol and District 13 continue to use pregnancy as a method of shaping her image. Gilligan (1982) notes that motherhood can be problematic from a care perspective if the mother is defining herself through her relationship with others because “one must first be able to care responsibly for oneself” (p. 76). While Katniss’s care perspective never truly centres value on her own self-preservation, I would argue that Katniss’s portrayed decision to become a mother during the epilogue of *Mockingjay* is a reflection of her growing physical autonomy in the context of the narrative and her desire to continue loving and caring, because her children represent a choice which, until that point, she had been denied. Coker’s (2011) analysis of literary heroines states that the power of choice is the most important indicator of a feminist perspective in a narrative. Katniss’s internal monologue indicates that although Peeta may have pressured her into having children after they were married, her continued refusal (“It took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree” (M p. 454)) establishes that the ultimate decision and the ultimate power over her reproductive rights lay with Katniss.

In Katniss’s case, as is the case with most fictional representations of young people, there is a difference between power and agency. She is a powerful figure in the
beginning of the narratives, thanks to her beauty and strength, but she is unable to wield any of her power out of fear of adversely affecting her small care circle. As her care circle grows, Katniss is portrayed as recognising that the power she represents can be used to protect her circle and ensure a better world for them, but Katniss must appropriate that power for herself before she can wield it. By negotiating the various identities created for her by the power holders, Katniss concludes that her Mockingjay identity – a songbird who survived through its relationships – is the most useful representation of her own autonomy.
The Hunchback Assignments

“You will always be ugly,” Mr. Socrates had regularly reminded him over the years. “Always. But you are better able to adapt than any chameleon. Be thankful for it.”

The Hunchback Assignments p. 67

According to various scholars (Zipes, 2009; Nodelman, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2009), when adults ‘colonise’ the child in children’s literature, they are effectively othering the reader and impose an adult-normativity onto them. This colonial construction of young people as passive readers is critiqued in the fiction itself through the representation of colonised individuals becoming more powerful and autonomous in the context of the fictional world. The Hunchback Assignments is a YA steampunk series with colonialism and the repression of minorities as a core theme. The representation of the protagonist as a colonised, passive individual who has internalised the otherness projected onto them by their adult colonisers is an effective critique of the supposed submissiveness of young readers. The adult colonisers in the narrative use the child’s otherness to control them by stressing that their divergence from the cultural norm makes them property to be used. As the protagonist gradually embraces their otherness they become more autonomous and willing to critique the adult normativity imposed on them.

The Hunchback Assignments is about a shape-shifting, teenage spy working in Victorian England. Modo, the protagonist, is a deformed hunchback who has the ability to change his face and body into any shape he wants. He is depicted as being exceptionally strong, intelligent, and capable of regrowing limbs. Modo wears a mask in public when he is too tired to maintain a more aesthetically pleasing face. This series is loosely based around The Hunchback of Notre Dame, by Victor Hugo (1831): Modo is described as having been born in France, where his parents left him on the steps of
Notre Dame cathedral after assuming that his deformities were the work of Satan.

Through backstory, the reader learns that Modo was sold to a travelling freak show when he was a toddler, before the Permanent Association purchases him and sends him to England to train as a spy at the beginning of the series. The Permanent Association is a group of adults who protect the British Empire in the narrative, and the main antagonists in the series are the Clockwork Guild, who work to overthrow the Empire. The Permanent Association is personified in the series by Mr. Socrates – who is depicted as Modo’s handler and father-figure. Through a series of scenes, the reader follows Modo’s training as he is locked in a room for twelve years to learn to control his chameleon-like abilities. When Modo turns thirteen at the beginning of *The Hunchback Assignments*, he is promoted to full agent and sent into the field.

This chapter will analyse the disempowerment and subsequent re-empowerment of young people through the apparatus of the face. Control over young people in *The Hunchback Assignments* series is portrayed as being based mainly in power over the body – particularly the bodies of children, although Indigenous Australians are also reduced to “like children” (*ER* p. 85) by the British colonisers in the texts. The reduction of the child to a possession or property reduces their agency by rendering them unable to make choices regarding their physical or mental well-being. While Modo is shown to hold a lot of power in the narrative, this power is controlled and put to use by Mr. Socrates and the Permanent Association. Modo is represented as having internalised the belief in his own otherness (and, by extension, his inferiority) through repeated experience with the adults in the narrative; particularly Mr. Socrates, who is shown repeatedly perpetuating Modo’s insecurities to ensure his compliance.
In the context of the narrative, Modo’s physical deformities are shown to limit his ability to engage with society; and he is depicted as needing the Permanent Association and the sense of belonging and acceptance, which the Association represents. Mr. Socrates is depicted as ‘haunting’ Modo with his face and physical deformities in order to make Modo dependant on him for guidance and acceptance. The fact of his ugliness is repeatedly reinforced to Modo in the early stages of the narrative. The effect of this on Modo’s characterisation is a near constant self-reminder that his appearance does not adhere to cultural norms. Modo’s point of view chapters, which are told from a third-person limited perspective to allow the reader access to Modo’s thoughts and feelings, portray him as being obsessed with his appearance, and the effect of his appearance on other characters in the text. This haunting reinforces Modo’s insecurity by continually limiting his ability to lose himself in his transformations and empower himself through them, while simultaneously creating a narrative link between Mr. Socrates and the acceptance which Modo is depicted feeling when he works for the Association. Because Modo is ugly, he is marginalised, and therefore cannot exercise agency beyond the Permanent Association where his marginality is shown to give him some measure of power and prestige.

Modo is frequently shown defending his master’s treatment of him and other colonised individuals, but this changes as Modo begins to contextualise Mr. Socrates’ treatment of him over the course of the series as he becomes more exposed to the world outside of his portrayed upbringing. As Modo comes into contact with other colonised individuals, he is shown behaving more autonomously. He is depicted as exercising his powers by not using them; choosing to forgo using his chameleon-like abilities to hide his face and conform to the ideal, and claiming ownership of his otherness. This effectively breaks the hold which Mr. Socrates and the Association are represented as having over him,
and by the end of the series, Modo is portrayed escaping their influence and celebrating his otherness and the autonomy it represents.

Modo’s portrayed preoccupation with his facial and bodily deformities ultimately limits his agency because, in a similar manner to Katniss Everdeen, he is depicted as being reduced to a ‘body’ by the Permanent Association and Mr. Socrates, as well as in his own self-perception in the third-person limited narration. Jen Webb (2009) writes in *Understanding Representation* that agency is displayed by those who can exercise control over “the properties of their brains, their sensory capacities and experiences, and the particularities of their own bodies (gender, age, ethnicity and so on)” (p. 13). Unlike Katniss, Modo’s moral accountability is not portrayed as being limited by his reduction to a body as described by Gray et al (2011), because his position in the narratives as a weapon of the Permanent Association holds him accountable to the institution for his behaviour. When he is working, Modo is representing the institution and must behave accordingly. This narrative relationship between Modo’s objectification and his moral and behavioural accountability also serves to construct the Permanent Association as necessary for Modo’s sense of self. Modo is powerful when he is using his transformative abilities and working for Association; without them, he has no purpose. It is only when Modo is shown questioning the institution’s right to reduce him to an object or body during *Empire of Ruins* that he begins to behave without deference to his accountability to the Association.

When Mr. Socrates repeatedly tells Modo that he is ugly, he is represented as establishing that Modo exists outside of the normative ideal and is thereby marginalised. This is, as Richard Delgado (1997) notes, the best way to ensure compliance in colonised individuals. As discussed earlier in this thesis, when a
colonised individual is repeatedly constructed by others as different or inferior, they can begin to believe in their own inferiority: “[a] principle cause of the demoralisation of marginalised groups is self-condemnation. They internalise the images society thrusts on them – they believe their lowly position is their own fault” (Delgado, 1997, p. 238). Modo performs in the narrative as an othered, inferior monster because that is what he is portrayed as being conditioned to believe. His shape-shifting adaptability, which makes him the perfect chameleon-like spy, is shown as being ultimately responsible for his inability to engage with the fictional society because he remains marginalised even when he is transformed.

Delgado (1997) writes that when a colonised group is told stories that empower their fictional counterparts, they begin to internalise the counter-narrative and become empowered as well. The counter-narrative in The Hunchback Assignments does not come from a character outside of the main action; it comes from Modo himself. When he is represented contextualising himself in the wider community, Modo sees other colonised individuals (particularly the young people in the narrative who are used as weapons in a similar manner to himself) and is shown recognising the cruelty done to them as a by-product of the perceived superiority of the adults in power. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2008) write that marginality can be a major source of creative energy, and that oppressed individuals can take power back from their colonisers through creative as well as critical methods. The Hunchback Assignments is set during the peak of British colonial history, so Modo as a character is only ever exposed to the dominant ideology that recognises colonial authority. He is shown occasionally meeting other disempowered individuals, such as his fellow agent Octavia Milkweed, who take issue with certain aspects of their marginality, but the ultimate recognition of agency in
the series comes when Modo himself is shown constructing a counter-narrative for colonialism through his experience with other colonised characters.

Popular literature and analysis in the form of steampunk-specific magazines and blogs are available online, but academic analysis represents a small portion of the writings available to researchers. Much of the academic literature that attempts to define the steampunk genre is focused on its aesthetic and performative aspects. Mike Perschon is a well-known steampunk academic whose blog *The Steampunk Scholar* (n.d) documents his analyses of contemporary and seminal steampunk texts. Perschon’s (2012) PhD thesis ‘The Steampunk Aesthetic: Technofantasies in a Neo-Victorian Retrofuture’ addresses the breadth of steampunk literature, both fictional and analytical, in order to answer the question: What is steampunk?

I suggest that steampunk, as a postmodern phenomena, is a type of parody. Steampunk does not seek to reconstruct the past in literature, art, or fashion, but rather constructs something new by choosing elements from the Victorian and Edwardian past to create a style which evokes those periods (p. 4)

Steampunk, Perschon notes, is often self-aware of its magpie-like ability to scavenge for narrative devices and tropes. *The Hunchback Assignments* draws its inspiration from many Victorian science fiction texts, including Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), Sir H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). Although the reader does not need prior knowledge of these texts in order to engage with the narrative, it does contextualise the series and provides a richer, more engaging experience. Bill Baker (2008) notes that the metafiction elements of steampunk create an “oddly familiar landscape” (p. 360), which creates a comfortable space for readers and authors to
interact. As Zipes (2009) notes in his treatise on commodification of children’s literature, it is “virtually impossible for a child to pick up a book inside or outside the family or school and not associate it with other products” (p. 13). Because children are surrounded with so much different media, the familiarity of steampunk remains regardless of whether the child reader has engaged with the original texts.

Much of the steampunk aesthetic is based in the Victorian era, usually in the context of an alternative history where steam-powered technology has advanced to fantastic proportions. Steampunk is both a lifestyle and a literary genre which “combines Victoriana with science fiction, and is known for subverting and critiquing societal conventions; hence the ‘punk’ suffix” (Seymour, 2013a, p. 4). I have also found, through wide-reading, that steampunk texts which are aimed at YA readers maintain a more nostalgic atmosphere than other science fiction subgenres such as dystopia. They generally involve the creation of fantastical machines using spare parts and improbable technology, creating uniqueness and individuality from the discards of more powerful objects.

As Lisa Hager’s (2011) analysis of steampunk in Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* series (2002) states, steampunk machines are in a constant state of ‘becoming’ or morphing, due to their bricolage nature, and this links the genre philosophically with the constant state of becoming experienced by the young reader. Jaymee Goh’s (2009) work on race in steampunk also notes the genre’s ability to create a safe space for marginalised others to engage with an era which traditionally oppressed those who were considered ‘other’: “many women re-imagine the steampunk world to be a more gentle time for their gender … who play sky captain, or other roles that would, in more realistic play, be
denied to them” (p. 18). Steampunk, then, creates a space for the appropriation and critique of normativity.

The ‘spectrality’ of the face, as described by Derrida (1993) in *Spectres of Marx* and put to practical use as a tool for narrative analysis in Grayson Cooke’s (2009) ‘We Had Faces Then: *Sunset Boulevard* and the Sense of the Spectral’, operates as a kind of haunting. Cooke describes the main character of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) as being haunted by the image of her youth, and examines the Western preoccupation with the face as being ultimately destructive when the face usurps the identity of a person.

Norma Desmond, the main character of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) surrounds herself with the image of her younger self and attempts to retain that image as her body ages. Cooke (2009) writes: “it is not the case that [Norma] therefore possesses her image; rather she is possessed by her image. Her image was produced by and remains the property of the Hollywood star system” (p. 93). It is Norma’s desire to remain the identity embodied by her youthful image that leads to her downfall. Modo’s face remains the property of the Permanent Association, and while Norma tries to retain her youthful face, Modo by contrast is repulsed by his reflection and wants the Permanent Association to use it because he believes that his usefulness makes him less abhorrent. Modo’s face haunts him by lingering constantly in his thoughts. This haunting is the crux of Mr. Socrates’ ability to control him.

Mr. Socrates, as the personification of colonial Britain in the series, constructs a narrative of marginalisation around Modo’s face. Throughout the series, Modo is shown internalising the narrative established by Mr. Socrates, and is portrayed believing in his own marginality to the point where he becomes particularly malleable as a character. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Modo is portrayed as being very easy to manipulate.
as long as he remains haunted by his appearance. Modo’s re-empowerment comes when he is shown claiming ownership of his face and establishing a counter-narrative to the one constructed by Mr. Socrates. Ian G Malcolm’s (2013) examination of Aboriginal ownership of language places particular emphasis on usage as the ultimate demonstration of control: “ownership is shown in what one can do with the language” (p. 43). As I mentioned above, Modo’s portrayed usage of his shape-shifting power is generally limited to the Permanent Association’s orders, so Modo’s face remains under the auspices of the Permanent Association.

As Ashcroft et al (2008) write, the self-image of a colonised individual can be eroded “by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour” (p. 9). Taking Modo out of the world and isolating him in his formative years show Mr. Socrates stressing the adult normativity of duty to the Empire in order to ensure that Modo’s loyalty to the cause remains absolute. Kudzai Matereke’s (2009) article ‘‘Discipline and Punish’: Inscribing the Body and its Metaphors in Zimbabwe's Postcolonial Crisis’ demonstrates the way metaphors of the body give nuance to postcolonial thought. He writes that the ‘body’, either the body of individual subjects or the body of the population, is directly linked to political power. Power holders inscribe the body according to what they require to maintain their control: “they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Matereke, 2009, p. 95). Given how powerful Modo’s body turns out to be, it makes sense that the major conflict between the two opposing political forces in the series – the Permanent Association and the Clockwork Guild – would be to decide who would ultimately control it.
Modo’s physical deformities reduce him symbolically to a possession or weapon within the Permanent Association. Stephanie Guerra’s (2009) ‘Colonizing Bodies: Corporate Power and Biotechnology in Young Adult Science Fiction’ offers insight into the suppression of the body as a way to subdue youth in a text:

> Bodies and minds are colonized both as consumers and products, and identities are negotiated in a post-human future where to be ‘less than’ or ‘other than’ human is an automatic sentence to product status, and where genetic coding relegates bodies to a series of parsed equations, units of value to be fed into one or another slot of the enormous, grinding corporate machine (p. 293)

While Guerra’s (2009) analysis is limited to YA science fiction/dystopia, the reduction of people – specifically young people – to products or weapons is pertinent to the steampunk genre because the use of child labour has been repeatedly represented as a necessary and integral part of the Victorian period. While YA dystopia reduces young people who divert from the norm to products or possessions in order to demonstrate social commentary, YA steampunk uses child labour and limited physical agency among youth as a basic premise of the genre. What marginalises Modo, then, is not that he is represented a product/possession, but that he is othered within his fictional society by being ugly. This makes him dependant on the Association for employment and a sense of purpose.

While body image and low self-esteem are common narrative tropes in YA fiction, their use within the genre tends to be limited to female protagonists. There are some notable exceptions; Melissa Keil’s *Life in Outer Space* (2013) demonstrates the male protagonist’s unflattering body image by having the character compare himself to his muscular best friend and a pre-pubescent girl, while John Green’s (2006a) male protagonists in *An Abundance of Katherines* both point out their various physical short-
comings to each other to justify why neither of them has a girlfriend. These short-
comings range from being weaker than the average male, to having “okay, there’s no
denying it – minor breasts. An A cup” (Green, 2006a, p. 71). What is interesting about
the portrayal of masculine-body insecurity in YA is that it is often framed in a teasing,
humorous manner; with a notable exception in Wonder by RJ Palacio (2012), which
portrays a young, disfigured male protagonist as he deals with bullying and harassment
at school. The apparent intention in most realistic fiction is to encourage the reader to
engage with the male character’s sense of humour, which is often based in self-
deprecation. This is a sharp contrast to female-driven narratives about self-esteem,
which often frame these issues in a more serious manner. These novels serve as a site
for young women to engage with mental health issues on different levels via different
protagonists. These narratives include: White Chalk by Pavarti K. Tyler (2013), Cut by
with a female protagonist dealing with negative body image issues are frequently darker
and more disturbing because the female experience has been constructed through
literature as being fraught with emotional turmoil.

Masculinity, by contrast, is generally not portrayed in fiction as a negative experience.
The examples of male-driven narratives cited above are notable because they represent
portrayals of masculinity in realistic YA fiction; specifically romantic comedies.
Masculinity in non-realistic YA fiction is very rarely tempered by any self-esteem
issues on the part of the male characters. This is probably because the majority of male
characters in non-realistic YA are fighters or warriors, and as a consequence their
bodies are portrayed as stronger and more toned to conform with the Western male
ideal. There are some examples of divergence from traditional masculinity, such as
Clary Fray’s Dungeons and Dragons-playing best friend Simon in The Mortal
Instruments series by Cassandra Clare (2007), but these characters are set up as unwitting comic relief and, importantly, develop out of necessity over the course of the series until they are warriors/fighters like the other men in the narrative. In short, self-esteem and body image issues in young men are not common themes in non-realistic YA.

Modo’s portrayed self-esteem creates a disconnection between himself and his personhood. He is shown to be so engrossed and haunted by his appearance that the only way he can consider himself as a character with power is when his abilities allow him to be useful to the Permanent Association. In this way, the Permanent Association, and Mr. Socrates as the personification of the institution, can control him and limit his agency. During the series Modo is shown meeting other colonised individuals and is able to construct an image of himself as an autonomous individual, and this is what prompts his decision to leave the institution.

Disempowerment

Modo’s domestic environment is linked irrevocably with the institution. Mr. Socrates represents the Permanent Association and its interests and often stands in as a personification of the British Empire; he also represents a father-figure to Modo and his behaviour during the series is shown to fluctuate between a parent caring for his dependant and an employer caring for an employee. There is a touch of the inherent paternalism of colonialism in this portrayal (Ashcroft et al, 2008). For the purposes of this analysis, Modo’s portrayed domestic disempowerment will be restricted to all of Mr. Socrates’ behaviours, which are considered to be part of his role as a father or carer. This includes all of Mr. Socrates’ decisions that are depicted as being part of Modo’s education and upbringing.
The relationship Modo has with Mr. Socrates is portrayed as deliberately cold and unemotional. Modo describes Mr. Socrates as a father-figure and is often shown questioning whether the behaviours Mr. Socrates exhibits could be considered father-like: “He understood that a son should learn from his father. He had been told about being abandoned as a baby, so he had no father, but still he yearned for his master's attention” (HA p. 29). Mr. Socrates is shown to deliberately withhold affection from Modo, and instructs his staff to do the same: “Do not comfort him, Mrs. Finchley. That is an order” (HA p. 26). Despite Modo’s demonstrable desire for an emotional connection, Mr. Socrates is frequently depicted assuring him that they are meant to be professionals and retain personal boundaries.

This is an unusual case study because the series is narrated by multiple characters, so the reader is given direct access to the mind and motivations of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. The narrative is told from the third-person, limited perspective, and while the bulk of the series is told from Modo’s perspective, there are chapters told from the perspectives of Mr. Socrates, Octavia Milkweed, members of the Clockwork Guild and other disempowered characters – notably the child spies from other organisations, the children drugged and experimented on by the Clockwork Guild in The Hunchback Assignments, and an Indigenous Australian girl in Empire of Ruins. It must be said that, however Mr. Socrates behaves, his internal monologues during his point of view chapters clearly indicate an affection for Modo which frequently supersedes his desire to harden Modo and make him into a more effective weapon.

The emotional manipulation of Modo is justified through Mr. Socrates’ point of view chapters in The Dark Deeps as necessary to ensure that Modo remains a successful investment: “Modo was not his son. He was a highly trained agent of the British
Empire… He had to move the pieces on the chessboard without succumbing to maudlin sentiment” (DD p. 122). Later, during Empire of Ruins, when Modo and Mr. Socrates are shown acting as father and son during an assignment, Mr. Socrates again reiterates his desire to distance himself emotionally from Modo through his point of view chapter: “At times Modo seemed to worship him. It was both a compliment and a bad habit. He would have to harden the boy’s heart” (ER p. 121). While this glimpse into Mr. Socrates’ thoughts in no way justifies the choices he is portrayed making during the series, it does allow the reader to see how the relationship between Modo and Mr. Socrates is represented as similar to that of father and son by both characters. The boundary between the institution and Modo’s domestic life is constantly blurred throughout the narrative.

Mr. Socrates is portrayed isolating Modo by physically removing him from society. During flashbacks, the reader learns that Modo is not allowed to leave his room at Ravenscroft Manor for the first twelve years of his life. Mr. Socrates oversees Modo’s education by Mrs. Finchley and Tharpa in the art of espionage. Modo is shown catching glimpses of the kitchen when Mrs. Finchley prepares his meals, and there is a sky light in his room which allows him to see the clouds, but Modo’s experience of the world beyond Mr. Socrates’ power is demonstrably limited. This ignorance disempowers Modo by limiting his ability to contextualise Mr. Socrates’ treatment of him, as well as keeping him dependant on the Permanent Association for all of his training and support. Modo’s portrayed isolation prevents him from developing necessary skills outside of those required to be a spy. This is shown during his first assignment in London when, in order to survive after being left alone without food, clothes or money, Modo is shown hiding in the rooftops, stealing pies out of windows and drinking out of drainage pipes. After several days, he finds work as a Private Detective. Although Modo’s first
assignment is portrayed as “a sink or swim situation” (*HA* p. 52) designed to test Modo’s ability to assimilate in any situation, it thematically relates his experience of the ‘real world’ to the abilities and training which Mr. Socrates has given him. The physical and emotional isolation Modo is depicted as suffering in the domestic environment disempowers him by limiting what he can accomplish outside of the institutional context.

Modo’s first assignment is described in the narrative as more emotionally traumatic than physically dangerous. Mr. Socrates is shown furnishing Modo with the skills necessary to survive, but Mr. Socrates’ position in the narrative as a surrogate father-figure makes his abandonment of Modo particularly distressing for that character; and by extension, the reader, who is introduced to Slade’s fictional London at the same time as Modo:

> Modo watched, stunned, as the coach turned down an alley and was gone. He stared after it for a long time as though at any moment it would reappear and his nightmare would be over. His heart thumped madly. Inside the coach, he'd felt safe, accustomed as he was to having walls around him. Here on the street with the sky open above him and the freedom to choose any direction he liked, Modo became confused and uncertain of what to do (*HA* p. 53)

The dark and run-down street Mr. Socrates chose for him further compounds Modo’s trauma. The steampunk genre’s Victorian setting creates a temporal displacement for the contemporary reader. The temporal displacement, along with setting descriptions which emphasise the darker, alien aspects of Modo’s predicament, creates a sinister atmosphere: “[a] dead horse stared blankly from the back of a knacker's wagon… an old woman, her eyes glazed with madness. A smile twisted across her chapped lips, revealing black, broken teeth” (*HA* pp. 53-54). Modo’s confidence is portrayed as
growing while he learns to use his spy training and learn the rooftops of London by heart: “They belonged to him now, the only place he felt free. He had each dormer and slanting surface memorized” (*HA* p. 65). The abandonment, however, is never forgotten by the character, and later the reader sees Modo’s first rebellion, which is limited to his own thoughts: “Mr. Socrates replied. "I'm aware of that." But Modo's anger continued to flare. *You pushed me out of the coach. You abandoned me on the street to fend for myself.* He sucked in a deep breath” (*HA* p. 125, emphasis in the original). His rebellion remains internal, however, which further indicates his relative inability to express his agency beyond Mr. Socrates’ desires at this stage of the narrative.

The reader is introduced to Mr. Socrates’ most important training method – ignorance, followed by a shocking first lesson – early in *The Hunchback Assignments* when Modo is portrayed seeing his face for the first time. During narration, the reader learns that Modo had been prevented from seeing his reflection for the first five years of his life. He is, however, allowed to see pictures of handsome male faces. He is shown being led to believe that his own face must look similar by his nurse, Mrs. Finchley, who is represented in the narrative as a surrogate mother-figure. This establishes a relationship of mutual affection between the characters, which leads to Mrs. Finchley being portrayed attempting to reassure Modo that he is handsome like the characters in his books: “He had, of course, felt his face enough that he was aware of the large protruding mole tucked next to his nose, and that above his right eye he had a spongy bump. Mrs. Finchley had gently called them beauty marks” (*HA* p. 21). This narrative relationship is shown to lead to Modo’s internalised understanding of masculine beauty, which falls in line with the Western social norms of the period in which the series is set.
Modo references these images when drawing his self-portrait early in *The Hunchback Assignments*, before he has been allowed to see his own reflection: “adding a straight nose and perfectly formed ears. He chose eyes from one of his favorite illustrations of the Royals – the eyes of a prince” (*HA* p. 17). Immediately following this scene, Mr. Socrates is depicted traumatizing Modo with a mirror: “for the first time in his life, his own eyes blinking… this was much worse than he’d dreamed; uglier than any illustration he had ever seen” (*HA* p. 25). Mr. Socrates is shown compounding Modo’s trauma by repeating: “You are deformed. You are ugly” (*HA* p. 25), and forbidding Mrs. Finchley to comfort Modo after the incident despite Modo’s clearly described distress: “Collapsing on his knees, Modo slapped his hands over his eyes and wailed. He rolled into a weeping, moaning ball, his hump pressed against his shirt” (*HA* p. 25). While Modo demonstrates a desire to detach himself from the Permanent Association later in the series, and frequently goes against Mr. Socrates’ orders by exercising agency in the context of the institution, his portrayed low self-esteem and self-image ultimately keeps him under Mr. Socrates’ and the Permanent Association’s control: “Would the people be horrified at the sight of him? Outside everything was new and possibly dangerous. He peeked around at the familiar rooms. It had always been safe here” (*HA* p. 41). Modo’s portrayed understanding of his own ugliness prevents him from believing that he could survive outside of it.

Mr. Socrates’ disempowerment of Modo depends upon Modo’s portrayed inability to form emotional attachments or exercise agency beyond what he is trained to exercise. He marginalises Modo by haunting him with his face. Cooke (2009) noted in his examination of *Sunset Boulevard* that while the face may technically belong to the person who wears it, when the face is transformed into an asset it becomes the property of the person or persons in charge. Cooke (2009) writes that Norma Desmond’s “sense
of self … the use to which she wishes to put herself, has been entirely supplanted or defined by an exchange-value wherein her self/image is subject to the whims of the market” (p. 93). In other words, she is depicted as valuing herself by how she is used by others. Mr. Socrates is shown traumatising Modo with his face, creating a haunting relationship between Modo and his appearance, in order to facilitate Modo’s commodification. When Mr. Socrates introduces Modo to his reflection, he reminds Modo of his usefulness to the Association; creating a narrative link between Modo’s ugliness and a potential use for it which only the Permanent Association can facilitate. Mr. Socrates is represented as offering Modo a chance to find power in his marginalisation, but this power does not equate to agency in the context of the narrative. In essence, Modo’s domestic relationship with Mr. Socrates teaches Modo to hate himself, and to judge his worth by what he can do for the Permanent Association.

Modo is portrayed as a commodity from the moment he is introduced to the reader. Modo is on display in a cage with the *Merveilles et Mort*, and Mr. Socrates must pay a fee to view him. Mr. Socrates is then shown purchasing Modo on behalf of the Permanent Association for a bag of coins, and the narration makes it clear that Mr. Socrates considers the transaction to be very clinical – as if he were purchasing an object rather than a child: “His talent could prove to be a valuable asset. His development would require years of investment, but the gentleman was good at playing the long game” (*HA* p. 14). The representation of Modo as an investment limits how the Permanent Association will be portrayed as choosing to see him, and when Modo meets the other members of the Association in *The Hunchback Assignments*, they are shown treating him as Mr. Socrates’ possession: “[Mr. Socrates] always has the most interesting agents” (*HA* p. 168). Mr. Socrates is frequently depicted referring to Modo as an investment or pawn, both to Modo’s face and during his point of view chapters in
The Dark Deeps and Empire of Ruins. This, despite Mr. Socrates’ apparently ambiguous personal opinion of his relationship with Modo, presents the reader with an image of Modo as an object first and a person second.

Both the Permanent Association and the Clockwork Guild disempower children to further their own political agenda. While the Permanent Association protects the Empire using these children, the Clockwork Guild seeks to destroy it. Because the narrative world of The Hunchback Assignments mimics the social and cultural structure of Victorian England, young people are represented as commodities divorced from personhood, making it easier for the two institutions to use them. This is seen most clearly when orphans and working children are kidnapped in the beginning of the first book. Octavia, who is represented in the narrative as a former orphan and pickpocket, recognises the vulnerability of youth in these situations: “It's happening because someone thinks she's worthless. Being an orphan doesn't make you worthless” (HA p. 181). In making these remarks, Octavia identifies a connection between herself and other disempowered young people. Octavia’s position in the narrative as a wiser, more worldly figure than Modo, due to her personal experience of disempowerment in society, lends credence to her recognition of the dangers faced by young people. Modo’s portrayed respect for Octavia foreshadows his own developing ability to make connections between the disempowerment suffered by other young people and his own disempowerment by the Permanent Association and Mr. Socrates.

The Clockwork Guild, working through a ‘mad scientist’ named Dr. Hyde, are shown building a giant, metal wicker-man during the climax of The Hunchback Assignments which runs on the anger of disempowered young people. Dr. Hyde gives the children a
tincture which is described as isolating and enhancing their anger at being
disempowered, and turns it into physical strength:

He examined the twisted wolflike faces of the children, their hate-filled, blank eyes.
Maybe the anger was part of what powered them… Always hungry, always wanting
a warmer place to sleep. Somehow Dr. Hyde had opened the tap to this in each child
(HA p. 253)

In this way, the Clockwork Guild is portrayed as being able to manipulate the
institutional disempowerment present in English society in order to power their war
machine.

As discussed above, the steampunk genre presumes the possibility of child labour. Due
to the amount of young people represented as being employed over the course of the
series, the reader learns to recognise that servitude is often necessary for a young person
to survive in this narrative world. Modo himself is shown employing children during his
first assignment in London, notably an 8 year-old boy named Oppie, who is eventually
kidnapped by the Clockwork Guild and used to power the wicker-man. The
commodification of young people, then, is part of the genre’s conventions. Goh (2009)
writes that marginalised groups and individuals can use steampunk to create alternative
realities where their demographics have power: “History is altered and adjusted by
whole groups of participants” (p. 20). In this series, however, the historically accepted
norm remains for Modo and the other young people in the narrative; although, it is
critiqued by the Clockwork Guild’s represented ability to manipulate the feeling of
disempowerment in youth. The Clockwork Guild’s weaponisation of young people
prompts Modo’s introspection, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
Modo is raised by Mr. Socrates to become the perfect spy. Technically, Modo is represented as the rightful property of the Permanent Association, while Mr. Socrates is its employee. This further complicates the relationship between Modo’s domestic and institutional environments because his various carers become his teachers, and the ultimate goal of his upbringing is his development into the perfect weapon in the war. Modo’s education is portrayed as all-inclusive, which links it symbolically with the Platonic model of “physical training for the body and cultural education to perfect the personality” (*Laws*, 7.795d-796a):

Three days a week Tharpa would train Modo in what he called “the fighting arts.”
The rest of the week was spent reading history, learning languages, and memorizing maps on which all the countries of the Empire were marked in red. As part of his schooling, Modo would dress up in costumes with Mrs Finchley, perfecting accents and pretending to be other people. Her years as an actress made her a fine teacher (*HA* p. 28)

Through this dual emphasis on mind and body, Modo’s regimented education is shown to ensure the maximum acquisition of skills and talents, which are directly related to Mr. Socrates’ eventual goal for him. Modo is shown to have no input in his education and the minor rebellions which Mrs. Finchley encourages, such as reading novels, are quickly suppressed by Mr. Socrates: “If he reads books for children he will remain a child… any other books must first be vetted by me” (*HA* p. 23).

The tendency of adults, in both fiction and real-life, towards demonising fiction for young people is an interesting phenomenon from a power relations perspective, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. For now, it is important to note that Mr. Socrates’ goal for Modo is depicted as following the institutionalised ideal of a young person who passively submits to adult normativity. Mr. Socrates, in raising Modo to be the perfect
weapon, is represented impressing upon Modo a certain standard of behaviour – one which promotes Modo’s position in the narrative as subordinate to Mr. Socrates.

Modo is shown to have internalised the ideal of the British Empire as a perfect society whose ends justify its means. He is often depicted becoming angry with Octavia when she is shown questioning Mr. Socrates. She is also the only character in the series to point out that Mr. Socrates’ treatment of Modo is “terribly cruel” (HA p. 207). It is noteworthy that this case study is the only one examined in this thesis that diverts from the YA tradition of normalising abuse. While Mr. Socrates justifies his treatment of Modo as necessary, Octavia, speaking as a representative of disempowered youth in the narrative, acknowledges the cruelty Modo has suffered. Modo, behaving in a manner to the popular assumption of an abuse victim who protects his abuser, defends his master’s work as necessary for the safety of the Empire: “How dare she speak of Mr. Socrates that way, after all the master had done for her. For him. For Britain” (HA p. 207). Through her construction as a socially-minded character, Octavia serves Modo’s continued moral development in the narrative by pointing out the various abuses suffered by other young people.

Modo is presented as being infatuated with Octavia because she is beautiful and kind to him. This serves the narrative in two ways; it further isolates Modo and reinforces his face’s ability to haunt him:

His face was not a face. It was a horrid hole where a face should be. She would take one look and that would be the end of everything. He couldn’t show her now. Not ever. He was ugly. Mr. Socrates had told him so. He saw it himself every day (HA p. 274)
Modo’s infatuation with Octavia simultaneously establishes a positive relationship with a character that questions adult normativity. This is shown to extend Modo’s ability to rebel and identify connections between himself and other disempowered individuals. But this is only shown later in the series. During the beginning stages of the narrative, Octavia’s portrayed disgust at Modo’s treatment pushes Modo to defend his abusers and retreat from the image of his face. His complicity in his own disempowerment enables Mr. Socrates, working at the behest of the Permanent Association, to manipulate Modo into using his remarkable gifts to further their cause.

**Manipulation**

Modo’s complicity in his own disempowerment stems from an internalised belief in his own inferiority. He is represented as allowing himself to be turned into a weapon for Mr. Socrates and the Permanent Association in order to find a purpose for his disfigurement. He is also portrayed as being grateful to the Association for taking him from *Merveilles et Mort* when he was a baby. During the early stages of the series, Mr. Socrates observes to Modo that “[t]he way in which a child is raised will stay with him for life” (*HA* p. 49), which prompts an outpouring of gratitude from Modo during dialogue. This dialogue reiterates to the reader that Modo is complicit in his disempowerment because he is represented as believing that Mr. Socrates raised him “properly” (*HA* p. 49). It is this portrayed sense of gratitude that allows Mr. Socrates to maintain control over Modo.

As stated above, Modo’s power in the narrative lies in his transformative abilities. His body and his face make him a powerful weapon, and the training Mr. Socrates gives him in espionage makes him more efficient. Modo’s depicted intelligence is also a key to his power, and Mr. Socrates is often shown carefully ensuring that Modo’s mental
acuity remains at its peak by chastising him whenever he fails to follow his lessons: “People may die because you have not been thorough enough… you understand why you must follow my methodologies in detail. Each lesson I gave you had its purpose” (HA pp. 130-131). The combination of Modo’s portrayed upbringing and physical abilities make him a powerful figure in the narrative and this makes him a valuable commodity, or “investment” (HA p. 51) as Mr. Socrates puts it.

Mr. Socrates is shown to claim ownership of Modo in order to appropriate his power. He is portrayed purchasing Modo, arranging his training, and isolating him to limit his experience of the world outside of Mr. Socrates’ control. At the beginning of the series, Mr. Socrates is shown explaining that Modo ought to feel a kinship with other disempowered young people, particularly the children experimented on by the Clockwork Guild, before going on to reiterate his own benevolence in saving Modo from such horrors: “I assume you feel some kinship with the boy. After all, you are an oddity like him. Many would look at you and be frightened or disgusted. That’s why I insisted on the mask” (HA p. 50). Mr. Socrates’ dialogue in this instance demonstrates the perceived narrative link between Modo’s power, and his ability to use it, with the Permanent Association.

When Mr. Socrates shows Modo his face for the first time, he is portrayed delivering a speech that appears to empower Modo (or, at least, Modo’s ability to transform his appearance). This dialogue, however, includes frequent references to Modo’s eventual usefulness to the Permanent Association: “an ability that other men can only dream of. It is a most wonderful and valuable asset. Together, we will develop it” (HA p. 25). This statement demonstrates how coveted Modo’s powers are within the context of the narrative, while semantically linking them with Mr. Socrates and his resources; making
it clear that Modo will be unable to develop his power to its full potential without Mr. Socrates’ assistance. This disempowers Modo because it forces him to use his abilities for the Permanent Association and Mr. Socrates rather than for himself, which reduces him symbolically to a weapon or possession to be used by adult characters. While Modo is represented as acknowledging Mr. Socrates’ and the Association’s ownership of him and his body, he is portrayed as being unable to exercise agency.

The power represented in Modo’s face is made clearest in Empire of Ruins when he goes on assignment in Australia to find the mythical weapon called the God Face. The God Face is portrayed driving men insane when they look at it. Modo and his companions are represented as the only characters immune to the God Face’s effects, leading Modo to conclude that the God Face is a reflection of his own face. By showing his face to his friends, he is portrayed as believing that he has inoculated them to the God Face: “All of you had seen my face before. Our enemies hadn’t. That’s why you weren’t driven insane by the God Face. You saw me in that stone head” (ER p. 275, emphasis in the original). Later, Modo confronts some Clockwork Guild soldiers by removing his mask and allowing his ugliness to drive them away: “There were more than fifty of them. They took one good look [at his face] and bolted, their rifles rattling to the ground” (ER p. 273). Modo’s decision to willingly show his face in this scene contrasts strongly with a scene early in The Hunchback Assignments when Modo’s face is revealed by accident during his first assignment in London: “Modo felt sick, remembering how a woman had actually fainted at the sight of him” (HA p. 126). Until Empire of Ruins, Modo is portrayed as being haunted by his face; establishing a negative relationship between himself and his greatest source of power in the narrative.
Mr. Socrates is depicted ensuring Modo’s complicity in his own disempowerment by reinforcing Modo’s insecurities – particularly those related to his appearance. When Modo finds the God Face in *Empire of Ruins*, Mr. Socrates dismisses Modo’s argument that the Face reminds the other characters of his own face. In order to do this, Mr. Socrates attacks Modo’s self-esteem by trivialising Modo’s belief that it is *his* face which has helped the other characters: “You do seem to have a penchant for self-aggrandizement, Modo. You cling to these notions of your own importance. Perhaps it’s a lingering effect of being abandoned as a child” (*ER* p. 275). In this passage, Mr. Socrates is portrayed simultaneously reminds Modo of his orphan status, rendering him dependent on the Permanent Association’s charity, and quashes Modo’s self-esteem back to the point where he is easily controllable. Mr. Socrates is shown controlling Modo through the very thing which makes him so powerful in the narrative.

By traumatising Modo with his reflection during the first book of the series, Mr. Socrates’ actions have the unintended consequence of limiting Modo’s portrayed ability to control his abilities. Modo’s characterisation emphasises his low self-esteem and self-consciousness, and this is depicted in the narrative through his near-constant reminders, to the reader and to himself, of his own ugliness. Modo’s control over his transformations, and the duties he must perform while transformed, are portrayed as being limited by these self-reminders (or haunting): “…he never felt as though he could forget who he was, so he could never throw himself into a part. How could he forget his life, his face?” (*ER* p. 70). Mr. Socrates is shown intending for Modo to lose himself in his transformations and become a chameleon, but the haunting Modo suffers as a result of Mr. Socrates’ harsh treatment of his face effectively renders Modo unable to perform at the level Mr. Socrates requires. There is a narrative link between Modo’s portrayed
inability to lose himself in his transformations, and the negative self-image born from his haunting ugliness.

The Clockwork Guild is also shown to covet Modo’s abilities. They do not project power onto Modo by claiming that he can be useful to them, as a tool or weapon, in the way that Mr. Socrates does. Rather, the Clockwork Guild is portrayed as aiming to steal Modo’s power and suppress his agency because it is a direct threat to them. This is a similar relationship to the antagonist/protagonist relationship outlined in the *Harry Potter* case study of this thesis. While Harry Potter is represented as being useful to Voldemort in the series, Voldemort is depicted as desiring Harry’s total annihilation – rather than attempting to manipulate and appropriate Harry’s power as Dumbledore does. Likewise, Modo’s relationship with the Clockwork Guild is entirely confrontational. Rather than attempt to manipulate Modo to work for them as he works for the Permanent Association, the Clockwork Guild is portrayed as wanting to study him, experiment on him, and then remove him from the Permanent Association’s arsenal of weapons.

It is interesting, from a narrative perspective, that Modo’s abilities are made known to the Clockwork Guild by another abused boy. Griff, the boy Dr. Hyde is shown using as an assistant and experimenting on until Griff is rendered invisible, tells the Clockwork Guild about Modo’s powers in order to curry favour with Miss Hakkandottir, one of its lieutenants: “Yes, he’s Modo. One of Mr. Socrates’ special projects. He can change his shape and his features. He looks fine now, but when his disguise fades he’s an ugly sot” (*DD* p. 207). Miss Hakkandottir is portrayed using similar language when describing Griff in her point of view chapters to what Mr. Socrates uses to describe Modo. She is depicted calling Griff “a wasted investment” (*DD* p. 271), while also acknowledging
her own affection for him: “And she would miss him: over the years she had grown attached to him” (DD p. 271). This creates a semiotic and symbolic link in the narrative between Griff’s experience and Modo’s, and further demonstrates the narrative connection between the two disempowered boys.

Although Modo is not aware of his narrative connection to Griff because he is not present in scenes where Griff and Miss Hakkandottir interact, the point of view chapters establish the connection to the reader. Modo’s point of view chapters do draw comparisons between himself and Griff, but these are also semiotic links rather than overt ones; particularly with regards to their position in the narratives as disempowered others. Physically, they both diverge from the norm. While Modo is represented as a character who is born different, Griff represents a young character who is made different. The experiments performed on him are portrayed as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Clockwork Guild to create a weapon. The narrative links the relative disempowerment experienced by young people who live on the margins of society with the more active disempowerment of institutions.

During Dark Deeps, Modo is portrayed crediting Griff’s upbringing with his insanity: “Griff had been driven mad by being invisible. What might he have become if he'd been allowed to have a normal life?” (DD p. 300). Earlier, during the first book of the series, Modo is shown questioning whether he would have been different if he were “allowed to live a real life” (HA p. 207). In this way, the narrative establishes that young people can be rendered into weapons or tools when their appearance somehow diverts from the norm; but that this objectification is the by-product of an upbringing that is overseen by adults. The two characters are shown to have been manipulated and transformed into desirable weapons by the adult power holders in the series; Modo through education,
Griff through experimentation. Later in the series, as Modo begins to develop his agency and power, Modo’s character is shown making these connections in a more overt manner.

**Empowerment**

Modo is portrayed developing agency through continued exposure to other disempowered individuals; creating a counter-narrative to the internalised, rationalised complicity in his own disempowerment. Richard Delgado’s (1997) work with slave narrative demonstrates the ability of disempowered individuals to re-empower themselves through story. He notes that oppression “does not seem like oppression to those perpetrating it. It is rationalised, causing few pangs of conscience” (Delgado, 1997, p. 239). Mr. Socrates is depicted as not recognising his behaviour as abuse/disempowerment because he rationalises it as necessary, and Modo is depicted as having internalised this understanding of his own subjugation. As Modo is portrayed building up a context for Mr. Socrates’ treatment of him, he is shown making comparisons between the other disempowered young people and himself.

As discussed above, Mr. Socrates is shown to ensure Modo’s complicity in his own disempowerment by emotionally and physically isolating him, attacking his self-esteem, and haunting Modo with his own face in order to maintain control. I should reiterate that while Mr. Socrates’ behaviour in the series is portrayed as deliberate, the chapters framed from his point of view indicate his uncertainty of the necessity of this behaviour. This insight into the character is a privilege afforded to the reader, but not to Modo. Modo’s choices during the series are portrayed as being based on incomplete information regarding Mr. Socrates’ motivations. As Modo becomes more autonomous in the narrative his rebellions against Mr. Socrates become personally motivated.
because, while he wishes to break away from the Association, his desire to do so is portrayed as being linked with his desire to live outside of Mr. Socrates’ influence. Modo’s power in transformation and adaptation is portrayed as eventually leading to his ability to exercise agency, but while Mr. Socrates places claims ownership over these abilities Modo is unable to do so himself. Modo can exercise agency in the narrative when he is shown confronting his treatment at the hands of Mr. Socrates and reclaiming ownership of his face and powers.

Once Modo is shown engaging with other disempowered characters, he is portrayed as being able to recognise his own disempowerment and begin to act independently of Mr. Socrates. This is seen in the first book in the series, when Modo talks the children in the wicker man down from their fury. During the battle against the wicker man, Mr. Socrates is portrayed as acting upon his first instinct; crippling the machine by taking out its legs. Modo notes “[a] flash of concern” (HA p. 247) in Mr. Socrates’ face because the children powering the machine will almost certainly be injured during the attack, but when Modo is shown offering an alternative solution – approaching the children as equals and talking them down – he is dismissed. Modo is shown recognising his symbolic connection with the children who are forced to power the wicker man, and defies Mr. Socrates’ orders to join the battle and speak to them:

> He had his own anger; he knew what it was like to be forsaken, forgotten. They had that in common... Modo reached a trembling hand and cupped the girl's cheek. “There are people who care about you. Who love you,” he whispered. “I care about you.” The girl's face softened and she looked directly at him and did not flinch at the sight of his face (HA pp. 253-254)

Modo is represented as recognising the disempowerment of the wicker man children as similar to his own, and breaks through the anger they feel by giving them the
reassurance of affection which he has, until that point in the narratives, never received:
“‘No, [Mr. Socrates] ... he ...’ And Modo nearly said the words loves me. But he had no
way of knowing that” (HA p. 207, emphasis in the original). This is recognition within
the narrative that Modo shares a symbolic connection with other disempowered
characters and that he has the power to engage them on a personal level. Modo’s
autonomy in this instance is represented through his ability to engage with young
people and construct a narrative around them, which allows him to break through the
hold of Dr. Hyde’s tincture. Modo is not able to extend this power to his own situation
until later in the series.

Mr. Socrates is not shown reprimanding Modo for this disobedience in this instance, but
the thematic connection between the Clockwork Guild’s treatment of young people and
Mr. Socrates’s treatment of Modo is reinforced during dialogue:

“That structure ... it really was a marvel. We have much to learn from it.”

“It was a monstrosity.”

“You are mistaken, Modo. What Dr. Hyde and the Clockwork Guild did to the
children was immoral. The young should not be used to fight battles; that's not the
gentleman's way. But the war machine itself is a marvel of scientific ingenuity.
Imagine twenty of them on a battlefield.” Modo wanted to disagree, but thought
better of it (HA pp. 266-267)

Modo’s reaction to this dialogue reveals his budding rebelliousness in response to Mr.
Socrates’ treatment of other disempowered characters. It also foreshadows Mr.
Socrates’ decision in Island of Doom to recycle the wicker man children into dragoon
soldiers for the Permanent Association, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Modo’s relationship with Mr. Socrates makes it difficult for Modo to question him, so
Modo is portrayed turning his scepticism towards the institution. He is depicted as
questioning the rights of organisations and governments to own people, particularly when that ownership extends to using people as weapons. At this point in the narrative, Modo is still depicted as being incapable of extending these ideas to his own situation; but his ability to create a counter-narrative for other disempowered characters indicates the shift in the narrative’s thematic concern towards the empowerment of colonised characters. This is demonstrated during *Empire of Ruins* when Modo is shown meeting a group of Indigenous Australians, called the Rain People, who are depicted worshipping Modo’s face. Modo is represented as sympathising with the Rain People, particularly when Mr. Socrates is portrayed ordering Modo to use his influence over the Rain People to fight the Clockwork Guild for them.

Modo argues that while Mr. Socrates may have the right to use Modo however he wants, he cannot order Modo to disempower others in a similar manner.

“I cannot obey, sir. I don’t believe following that particular command is within the scope of my duties.”

“Your duty is to me and to me alone!” Mr. Socrates shouted…

“I know that, sir. I’ll do anything you command with my own person. I would die if you so require.” (*ER* p. 221)

Modo’s conscience is revealed to prevent him from using other characters as weapons, or allowing them to be used by others, although the final sentence of the above quotation indicates that he remains under the control of Mr. Socrates even as he is shown defying his orders. Through narration, Modo concludes that although the Rain People may be willing to fight, it was not his place to force, trick, or manipulate them into risking their lives: “They were brave and they’d proved they could be fierce. Was he wrong? If they died willingly, wasn’t it their choice? … No. It wasn’t right.” (*ER* p.
This is the second time is the series that Modo is depicted acting on behalf of other disempowered characters through an agency which he cannot exercise for himself.

Modo’s reasoning with regards to the Rain People is strengthened during Island of Doom when Modo is depicted meeting Mr. Socrates’ dragoons. The dragoons, or mounted infantry, are portrayed in the series as super soldiers, acquired by the Permanent Association after the wicker man incident in The Hunchback Assignments. The children used by the Clockwork Guild are shown to have been incurable of the violent tendencies and increased strength, which are by-products of Hyde’s tincture. They are relocated to America to be trained as soldiers by Mr. Socrates. Modo is portrayed recognising one of the dragoons as Oppie, his young employee who is kidnapped and used in the wicker man by the Clockwork Guild. Modo is shown as visibly distressed with Mr. Socrates’s treatment of Oppie and the other children: ““This is caring for them ?” Modo asked. “You’ve turned them into— into war machines!”” (ID p. 193). Essentially, Mr. Socrates is shown employing the same methods he employs in training Modo – turning the children into living weapons – but on a much larger scale.

There is a clear narrative connection between Modo and the dragoon children; one which Modo himself is shown to recognise. Modo expresses his concern about the continued weaponisation of these young people to Octavia, who is also friendly with one of the children before she is turned into a dragoon:

I don’t completely trust Mr. Socrates’ motives. I can’t help wondering if there was something else that could have been done besides turning them into soldiers… they’ve been turned into weapons. Again. Oppie wanted to read and become a detective. That’s all he wanted when I met him (ID p. 209)
There is a clear recognition of the disempowerment of young people at the hands of the British Empire, the Permanent Association, and Mr. Socrates. During *Empire of Ruins*, Modo refers to the Rain People as ‘children’, corresponding with the British representation of Indigenous Australians at the time, but the dragoons actually are children who were reduced to weapons in a similar manner to Modo himself. Modo is shown acknowledging this connection; which in turn renders the connection more overt to the reader and establishing Modo’s understanding of his own disempowered position in the narrative: “‘Have you had your flesh cut into, your childhood plucked out?’ Oppie asked. Modo nearly answered that he had” ([ID p. 218](#)). At the beginning of the series Modo defends Mr. Socrates and remains complicit in his own disempowerment, but when confronted with other colonised and disempowered characters, Modo is shown drawing comparisons and contextualising his own experience with the experiences of others.

The narrative further reveals the connection between Modo and Oppie at this point in the series by reflecting the behaviour of Modo in *The Hunchback Assignments*. Oppie’s defence of the Permanent Association during *Island of Doom*, and his own complicity in his disempowerment, is markedly similar to the representation of Modo’s own complicity. Both characters are represented as believing that they are not fit for the ‘real’ world due to their physical deformities, and both are depicted as grateful to the Permanent Association and Mr. Socrates for giving them a place to belong. Oppie is shown asking Modo: “Do you really believe there’s a place for me in that other world, sir?” ([ID p. 297](#)), which is reminiscent of Modo’s continued references throughout the series to his own appearance: “not a face for the world to see” ([ER p. 231](#)). By creating this symbolic link between the disempowered characters, the narrative is constructed to allow Modo an opportunity to compare and contextualise himself and his upbringing.
with this new information. As he engages with other disempowered characters, he is shown recognising the similarities between them and himself. Modo is shown constructing a counter-narrative to the Mr. Socrates’ construction of Modo as a weapon. It is following this discussion with Oppie that Modo is shown making the decision to leave the Permanent Association.

After *Empire of Ruins*, and the incident with the God Face, Modo becomes significantly more open about his appearance and more willing to let people see his face. This is the beginning of Modo’s reclamation of his own appearance with a recognition that beauty as a social and cultural construction which is not in his power to change. While he still refers to his face as an ‘abomination’, Modo is portrayed reminding himself that the concept of beauty is subjective: “for the first time he corrected himself. The Rain People had looked at him with adoration” (*ER* p. 228). In *Island of Doom*, Modo is represented as no longer considering himself genuinely ugly:

> He hadn’t looked in a mirror for ages. He examined his face, tracing the sunken nose and lopsided features. It wasn’t as ugly as he remembered. In fact, he thought he was a hint of distinction. He laughed at himself and slipped the mask on. Distinguished or not, it’d scare the living daylights out of the soldiers (*ID* p. 213)

This particular passage is important because it demonstrates the culmination of his attitude towards his face over the course of the series. After the events of *Empire of Ruins*, Modo spends *Island of Doom* continuously reminding himself that his marginalisation is not his fault: “His was not a face that the “civilized” could love. But that was their problem” (*ID* p. 31). This is a complete turn-around from the Modo from the earlier books in the series where Modo is being haunted by his own appearance. Modo is shown to wear his mask out of courtesy to others, but this is represented in the narrative as a recognition that ‘civilised’ people have a different subjectivity to the Rain
People who worshipped Modo: “He was no longer troubled by people underestimating him, nor did he fear the horrified glances of strangers… He slipped on his mask so he wouldn’t frighten the two women if he rolled over in his sleep” (ID pp. 111-112). In recognising the subjectivity of beauty, Modo claims ownership of his face and all of its faults, effectively making it impossible for Mr. Socrates to use it against him.

Mr. Socrates is shown attempting to extend his control over Modo during Island of Doom when Modo discovers that his birth parents were targeted by the Clockwork Guild. The Clockwork Guild is shown implementing a systematic search for Modo’s parents, before locating them in a village in France. When Modo learns that he was born in France, he is portrayed as interpreting this knowledge as a betrayal of the narrative Mr. Socrates constructed; which places the protection of the British Empire above every other concern:

It had been more than a small betrayal, Mr. Socrates not telling him that the blood in his veins wasn't English. Modo felt weakened by that knowledge, for he had believed that British blood and intellect were what got important things done in this world. He'd been trained to serve England, in fact had served the country well, and yet, he was not English (ID pp. 31-32)

This recognition that the narrative Mr. Socrates has created may, in fact, be false is represented as a catalyst for Modo’s next rebellion; defying orders in order to rescue his mother and father. Mr. Socrates is portrayed as recognising and expecting this response from Modo, and once Modo has attempted and failed to sneak out and make it to France, Mr. Socrates gives him permission to retrieve his parents:

I must purge you of your obsession… It’s a small assignment, really. I’ve booked a steamer passage for you and Octavia first thing in the morning. I’ve decided that it’s important for us to discover whether you have any living relatives (ID p. 35)
In essence, Mr. Socrates is represented validating Modo’s desire for closure with his biological parents and stifling his desire to express agency by constructing Modo’s initial plans as being part of his work for the Permanent Association. When Modo eventually goes after his parents, he does so under orders from the Mr. Socrates as opposed to his own autonomous decision.

Modo’s chameleon-like abilities become a source of power for him when he learns that he doesn’t need to use them. Modo’s disempowerment in the series centres entirely on his low self-esteem and his portrayed belief in his own ugliness; the narrative is structured to portray Modo’s ugliness as the catalyst for the Permanent Association’s power over him. His desire to hide his face makes him more motivated to transform and find purpose as a spy, and he puts his skills to work with the Association because Mr. Socrates’ training makes it difficult for him to exercise them elsewhere. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Modo uses his natural appearance to terrify some Clockwork Guild soldiers, and his decision not to act in *Empire of Ruins* and force the Rain People to fight for the British Government is a further representation of the power which he can wield when he chooses not to wield his face as a symbol of power and control.

When Modo is portrayed learning to recognise that he does not need to use his abilities in order to find fulfilment, he begins to entertain fantasies about finding employment elsewhere and developing other skills: “He had the strength to work on the railways. Or in the mines… He loved the idea of just bending his back to a task without worrying about the fate of the Empire” (*ID* p. 305). Modo may be portrayed as having the skill to be a chameleon and adapt to any situation, and his face has an inherent power over others, but Modo is shown exercising autonomy in choosing not to exercise this power.
Modo’s newfound self-awareness is demonstrated during Modo’s resignation from the Permanent Association. During this scene, Mr. Socrates attempts to manipulate Modo’s emotions using the same tactics that have been shown to work on Modo in the previous four books – by reminding Modo of his appearance and what he owes to the Association. In this way, Mr. Socrates is depicted reiterating the stock narrative that has been constructed throughout the series as the best method to control Modo:

“I raised you. You would be nothing without me – just a cowering beast.”

“Beast?”

“I didn’t mean to use that word… But know this, Modo: if you walk away from me, you’ll regret it. The world out there is cruel. You’ll come crawling back to me.”

“I must find my own place, sir.” (ID pp. 303-304)

Modo is depicted shaming Mr. Socrates for his use of the word ‘beast’ to describe him, and this demonstrates that Mr. Socrates’ methods for manipulation are no longer effective. While Modo is shown acknowledging that he does owe Mr. Socrates and the Permanent Association gratitude for his upbringing, Modo’s desire for agency trumps his gratitude to his father-figure in the series: “You’re the closest thing I have to a father. But, through no choice of my own, I have given you fifteen years of my life. I want my next years to be my own.” (ID p. 303). In engaging with other disempowered characters, Modo is shown to have learnt to recognise the manipulations that Mr. Socrates employs. The narrative comparisons between the Permanent Association and the Clockwork Guild establish for both Modo and the reader that these manipulations have negative consequences when they are used to disempower young characters.

Modo’s ability to recognise this and fight back demonstrates that the power in the narrative has shifted to him.
Modo’s power does not extend to the dragoons or Rain People because his empowerment does not extend to the destruction of the British Empire and its colonial interests. Modo’s resignation from the Permanent Association is depicted as a trigger for a similar action in Octavia Milkweed, Modo’s fellow agent, who tenders her own resignation in order to join him in his quest for a new life outside of the Association’s control: “I would like to travel with you. Where, I don’t know… Anywhere we want to go” (*ID* p. 307). During the narrative, Octavia portrays a certain blasé attitude to the patriotism Mr. Socrates attempts to instill in his agents. During dialogue, it is revealed that Octavia joined the Association to avoid a pickpocketing charge. She is represented as having allowed herself to be controlled by the Permanent Association, and over the course of the series the reader learns through her conversations with Modo that she receives lessons from both Mr. Socrates and Tharpa in the art of espionage; although her training takes a different form to Modo’s:

She began to imitate Mr. Socrates, feeling pleased with her tone and accent. “The key to being a good agent is manipulating your targets into giving you information. Use flirting. Use words that imply love. All their emotions are tools that can be used against them… Perhaps we female agents get different lessons. We are so much weaker than you men, so we have to rely on trickery” (*DD* p. 66)

In a way, Octavia is taught to make a chameleon of herself as well; but while Modo is taught to manipulate his appearance, Octavia is taught to manipulate her behaviour. The gendered differences here are problematic, but not surprising; as my own peer-reviewed research has demonstrated (Seymour, 2013a), women using gender subversion to dominate and manipulate men is common in the steampunk genre. The subversion of typical gender expectations in order to empower feminine characters is a staple of a genre which glorifies the past while critiquing, but these feminine characters are
generally older, adult characters as opposed to young women (Onion, 2008; Casey, 2009). It is troubling from the perspective of a contemporary reader to see an underage character (Octavia guesses her age at fifteen) being trained by older men in the art of seduction. As discussed earlier in this thesis, during *The Hunger Games* case study, the sexualisation of underage characters in YA is an indication of the objectification of the young characters in the narrative. While *The Hunger Games* portrays underage sexuality as an indication that the young characters are portrayed as entertainment rather than actual human beings, *The Hunchback Assignments* portrays underage sexuality as a necessary part of Octavia’s espionage training. At the least, it demonstrates that Octavia’s character is represented as being reduced to a body – her gendered body – by Mr. Socrates, and his lessons for her are tailored to her ‘talents’.

In this series, Octavia’s learned ability to manipulate through identifying people’s weaknesses is represented as making her very good at recognising the disempowerment of others. As previously noted, Octavia is the first character in the narrative to recognise and name Modo’s abuse, although she is represented as being particularly harsh when she is explaining that Mr. Socrates cannot possibly love Modo based on the evidence of his behaviour: “I’m being cruel, she thought. Why? And yet, she couldn’t stop. He could be so innocent at times. He had to wake up to the reality of the world around him” (*DD* p. 67). Octavia’s characterisation places firm emphasis on her backstory as a London street child, and so her desire for Modo to ‘wake up’ to his situation and disempowerment is consistent with her no-nonsense attitude towards power holders in the narratives. As discussed previously in this chapter, Octavia’s desire for Modo’s recognition of his own disempowerment is what triggers the beginning of his construction of a counter-narrative to Mr. Socrates’ education.
A counter-narrative is designed to work against the dominant ideology of a culture – or the ‘stock narrative’, “which the cultural centre tells itself in order to reiterate their place in relation to the margins of society and create a shared reality in which its own superior position is naturalised” (Seymour, 2012, p. 32). I have found that when a character declares a narrative of power to be false, then they can place the marginalised character in a defensive position (Seymour, 2012); especially when those marginalised characters have internalised their oppressor’s normativity as Modo does in *The Hunchback Assignments*. While attacking Mr. Socrates and the Permanent Association outright alerts the reader to the troubling circumstances of Modo’s upbringing, Octavia is portrayed as triggering a defensive response in Modo. Modo’s depicted empowerment through the construction of a counter-narrative only takes place through continual experience with other disempowered characters constructed in the narrative as foils to Modo himself. While Octavia is represented demonstrating a desire for Modo to express agency, she remains under the employ of the Permanent Association until he is able to construct a counter-narrative, which allows him to leave.

Octavia is shown following Modo after pickpocketing Mr. Socrates – a minor act of rebellion in order to collect the wages which both she and Modo were owed. This completes her narrative arc by circling back to her original occupation as pickpocket; the reader deduces from this that the character will continue to exercise her power of choice and, like Modo, make her way in the ‘real’ world without the help of the Permanent Association. Modo and Octavia are unique in my case studies, and much of non-realistic YA fiction, in having very little effect on their narrative world. They are not represented as having the capacity to change the institution itself to accommodate their new sense of agency. Modo is shown preventing a war between the British Empire and the Clockwork Guild, but this allows the narrative status quo to continue as it is.
Modo does not represent the paradigm shift that Katniss Everdeen and Harry Potter represent in their respective series. The dragoons remain under Mr. Socrates’ control, and the Australian Indigenous population continue to suffer under the British Government. Modo is not shown sharing his discovery of the power of choice with other disempowered young people. While this could be recognition of Imperial power, I would argue that in this particular series the reclamation of power and agency necessitates a removal of the individual from the institution, and not the removal of the institution itself.

Modo is portrayed in his final point of view chapter as desiring a normal life free from the burdens of world-saving. Ultimately, changing the institution was not the character’s goal. His stated goal is autonomy and a new sense of self; both of which the character achieves. He creates opportunities for other disempowered youths to construct alternative counter-narratives, much as Harry Potter did as part of his role as the metaphorical Philosopher-King, and some characters are shown using Modo’s example to likewise remove themselves from the institution. Octavia is an example of this. Modo is portrayed as discovering that the Permanent Association as an institution is toxic for him, but his own response to Octavia’s attempts to reveal his disempowerment demonstrates that forcing other disempowered characters to acknowledge their position as victims can be difficult.

The other disempowered characters in the series, which is set historically during the height of colonialism, are portrayed as being outside of Modo’s power to help. Modo’s portrayed ability to reclaim ownership of his face allows him to construct the counter-narrative to combat Mr. Socrates’ deliberate disempowerment of him. As long as Modo is haunted by his own appearance, Mr. Socrates is able to control him. Slowly, over the
course of the series, Modo begins to contextualise his situation and learns to recognise it as disempowerment by identifying similar treatment in other characters. Through his relationships with other colonised characters, notably the Rain People, Octavia and Oppie, Modo develops the self-knowledge necessary to construct his counter-narrative and accept his ugliness; breaking away from the oppressive Permanent Association who use him as a weapon in their war.
Other Findings & Discussion

We may be young, but we’re not powerless.
We play by their rules long enough, and it becomes our game
Orson Scott Card, 1977, p. 239

During my analysis, it became apparent that these YA case studies share many thematic similarities. *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Hunchback Assignments* portray young fictional characters as being oppressed, disempowered and manipulated by their adult counterparts. These representations of youth oppression are in line with the claims made by many children’s and YA literature academics (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009) who argue that adults have colonised the child by using fiction to portray children as weak and submissive. There is, however, a significant difference between the perceived relationship between adults and young people among these academics and the contemporary fiction produced by adults for young readers; the young protagonists, unlike the academic construction of the young reader, are portrayed fighting back. While some children’s and YA literature academics continue to argue that young people are constructed as passive and submissive in fiction, a close analysis of popular YA book series demonstrates that the young protagonists are actually represented as capable of engaging meaningfully in the fictional power hierarchy. Adult characters are represented in the fiction (by adult authors) as repressing and disempowering child characters, but child is subsequently portrayed as being too powerful to control.

In the Literature Review, I outline a number of academic arguments for the oppression of young people through fiction. It is argued by many (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009; Hunt, 2005) that the young character is represented as
submitting to adult normativity in fiction, and that the real-world young person cannot exercise agency because they have no experience of these representations. If this is true, then it must logically follow that any demonstration of agency in children’s and YA fiction would necessarily lead to the empowerment of the young reader. By demonstrating the importance of power and agency among young fictional characters, the adult author is portraying the child as powerful and capable of negotiating the power structures of the adult world. In this way, the adult author is entering the ‘between space’ outlined by Melrose (2012a; 2012b) by recognising and celebrating the agency of youth in fiction.

The aetonormative ideals, or adult normativity (Nikolajeva, 2009), expressed in the fiction (ie, the subordination of young people ‘for their own good’) are represented in the case studies as being stifling and ultimately dangerous to the emotional and physical wellbeing of young characters. The case studies examined in this thesis and the subsequent findings have thrown up several interesting ideas and conclusions about the academic approach to youth agency and power in the children’s literature discourse. I will explore the relationship between the adult author and the child reader during the Conclusion(s) chapter, but first I will examine the thematic links between the three case studies. One of the major thematic connections between the three case studies is the demonstrable difference between the portrayal of youth power and adult power. While the adult characters are represented using their power to control, the young characters are frequently depicted using their newfound power and agency to liberate other disempowered characters in the narrative. Here, again, we see the adult author entering a discussion with the child reader by offering them multiple examples of power and control and demonstrating their possible consequences.
Adult power vs. youth power

Each case study presents a clear distinction between how the adult characters express agency and how the younger characters express agency. This distinction is shown throughout the narrative through the conscious decisions shown by the protagonists who, once they have the power to behave autonomously, are portrayed as wanting to behave differently to their adult oppressors. This breaks the cycle of disempowerment in the narrative, and is demonstrated through their portrayed interactions with the oppressed characters of the next generation.

Nikolaveja (2009) writes that the empowerment felt by Christopher Robin in A.A Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh (1926) series is directly related to his portrayed ability to disempower and humiliate his toys – echoing his own treatment at the hands of the adults in the narrative. While this would seem to be the case for Christopher Robin, the case studies examined in this thesis demonstrably empower young characters without passing their oppression onto another set of characters within the story. During the Introduction of this thesis, I explain that the portrayal and construction of aetonormativity in fiction is crucial to meaning-making because the whole text provides the context through which the aetonormative ideals are viewed. Contemporary YA fiction tends to portray adult ideals of normativity negatively, with young characters shown rebelling against the aetonormativity they encounter in the narrative.

The demonstrations of power on the part of adult characters are frequently constructed as relying on the subordination of other, younger characters. This indicates the position that the young character occupies within the narrative, as well as a clear distinction between the oppressive power of the adult and the inclusive power of the child. The represented actions of young characters that demonstrate their agency are often in direct
opposition to the oppressive demonstrations of agency used by adult characters. This oppositional construction demonstrates the positive connotations of youth power in the case studies, which is contrasted by negatively constructed adult power.

While the adult power holders in *The Hunger Games* objectify young people in order to maintain control, Katniss is portrayed using her personal and political power to eliminate the Hunger Games as a method of oppression. This involves the use of her newly acquired agency to kill President Coin. Although Katniss is shown acting with the same ruthless malice as her oppressors, her motivation and the end result are designed to protect the youth of the Capitol from being reduced to weapons as she was. She is shown extending the power she wields by creating a world where young people are no longer the tools of oppression, and this directly opposes the methods of control used by adults in the narrative.

Harry Potter is depicted liberating himself through knowledge, and he immediately extends this liberation to the students of Hogwarts. While Harry is shown to recognise that he “must be like Dumbledore, keep a cool head, make sure there were back-ups, others to carry on” (*DH* p. 557), once he has the capacity to change the Game in play, he employs a completely different strategy which relies on openness and honesty. In doing this, the narrative constructs Harry as similar to Dumbledore, because he is playing the Game, but his Game strategy is so different that it is contrasted by Dumbledore’s reliance on ignorance. Likewise, in *The Hunchback Assignments*, Modo is shown asserting his independence from the Permanent Association by refusing to exercise his colonial power, choosing instead to exercise the power that marginalises and separates him from the norm. When he begins to recognise the power in his own difference, he is shown attempting to extend this power towards other marginalised
characters (with limited success) before removing himself entirely from the fictional
power hierarchy.

*The Hunchback Assignments* represents an interesting narrative arc because it avoids
confrontation; unlike the other fictional narratives explored in this thesis, which rely
upon it. Rather than engaging with Mr. Socrates’ world of espionage and violence,
Modo is shown to exercise his agency by removing himself from the toxic environment
in which he was raised. The character’s decision to avoid conflict is constructed as
oppositional to that of the adults in the narrative, who are portrayed as being excited
when there is danger and violence: “[Octavia] glimpsed the man [Mr. Socrates] must
have been many years ago. A young officer. A conqueror. With thousands of similar
men exploring, no wonder Britain controlled most of the world” (*ER* p. 151). The
constructed society of colonial Britain requires that Modo became a conqueror, and so
Modo’s portrayed lack of enjoyment during conflict and his desire for peace make the
rejection of violent confrontation a symbolic act of rebellion.

In the case studies examined in this thesis, young characters become autonomous agents
without mimicking the coloniser/colonised relationship. Instead, they are shown to
liberate their fellow young people with the power they acquire over the series and are
shown to behave as direct opposites to their oppressors. This is important because it
demonstrates a clear trend towards the empowerment of young characters without a
subsequent subordination and marginalisation of other young characters. Here, the adult
author is making a clear distinction between the power exercised by adults within a
narrative, and the power exercised by young people, establishing an alternative
narrative of power and control for young readers to engage with.
I want to discuss, briefly, how child characters are represented in fiction for adults. Adult-targeted novels with young protagonists frequently construct a relationship between young people and adults that conforms to the idealised child as a site for improvement. As discussed in the Literature Review, before children’s literature became a well-known, actively sought-out and published genre, there were many novels written from the perspective of young characters that were meant for adult consumption.

Charles Dickens is a well-known example of an author in this literary tradition – his many serialised novels are now considered standard fare for introducing young readers to classic literature, but they were originally published in adult-targetted journals. Coming of age narratives, such as David Copperfield (1850), are notably driven by complex young protagonists, but these characters are always at the mercy of their adult counterparts in the narrative. As child labour laws commodified the child and reduced youth to a state where certain jobs were available before others (Gittins, 2008; Sorin, 2005; Hendrick, 1997), the narratives told from the perspective of the fictional child continued to express the adult/child relationship as one of powerful/powerless. David Copperfield remains at the mercy of his cruel stepfather and aunt until he becomes a man, and then he is able to exercise freedom of choice (1850). His relative inexperience is portrayed as being punished, however, through various conflicts with his servants until he is shown to have matured. Likewise, the adventures of Pip in Great Expectations (1861) appear to caution against allowing young men too much financial freedom. As Nikolajeva (2009) aptly points out, the ability of the young characters to gain agency and express their power of choice in these narratives is limited to their
experience, and it is not until the characters are portrayed as reaching adulthood that they can exercise agency.

Female characters in classic tales originally published for adult audiences also frequently fail to express agency in the context of the fictional setting. *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868) is told from the perspective of four sisters. Although they go on many adventures together, they are severely limited by their youth (and their gender, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis). The narrative is driven by events happening to the character, and it is not until the sequel *Good Wives* (1869) that the sister characters are portrayed affecting the narrative through their actions. This is arguably a result of them being of marrying age.

Young female characters in these narratives also represent models for behaviour, in the tradition of moral fairy tales. Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (1905) is portrayed as penniless and alone at her London school, and is subjected to horrible cruelty, but she is shown bearing it with Cinderella-like patience. Instead of attempting to escape, she is shown resorting to imagining a world where she is happy and healthy. This power, to pretend that she is somewhere else, has no effect on her actual position in the narrative. In essence, although Sara is depicted reminding herself constantly that she is a princess and should act accordingly, the narrative does very little to support Sara’s portrayed perception of her own agency or autonomy. This could be the result of the gendered discourses of the time, which limited the agency of many women, but it could also be a reflection of the tendency towards child passivity in texts aimed at adults. Once the young characters of both sexes grow up, they are portrayed engaging more heavily in the narrative.
Contemporary child-driven narratives for adults, such as the popular *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R.R. Martin (1996), and Stephen King’s *Carrie* (1974) and *The Shining* (1977) also tend to render the child characters impotent in the face of their adult counterparts. Although these examples were published more than ten years ago (and are therefore not ‘contemporary’ as defined by this thesis), they are a strong sample of widely-consumed child-centred fiction for adults. Given that the portrayal of young characters in these adult-centred texts is thematically similar to the portrayals of young characters in the fiction of Dickens and his contemporaries (as discussed previously), this would indicate that fiction for adults has not followed the same pattern for development as fiction for young people. King renders his adults into villains, and his child characters are victims to the tyranny and power of the adults in their lives. The title character of *Carrie* (King, 1974) is portrayed being victimised by both her mother and her peers, and cannot exercise agency within the narrative until she acquires super-human abilities. By the conclusion of the narrative, however, these abilities are shown to have consumed and destroyed her. This narrative arc demonstrates the dangers of oppressing youth, but also represents young characters as being incapable of exercising power without violently obliterating themselves in the process. The onus of change is on the secondary and peripheral characters in the narrative, and their choice to either oppress or assist the title character, which renders the narrative complicit in the support of the adult/child power hierarchy.

The young characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996) are portrayed being exposed to sexual violence and objectification, and those who can and do express agency only do so with the support of adult advisors or helpers. There is also an unclear distinction in Martin’s series around the difference between a child and adult. A female is considered an adult when she is of childbearing age, but the distinction between male
characters is less clear. Some characters are described as men when they are old enough to frequent a brothel, while others must kill to be portrayed in the narrative as adults. This ambiguity renders the narrative’s attempts to empower young characters problematic, because the reader’s understanding of youth is context-dependant.

The youth-driven narratives marketed to adults tend to render young characters either impotent, or active but ultimately misguided. The contemporary narratives marketed towards young people mimic and then reject the child/adult power relationship as it is described by children’s and YA literature academics (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009). Young people are disempowered, and then overthrow their adult oppressors over the course of the series. Considering the target audience of these narratives, it makes sense that power and agency would be extended to the characters that would symbolically represent the reader in the text; either the adult reader, or the young reader.

I would argue that the reason adult-targeted texts conform to the representations of coloniser/colonised relationship between adults and young people may be to reassure the adult that their position in the real-world social hierarchy as controlling and suppressing young people is natural. As discussed in the Literature Review, stock narratives produced by power holders often serve to naturalise their oppressive position in the social order (Delgado, 1997; Rushdy, 1992; Sekora, 1987). Adult-targeted narratives thus construct young characters as requiring ‘guidance’ from the adults in order to protect them from their own inexperience. On the other hand, the case studies examined in this thesis are marketed to young readers. They represent a counter-narrative to the traditional narratives of power that are marketed towards adult readers.
**Childhood, and its limitations**

When young characters acquire power in the context of the narrative, there is often a linguistic shift towards using adult descriptors for those characters. Essentially, the young protagonists become adults when they begin to exercise the equivalent agency of their adult counterparts. Nikolajeva’s (2009) argument that the acquisition of power is dependent on this escape from the confines of childhood is relevant here, because it would appear as if young people, in fact, do not demonstrate agency in the fiction. As discussed in the *Literature Review*, this argument identifies the adult as the powerful oppressor in the relationship. When the child becomes an adult, it is argued, they begin controlling and disempowering the younger characters in the narrative.

This is true of AA Milne’s (1926) Christopher Robin, whose position in the *Winnie-the-Pooh* series, according to Nikolajeva (2009), acts in the narrative as a mature moral compass contrasting the childlike naiveté of his toys. Nikolajeva (2009) further argues that Christopher Robin’s impending adulthood (leaving for boarding school) indicates his overall powerlessness in the world because he cannot escape what is expected of him as he grows up, and so he must disempower and patronise his toys in order to exert from measure of control: “adult normativity wins at the end” (p. 20). As argued in the *Introduction* and *Literature Review*, the main problem with identifying young people as colonised in the academic discourse is the fact that ‘childhood’ is a very brief stage of the human experience, and open to change. What other minority or oppressed group migrates naturally from the margins to the centre?

Many of *Harry Potter*’s most dedicated fans are those who aged with Harry as the books were released annually (Gierzynski & Eddy, 2013). The representation of the fictional child as aging and learning over the course of a series is particularly relevant to
the young reader on the cusp of their own adulthood, but this does not necessarily mean that the portrayals of child characters becoming aetonormative should serve to reiterate the adult normativity present in the fiction. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the power exercised by young characters in the fictional world often juxtaposes the power exercised by their adult oppressors with oppression being constructed negatively within the narrative. The young protagonist’s power does not rely on the subsequent suppression of the next generation and this demonstrates a positive construction.

When Nikolajeva (2009) writes that personal growth and the development of emotional maturity (two of the many character traits which adults apparently desire in young people) disqualifies a character from genuine empowerment, she is essentially preventing the child character from ever truly being considered powerful. To question whether or not child characters are technically adults at the time that they are portrayed acquiring power is to deliberately undermine them in the context of the narrative and in the eyes of the young reader. It implies that unless the child character seizes control in a sudden and unrealistic attack, then they are failing their peers by somehow cheating their way to the top of the social hierarchy. It would be a mistake to argue that the ‘adulthood’ represented by young fictional characters reflects a genuine identification as an adult within the narrative. In this case, it is the adult academic limiting the power of the young character, not the narrative itself. Although the narratives construct young characters as aging at a predictable rate, and acquiring knowledge as they age (just like the young reader is expected to do in real life), there is always a clear distinction in the narrative between the protagonist and the antagonist: the young character and the adult. There is a clear separation between the lived experience of the young protagonists and their oppressors, and despite the development and growth of these characters, the
identification of young protagonists as adults does not sever their narrative connection
to the other young characters and their cause. That is the crucial point.

Unlike books targeted towards beginning readers, YA is targeted towards readers who
are much closer to becoming adults themselves. So, arguably, the representations of
young characters as being ‘adultlike’ would be even more problematic. The colonised
youth joins the ranks of his or her colonisers much sooner, and is therefore placed in a
narrative position to abuse the power which once abused them. Children grow older and
become adults, both in real-life and in literature, and unless the child character is a
perpetual child (Peter Pan, Pipi Longstocking and Tom Sawyer come to mind) then the
author must represent them growing into adulthood in order to maintain that connection
with the young reader – who is growing and aging as well.

The idea of ‘adult’ is a construction, which, in the fiction, can be context-dependant and
genre-specific. In Harry Potter the characters are portrayed as being legally of age at
seventeen, which technically renders Harry an adult in the last book, but he and the rest
of the Wizarding world are represented identifying him with reference to his youth and
inexperience throughout the remainder of the series. Modo does not age past fifteen
during The Hunchback Assignments, but Mr. Socrates is shown in his point of view
chapters frequently referencing Modo as being mature enough to pass for a man. In the
context of the genre’s setting (Victorian England), ‘adulthood’ is a difficult concept
because there is no clear definition for childhood (Gittins, 2008; Sorin, 2005; Hendrick,
1997). Katniss, who is represented as feeling like an adult during Mockingjay, cannot
sever the connection she shares with the children of Panem because she continues to
identify with them.
The young protagonists in the case studies represent a bridge between the reader and the fictional world in the same way that their state of adolescence metaphorically bridges childhood and adulthood. These representations of young people may technically be grown-up in the context of the narrative, but that does not diminish their representation of youth. On the contrary, their technical position within the powerful majority is constructed within the narrative to reflect their personal and intellectual growth – not their physical age. Calling powerful or unusually mature child characters ‘adults’ within a narrative world could simply be a reflection of the limitations of Western thinking. Perhaps, linguistically speaking, these characters are considered adults within the narratives because the concept of a powerful young person is so foreign to Western audiences that, as yet, there is no word for one. If the child wields the power of an adult, then he or she can no longer be considered a child according to the Western concept of childhood.

Each case study constructs the young protagonists as choosing to guide or enter a mutual exploration with their younger, more inexperienced counterparts, instead of oppressing or overpowering them as the adults in the narrative were portrayed doing. This is demonstrates a symbolic rebellion from the aetonormativity embodied in the adult characters in the narrative. Instead of the powerful controlling the powerless, the fiction constructs the relationship between the experienced and inexperienced as one of mutual benefit and support. As Melrose (2012a) writes, the powerful characters in the relationship, like the powerful adults in the real world, are capable of entering the ‘between space’ and engaging directly with the so-called powerless. This relationship is modelled in the fiction produced by adults for young people, inviting youth to entertain the ideal of mutual understanding over a hierarchical social structure which privileges age.
**Internalising and rejecting aetonormativity**

Each case study portrays the internalisation and subsequent rejection of aetonormative ideals of the young characters as being central to the structure of the narrative. In the beginning of the series, the young character is represented as disempowered by adult characters. Whether the young character idealises their oppressor (in the case of Harry and Modo), or whether they have accepted their place in the social hierarchy (Katniss), their position as subordinate is naturalised and they do not demonstrate any desire for change or empowerment. This is a common theme in dystopia fiction, where the protagonist learns to recognise the insidious undercurrents of their world and chooses to oppose them, but the presence of this theme in case studies which represent different genres indicates its universality to the YA target audience. Wimsatt & Beardsley’s (1946) work on intentional fallacy renders the identification of authorial intent questionable, but the demonstrable trend in the construction and subsequent subversion of the submissive youth indicates that there is a preoccupation with this theme among YA literature authors.

This indicates an overall trend towards rejecting the ideal of the submissive youth; adult authors, far from constructing child characters as colonised and vulnerable, construct them as strong and powerful in the context of the fictional world. The rejection of aetonormativity is important, from a narrative perspective, because the aetonormative ideals represented by adult characters in the case studies represent the main narrative conflict. The young characters are represented as actively opposing the adults in the narrative and the aetonormativity personified within those characters.

This particular expression of aetonormativity is portrayed in the case studies through adult characters idealising submissive traits in young characters, and ultimately being
concerned with constructing a narrative hierarchy where they remain in a position of power. Any young character that embodies power is oppressed through the aetonormativity inherent in the fictional society and put to work to maintain the status quo within the narrative. My analysis of the case studies demonstrates the ability of YA narratives to negatively construct the adult characters and their ideals of submissive youth, and the subsequent rejection of the oppressive practices of adult characters is portrayed positively through the young protagonist. The fiction demonstrably diverges from the expected norm of many children’s and YA literature academics (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009) who argue that the child has been colonised by fiction which glorifies adult values; far from being glorified, fictional adult characters are frequently portrayed as being critiqued and dismissed by their younger counterparts.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the empowerment of young characters in fiction is made possible through their initial acceptance of the aetonormative ideals to which they are exposed in the narrative; Harry is shown accepting his place in Dumbledore’s Game, which allows him to start a new Game once the old one is complete; Katniss is portrayed as supporting the continued abuse of children through the Hunger Games in order to get close to President Coin and eliminate her; and Modo, after initially being depicted as being ashamed of his appearance, learns to use the fear and disgust his face triggers in other characters as a weapon.

The protagonists of the case studies cannot avoid the aetonormative indoctrination of their society, and their empowerment becomes a negotiation rather than a sudden seizing of control because they must learn to reconcile their preconceived notions of normativity with their experiences of the fictional world. Once they can do this, they are
portrayed as being better equipped to question those ideals that do not conform to their experience – and then take action. The case study analyses indicate that the representation of empowerment in young characters is made possible through an initial acceptance and eventual rejection of aetonormativity. This has become a narrative device of empowerment which convincingly demonstrates the young characters’ progression from disempowerment to empowerment.

The narratives construct the young character’s burgeoning opposition to aetonormativity as being a gradual shift, taking place over multiple books in each series. This creates an element of realism in the otherwise non-realistic narratives because, as mentioned in the *Introduction*, the gradual shift mirrors the real-world development of adolescents. The case studies demonstrate the empowerment of young characters as reminiscent of the empowerment of real-world victims of societal oppression; that of a gradual shift through predictable stages over several years. This is an interesting finding because it indicates a metaphorical and thematic link between the construction of fictional disempowered characters and real-world marginalised others. It offers an opportunity for the fiction to model and reflect different methods of empowerment with some reference to the real-world methods employed.

**Atwood’s victim positions**

While there is a general sense of uneasiness and discontent in the early stages of each case studies examined in this thesis, the young characters are constructed as being either unable to accept their victim role or projecting that victim role onto others in order to empower themselves. Margaret Atwood’s (1972) *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* demonstrates a predictable pattern to self-awareness for colonised or oppressed people. Atwood’s work with Canadian literature is primarily concerned
with the portrayal of themes of survival in the narratives produced by Canadian authors. Atwood (1972) writes that Canadian literature is preoccupied with survival and the obstacles to survival, and argues that these themes are a “central symbol for Canada” (p. 32). She goes on to argue that Canadian people represent a “collective victim” because Canada began as a British colony, and was therefore subject to British colonial disempowerment. The state of ‘victimhood’ in this instance is an extension of the disempowerment experienced by the marginalised and colonised groups in Atwood’s experience. Atwood (1972) calls the pattern towards self-awareness for victims of colonialism and disempowerment ‘the victim positions’, and writes that these positions are the same whether the victims represent a country, a minority group, or a single individual.

Considering the representation of young people among many children’s and YA literature academics as being ‘colonised’ by adults, the use of Atwood’s (1972) victim positions to trace the empowerment of young characters in YA literature is appropriate. Atwood (1972) writes that the victim positions “are like the basic positions in ballet or the scales on the piano: they are primary, though all kinds of song-and-dance variations on them are possible” (p. 36). The case studies examined in this thesis are concerned with the empowerment of the young characters. This could be read as a reflection or reaction to the consistent disempowerment of young people in the real-world and young characters in adult-targeted texts. The representation of young characters as revealing similar behaviours and coping strategies to real-world victims of marginalisation demonstrate the blurring of lines between reality and fantasy which make it possible for fiction to offer a space for the adult author and child reader to meet.
In Atwood’s (1972) Position One, the victim denies their victimhood by either ignoring their oppression or pointing out that they are better off than other victims. To acknowledge their victimhood, Atwood writes, would be to acknowledge their powerlessness and dependence on others; which could therefore lead to the removal of benefits and privileges that they have accrued by being submissive. It is therefore necessary to deny their position in the social power hierarchy as victims; Harry and Modo are shown to begin their respective series in this position. Harry is represented as approaching his domestic disempowerment with nonchalance, and his institutional disempowerment with the same attitude (as discussed in the case study chapter, this is the result of the genre expectation of the abused orphan rising above their maltreatment). Modo is portrayed actively denying his victimhood when Octavia points it out in the first book of the series. In this position, the character is rendered impotent in the face of their disempowerment because they do not recognise it as disempowerment.

In Position Two, the victim is aware of their state of victimhood but they displace the cause so that they cannot be held responsible for their own empowerment. This position is particularly difficult to move away from, according to Atwood (1972), because the displacement of the cause, most often by attributing it to an all-powerful other (such as God, the government or ingrained gender biases), creates the assumption that any rebellion is foolish and doomed to fail. It creates a self-reinforcing cycle of disempowerment and disillusionment. The victim becomes complacent within that cycle because they have accepted their position in the social hierarchy as one of unchangeable necessity. This also leads to the victim becoming angry with other victims who attempt to rebel.
This is seen most clearly in the case studies when Katniss is portrayed as being angry with Gale for railing against the Capitol during *The Hunger Games*, because that energy could be better used hunting and exercising what little power they do have. Katniss is constructed as having resigned herself to her disempowerment by attributing it to the vast unchangeable other of the Capitol, and she is shown to have exempted herself from attempting to alter her situation. While Katniss begins the series in this position, Harry and Modo are depicted reaching this position when they too become disillusioned with the power holders in their respective narratives. When this happens, Harry and Modo are portrayed as being unhappy with their situation, but unable to change or alter it. Modo is shown attributing his continued victimhood to his appearance, while Harry’s subordination is justified in the narrative by a prophecy which fates him to die at Voldemort’s hands. In order to escape this position, the victim needs to acknowledge that their victimhood is a construction of their environment.

This is an important point; victimhood is a construction of the fictional world. While victimhood is a product of colonial practices that create a hierarchy of power among citizens, the construction of victimhood in a fictional world as being similar demonstrates the potency of the image of the child as other in Western culture. The young characters are established in the case studies as marginalised by virtue of their age and relative powerlessness in the fictional social power hierarchy that privileges adulthood. The text is constructed to demonstrate to the reader the young characters’ powerlessness through repeated experiences. Then, much like the victims of real-world colonisation examined in Atwood’s work, the texts construct the young character as becoming engaged with the fictional power hierarchy, recognising its flaws, and fighting back against the oppressive practices which require their subordination. The reader sees the fictional child character engaging with the predictable stages of victim
empowerment, and that allows the adult author to enter the ‘between space’ of the text and model examples of power in the colonial context.

Each case study’s narrative of power and control shifts when the child character begins to show evidence of entering Atwood’s third victim position: acknowledging their victimhood and recognising that this is not inevitable. Once the young protagonists are shown entering this position and recognising the unjust social order, they set about changing it. This is shown to occasionally require their complicity in their own disempowerment; particularly when young characters must work with their oppressors in order to destroy a more dangerous opponent. Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen and Modo are all portrayed as working alongside their adult oppressors in order to eliminate the threat of a much more sinister and dangerous adult threat. But the narrative is structured to acknowledge that the young characters have the power to change the situation, and this is critical to the characters’ empowerment throughout each narrative arc. It is also significant that, once the characters are shown to recognise that they have the power to engage with the fictional power hierarchy on an equal or greater level than their adult counterparts, they use it. They are not represented as choosing to remain submissive to the aetonormative ideals of their fictional context; they fight.

Position Three, as Atwood (1972) notes, is a dynamic position for victims of social oppression because it is the position where the real cause of their disempowerment is identified. Once they recognise the cause, the victim can make real decisions about how to engage and eventually break their victim cycle. Modo is shown approaching this position when he becomes more open about his physical appearance and critical of Mr. Socrates’ methods; Harry is portrayed losing faith in Dumbledore while simultaneously taking responsibility for his role in Dumbledore’s Game; and Katniss identifies
President Coin as a threat to the youth of the Capitol, and chooses to use her
Mockingjay image to oppose her. Fantasy and speculative fiction, as discussed in the
Introduction, allows the young characters portrayed in the narrative to actively fight
tetonormativity in a way that is not available to their realistic genre and novel
counterparts. When realistic-fiction characters are represented fighting against
oppressive regimes, this often means actively taking up arms, or, significantly, putting
them down. It is important to recognise that the young characters in the case studies are
portrayed as engaging in warfare with their adult oppressors. This allows the narrative
to literally overthrow the oppressive aetonormative ideals personified within the adult
characters. Once the victims enter Position Three, they can recognise what agency is
available to them and act to remove their oppressors.

Position Four is the most powerful of Atwood’s (1972) victim positions: the creative
non-victim. Atwood (1972) distinguishes this position from the others by writing that
this is not a position for victims; it is a position for ex-victims:

> In Position Four, creative activity of all kinds becomes possible. Energy is no longer
being suppressed (as in Position One) or used up for displacement of the cause, or
for passing your victimization along to others (Man kicks Child, Child kicks Dog) as
in Position Two; nor is it being used for the dynamic anger of Position Three. And
you are able to accept your own experience for what it is, rather than having to
distort it to make it correspond with others’ versions of it (particularly those of your
oppressors) (pp. 38-39)

Atwood (1972) makes it clear during her discussion that it is very difficult to escape
victimhood in an oppressive society because the society itself is constructed to
subordinate certain groups and there would need to be a radical change in the power
hierarchy in order to stop marginalising or victimising certain citizens. As discussed in
Literature Review, the continued portrayal of marginalised groups in fiction as requiring protection and guidance naturalises the power hierarchy that subordinates them (Delgado, 1997; Rushdy, 1992; Sekora, 1987). This is why most victims in the real world remain in Position Three: acknowledging their victimhood.

In fantasy and speculative fiction, however, there is scope for a radical restructuring of the fictional society. Victims in this fiction can express their agency by tearing down the power hierarchy as it stands, and then rebuilding it to accommodate a new structure that favours the marginalised characters. This is particularly true in dystopia fiction, where a radical restructuring of the social order is considered a narrative staple; this is important from a reader’s perspective because it makes the removal of the oppressive regime an expected conclusion of the plot. The reader is, in effect, rooting for the protagonist to ‘fix’ the world of the narrative. *The Hunger Games* pushes the narrative drive towards a paradigm-altering war, which would either overthrow the government or bring worse oppression to the districts in retaliation. When President Coin, the leader of the rebels, attempts to continue using the oppressive method of her predecessors by killing children in the Hunger Games, Katniss murders her to ensure that the new social structure does not include that particular form of discipline. It is this demonstration of agency that places Katniss firmly in Position Four because the character ensures the creation of a social order which does not marginalise, objectify or oppress youth.

Harry and Modo exist in slightly different narrative worlds, so the represented shift into Position Four expressed by these characters is less concerned with the restructuring of the narrative society, and more concerned with the suppression and disempowerment of individual character. Once the two characters are portrayed as being empowered, they are able to extend some of that power to their fellow disempowered characters. The
restructuring of the fictional world, however, is left to others. Harry’s victory over Voldemort ushers in a new era of peace, and Harry is shown to enter Position Four by removing himself from the metaphoric Platonic Cave. He is depicted furnishing his fellow prisoners with the knowledge to leave the Cave themselves, and then cuts himself off from his symbolic role as Philosopher-King. Harry Potter is represented in the narrative as exercising his agency by choosing to devote himself to family; he is no longer a victim of circumstance because he has distanced himself from the circumstances which victimised him. Similarly, Modo’s represented disempowerment at the hands of the colonial authority of Mr. Socrates ends when Modo removes himself from it. Instead of attempting to renegotiate or restructure the power hierarchy of colonial Britain, Modo is represented as a creative non-victim by choosing a different path and extracting himself from a toxic situation. He is shown attempting to extend this power to his fellow victims – Oppie in Position Two, and the Rain People in Position One – but he is shown ultimately accepting that other disempowered characters may not be ready to empower themselves.

The case studies examined in this thesis make a case for victims exercising agency within a social order by leaving it, or distancing themselves from those disempowering elements in the narrative, which are ultimately toxic to them. The non-realistic genres of fantasy and speculative fiction allow for this severing of ties in a social order, which, in the real world, would be extremely difficult or impossible for a victim to accomplish. The development of the young characters in the case studies from oppressed to powerful mirrors the development of Atwood’s victim positions. This is probably not intentional (while Arthur Slade is Canadian, it is doubtful that he modelled Modo’s progress on the victim positions outlined by Atwood), but it is an interesting thematic
reflection in the way marginalised characters have traditionally negotiated empowerment in fiction.

Contemporary authors tend to portray colonised characters becoming powerful in predictable ways; perhaps modelling from methods of victim empowerment in the real-world, perhaps reflecting the traditions embedded in years of post-colonial narratives. The process of victim empowerment remains fairly constant in each of the case studies. Empowerment does not, as discussed above, mean that disempowered character is portrayed taking the oppressor’s place in the hierarchy. In the YA case studies examined in this thesis, the expressions of agency portrayed by young characters are constructed as being fundamentally different from the expressions of agency modelled by adult characters. The confrontations with power holders in the narratives are a result of the young character’s portrayed opposition, and these confrontations are used in the case studies to conclude the series and establish the symbolic superiority of the young character in the fictional social hierarchy. This reveals an encouraging model for the child reader in terms of the child/adult relationship.

Confrontations with power holders

As discussed above, of the three case studies I examined two of the protagonists are portrayed as engaging in a violent uprising against the adults, while the third is portrayed disengaging from the power hierarchy that commodifies and oppresses young people. Despite these different approaches, the characters in each narrative are portrayed confronting the institution through a dialogue-based recognition of their maltreatment. In doing this, they hold the power holders accountable for the disempowerment of younger characters. Interestingly, while the institutions are often toppled or subverted in the young protagonists’ quest for power, the sources of
domestic disempowerment are frequently left unaddressed (or addressed with ambiguous results). Despite the importance of domestic disempowerment to each protagonist’s narrative arc, and its place in the overall narrative as underlying and supporting institutional disempowerment, the narrative conclusions tend to focus more heavily on the institutionally-based disempowerment.

Harry Potter is shown having conversations with both Dumbledore and Voldemort at the conclusion of *Deathly Hallows* which run several pages long and draw together several narrative threads. This dialogue signifies the protagonist’s apparent shift towards empowerment. His ability to engage with his oppressors on an intellectual level demonstrates his equal status. Harry’s relationship with the Dursleys, however, is portrayed as tenuously resolved at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*. Harry is shown reconciling with his cousin Dudley, but his relationship with his aunt and uncle remains so strained that they do not wish him luck in the upcoming war or express their concern for his safety. JK Rowling has stated in interviews (*J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*, 2007) that Dudley and Harry exchange Christmas cards, but overall the Dursleys appear to simply exit the narrative. In this case Harry is not represented as being given the opportunity to discuss his maltreatment with them as he did with Dumbledore and Voldemort, and the narrative thread of his domestic abuse is left open.

It could be argued that Modo does, in fact, find closure with his domestic oppressor because he is shown cutting himself off from Mr. Socrates in *Island of Doom*. There is, however, the problem of the institution and the home environment being so difficult to differentiate in the context of this narrative. While Modo’s portrayed resignation from the Permanent Association does signal the closure of that narrative thread, the father/son relationship remains somewhat intact with Modo stating during narration that
he will return to Mr. Socrates someday. The implication here is that the characters will eventually reconcile. There is therefore very little in the narrative action to suggest closure for the protagonist in the domestic context, because the implication is that the closure will come after the narrative closes, which the reader is free to speculate over.

Katniss’s portrayed domestic neglect is only briefly addressed after *The Hunger Games*, when the sudden windfall of wealth, which results from her victory during the Games, removes the financial pressures on her family. Katniss is represented taking steps to make amends with her mother, but these steps do not result in reconciliation between the two characters. In *Mockingjay*, Prim is killed and Katniss is shown exhibiting symptoms of post-traumatic stress. The narration does not mention Katniss’s mother during the several chapters following Prim’s murder, despite her mother’s characterisation being constructed as primarily concerned with grief at the loss of loved ones. Katniss and her mother speak when Katniss begins to recover from her shock, and it is revealed that her mother has taken work in a different district. There is no portrayed attempt, on the part of either character, to support the other or salvage their relationship. There is no closure to that plot thread in the narrative; the relationship between Katniss and her mother is represented as falling apart in the wake of Katniss’s violent conclusion to the main narrative thread of institutional oppression.

Narratively speaking, each case study builds a strong relationship between the domestic maltreatment and institutional disempowerment suffered by the protagonists. There does, however, appear to be a greater emphasis in contemporary YA narratives towards toppling regimes than in micro-managing family support systems. This could be the result of the adult author’s pre-occupation with social commentary, or a desire to avoid the potential pitfalls of offering alternative solutions to domestic abuse. Perhaps it is
just easier, from a narrative perspective, to portray the protagonist externalising their troubles onto the institution rather than spending chapters of exposition analysing and addressing the emotional issues underlying domestic abuse in the fictional setting. These questions are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that the case studies appear, for want of a better word, neater as a result of the protagonists’ decisions to place their domestic abuse as secondary to the institutionalised disempowerment suffered by young characters.

The Mother

It is interesting that each case study portrays the mother as being instrumental to the young character’s growth. The presence (or absence) of the mother is central to the thematic concerns of the narrative, regardless of the gender of the protagonist or author. Motherhood, as a social and cultural concept, is frequently constructed in fiction (both YA and adult lit) as being a source of conflict, protection, or abuse (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2012; 1998). In YA fiction in particular, the mother is often portrayed as being nurturing, understanding and protective, or destructive. Real-world research into mother/child relationships places a greater emphasis on the mother (as opposed to the father or masculine spouse) as the primary nurturer of the child, and therefore largely responsible for their growth and development into healthy citizens (Borovoy & Ghodsee, 2012; Greenwald, 2005). Given the Western world’s fixation on the mother/child relationship as being paramount to the future health and wellbeing of the child, it is unsurprising that mothers are often constructed in YA literature as being central to the development of the young protagonist’s eventual acquisition of power.

As discussed in the Literature Review, the mother is often constructed in Western culture as being the main caregiver of young people, and therefore the parent who is
most responsible for the development of youth into useful citizens. James McGregor Burns (1978) discusses the importance of the relationship between mothers and young leaders through hindsight:

The most common experience of humankind is close association with a parent or parents during the first several years of life. We can generalize across cultures about this experience that exists everywhere despite extended kinship systems in many cultures. The mother or mother-substitute, the chief nurturant figure, is the main object of identification and attachment (p. 81)

Burns (1978) goes on to discuss the importance of the relationship between mother and child in the lives of several well-known power-wielders, including Adolf Hitler. The preoccupation with motherhood in contemporary narratives, particularly narratives directed towards young readers, is not surprising given their apparent links with real-world power holders and their impact on society.

As discussed during the *The Hunger Games* case study chapter, motherhood is frequently portrayed positively in YA fiction – at least as a potential state of being for female protagonists. Gazi Islam’s (2009) work on leadership narratives in Disney films notes that the mother figure is crucial to the development of empowered protagonists because she is at the forefront of the protagonist’s story. These narratives, as part of the Disney oeuvre, portray a traditional ideal of family and the relationships between family members, and so the presentation of the mother as being at the forefront of a character’s life is in line with the traditional ideal of the mother as matriarch or head nurturer of the family.

There is, however, a tendency in YA narratives to draw from the folklore tradition of the mother as the source of the young protagonist’s problems, or the catalyst for their
desire for empowerment. The mother, both in folklore and in contemporary YA literature, wields significant power over the young protagonist’s life. Maureen Crago’s (1997) work on homeless youth in YA texts, while not representing recent research, is important because it notes a shift in narratives for young people: “[o]ne begins to wonder if the fear traditionally generated by stepmothers in children’s books has not been replaced by dread of Mum’s latest boyfriend” (p. 39). Crago’s choice of words is very interesting because it recognises that, while the father in folklore was very rarely demonised for his part in bringing a wicked stepmother into the home, the mother in contemporary narratives is often blamed for introducing the threat of ‘the latest boyfriend’.

Many YA narratives utilise this plot device to generate conflict. Rainbow Rowell’s (2013) acclaimed *Eleanor and Park* follows a young female protagonist whose mother is in an abusive relationship. While the stepfather is clearly the antagonist in this scenario, most of Eleanor’s frustrations are portrayed as being levelled toward the mother for failing to remove her children from a toxic environment. This gender bias is probably the result of patriarchal Western ideologies that favour the male abuser over the female victim, but a complete analysis of this potentially causal relationship is beyond the scope of this thesis. The mother’s constructed position as nurturer and protector in Western culture means that when she does not perform these gendered expectations, she is portrayed as being ultimately to blame for any damage done to her children. The relationship between mothers and their children, as shown in the case studies examined in this thesis, is crucial to the growth of the protagonists. This is despite differences in genre, gender of protagonist, and the gender of the author.
While Katniss, as a female character written by a female author, is shown to have a complex relationship with mothers and motherhood, Harry Potter’s female author creates an idealised mother in Lily Potter, whose early death before the events of the narrative prevent the protagonist from becoming disenchanted with her. This is interesting given the significance of Harry’s eventual disenchantment with his father when he is shown memories of James Potter bullying Severus Snape in *Order of the Phoenix*. Harry’s relationship with the various father figures in the narrative (Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore, Remus Lupin, etc) are portrayed as becoming complicated as more information about these characters’ backstories are introduced. There is no such complication in Harry’s memory of his mother. It is very interesting to see this construction of motherhood from a female author, particularly when other female authors, notably Suzanne Collins in *The Hunger Games*, represent the relationship between mother and daughter as one of suspicion and neglect. I would argue that this is the result of the gender of the protagonists. While Harry is male, and is thus constructed as being more concerned with learning manhood and masculinity from the other male characters in the narrative (Nilson, 2012), Katniss is female. Her relationship with femininity and motherhood is represented as being learnt from her relationship with her mother. As her mother is portrayed as the original source of Katniss’s disempowerment in the narrative, Katniss’s relationship with femininity and motherhood is constructed negatively.

*The Hunchback Assignments*, written by male author Arthur Slade, is mainly concerned with the father/son relationship represented between Modo and Mr. Socrates, however there are numerous references and allusions throughout the narrative to Modo’s desire for a mother figure. This is initially expressed in the first chapters of the first novel, when Modo is shown shifting his face to mimic Mrs. Finchley’s dead son. Mrs.
Finchley is referenced throughout the series as Modo’s surrogate mother, and Mr. Socrates is portrayed as blaming her influence for Modo’s apparent soft-heartedness. The desire for control over Modo’s sensitive nature is represented in the narrative as being at odds with Mr. Socrates’ own fatherly affection for the character, and Mr. Socrates’ ability to send Mrs. Finchley away and cut off communication between her and Modo indicates his power over them both. The narrative thread of Modo’s desire for a mother culminates in *Island of Doom* when Modo fights the Clockwork Guild to rescue his biological mother from experimentation. Modo’s resignation from the Permanent Association and open rebellion against Mr. Socrates is portrayed in the final act of *Island of Doom* following a scene where Modo introduces himself to his mother, who rejects him as the work of the devil. Symbolically speaking, there is a clear relationship between the character’s represented interest in a nurturing mother figure and his attachment to Mr. Socrates as his father figure; and his rejection by one appears, from a linear narrative perspective, to influence his decision to detach himself from the other.

There appears to be a clear causal relationship between the mother character and the revelation and reclamation of the young character’s power. *Harry Potter* portrays the nurturing power of the mother as being stronger than the most powerful dark magic. In the *Harry Potter* series, the loss of Harry’s mother has a direct and lasting effect on the character and his decision-making processes. Harry’s decision to die for his friends in *Deathly Hallows* is shown to be a reflection of Lily Potter’s sacrifice in his infancy, and the resulting protection which this sacrifice offers the citizens of the Wizarding world is portrayed as allowing Harry to confront Voldemort directly without fearing the loss of innocent life.
The power of a mother’s love is also made evident in the narrative through the character of Narcissa Malfoy, Draco Malfoy’s mother. During *Deathly Hallows*, Harry is shown faking his own death after being attacked by Voldemort. Narcissa checks his pulse and, instead of alerting the other Death Eaters that he is alive, asks Harry whether Draco was alive the last time Harry saw him. When Harry replies in the affirmative, Narcissa is shown telling Voldemort that Harry is dead. This decision protects Harry from further attacks and allows him to take Voldemort by surprise later in the chapter. This particular scene reiterates the protective, nurturing nature of a mother’s love, which is typical of representations of mothers in the series. There is a direct link in the *Harry Potter* series between a mother’s love and the child’s power, and one of the greatest mistakes which Voldemort makes, by his own admission, is failing to recognise that power.

There is also, within the narratives, a clear distinction between the nurturing, empowering love demonstrated by Narcissa Malfoy and Lily Potter, and the destructive, coddling, suffocating love represented by Molly Weasley and Petunia Dursley. The latter two characters are portrayed as being needlessly protective, and this protection is portrayed as leading to the further disempowerment of their children. Molly Weasley’s children are shown to be ignorant of several key pieces of knowledge during the war, and their understanding of the world is limited to the point where they are shown to engage in the same blind racism as the antagonists in the narrative: “Ron made a valiant effort to get up again, but fell back with a whimper of pain. Lupin made towards him, looking concerned, but Ron gasped, ‘Get away from me, werewolf!’” (*PoA* p. 253, emphasis in the original).
This internalised racism is demonstrated by Molly Weasley herself when, in *Order of the Phoenix*, she is portrayed as horrified that her husband is sharing a room with a werewolf – despite her mutually supportive relationship with Remus Lupin: “‘A werewolf?’ whispered Mrs Weasley, looking alarmed. ‘Is he safe in a public ward? Shouldn’t he be in a private room?’ ‘It’s two weeks till full moon,’ Mr Weasley reminded her quietly.” (*OotP* pp. 431-432). Molly Weasley is portrayed as overprotective of her children, and as having home schooled them for the first eleven years of their lives, and so the racist behaviour of her son can be linked back to her depicted opinions and reactions to otherness and marginalised characters throughout the narrative (Seymour, 2012).

The series also constructs Petunia Dursley’s coddling of her son Dudley as being directly responsible for his most unappealing character traits: his propensity towards bullying, denial of his own obesity, and his desire for instant gratification: “Dudley began to cry loudly. In fact, he wasn’t really crying, it had been years since he’d really cried, but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted” (*PS* p. 23). During *Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore tells the Dursleys that they have inflicted “appalling damage” (*HBP* p. 57) on Dudley. This dialogue is framed in a discussion of Harry’s maltreatment at the Dursley’s hands, and indicates that, from Dumbledore’s perspective as the Socratic figure in the narrative, neglect and cruelty is less damaging to a child than overbearing coddling.

Unlike Lily and Narcissa, who are representatives of nurturing maternal love in the series, Petunia and Molly are portrayed in the narrative as being unnecessarily protective. Their protective character traits aid in the subsequent disempowerment of their children; Molly by raising her children with a limited understanding of the world
which leads to their internalised racism, and Petunia by refusing to censure her son’s less desirable traits. This distinction demonstrates the clear separation within the narrative between different types of motherly love and their portrayed effect on the empowerment of various young characters. A mother’s love, when tempered by distance, is represented in the narrative as allowing for the development of an autonomous young character.

_The Hunger Games_, with both a female protagonist and a female author, has the most overt examination of motherhood of the case studies examined in this thesis. Not only is Katniss’s relationship with her mother crucial to the acquisition of the hunting skills which keep Katniss alive during the Hunger Games, Katniss herself acts as a symbolic mother to her sister and the younger tributes. Katniss’s feminist care ethic requires her to extend a duty of care to perceived dependants. This is triggered by her motherly connection with younger girls, and the more the character cares during the course of the series, the more powerful she becomes. As the series progresses, and Katniss is portrayed as negotiating the symbolic nature of motherhood (her ‘pregnancy’ during _Catching Fire_ and subsequent ‘miscarriage’ in _Mockingjay_), her relationship with the concept of motherhood becomes strained. At the end of the series, Katniss exercises her newfound agency by having children. This physical manifestation of the power she holds as a woman and mother indicates her separation from the oppressive regime of the Capitol.

The case studies examined in this thesis demonstrate a symbolic link throughout the series between the mother figure and the young protagonist’s empowerment. This link appears to transcend the character’s gender and the gender of the author, although the link is more overt in the female-written, female-driven narratives. I would argue that
this is a result of female authors consuming more female-centred narratives than male authors. There is empirical evidence to suggest that men are less likely to consume female-authored texts than women (Swinn, 2014; Flood, 2014). Male authors do frequently produce women-centred texts, with female protagonists and antagonists, but female authors who do the same outnumber them. It stands to reason that female authors would produce work that represents their lived experience and privilege their own perspective as much as possible.

The narrative connection between mothers and youth empowerment could be read as the young protagonist needing an adult’s (mother’s) power to empower themselves, but I would argue that the mother *facilitates* growth which would have occurred over the course of time. The ability of the young character to grow and develop is not solely dependent on the position of the mother in the character’s narrative arc, but the symbolic power of the mother does create an opportunity for the young character to act. The case studies examined in this thesis use the mother’s position in the narrative to create a narrative arc that is conducive to the growth and development of the victimised young protagonist.

This is interesting from this thesis’s perspective because it demonstrates a pre-occupation on the part of the adult author with the environment in which a young character is raised. Mothers and motherhood are symbolically representative of nurturing and protection in these narratives. By portraying them as being the catalyst for a young character’s power, the adult author is portraying these traits as being desirable in the development of a young person’s autonomy and empowerment. They are entering the ‘between space’ of the text and modelling a relationship between the young
characters and their caregivers as either being supportive or destructive; with the consequences of both being made clear in the arc of the child character’s growth.

**Meeting the reader online**

When Melrose (2012a; 2012b) writes about the ‘between space’, he is referring to the text; that is, the narratives presented to young readers by adult authors as an opportunity to engage and enter a joint exploration of the world. This ‘between space’ extends beyond the text, in some cases, to the relationship forged between the adult author and the young reader through other media: notably, the Internet. The online environment is widely accepted as the primary domain of youth (Curwood et al, 2013; Wilkinson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006), and provides scope for a unique, almost collaborative relationship between readers and producers of texts (Seymour, 2014b).

YA authors recognise, as pointed out in Lili Wilkinson’s (2011) online article *A Generation of True Writers*, that contemporary teenage readers tend to be more active creatively than previous generations. The invention and increased use of the Internet in recent decades has allowed young people to connect with other artists and share their work with the online community (Curwood et al, 2013; Wilkinson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). Wilkinson (2011) writes that young readers do not only review books online, but they want to engage with them in creative and collaborative ways. Essentially, they take work created *for* them, and claim ownership of it by reimagining or extending it however they choose (Curwood et al, 2013; Wilkinson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006).

John Green (2012), author of the critically acclaimed *The Fault in Our Stars* engages directly with his audience through a weekly YouTube channel called *Vlogbrothers*. Green’s engagement with his audience allows him direct access to the art and fanfiction, which his novels inspire. In 2012, he featured fan versions of the cover of
The Fault in Our Stars in one of his videos (Green, 2011), and this recognition of his teenage fans’ creative talent prompted his publisher to rerelease his earlier novel, An Abundance of Katherines (2006), in 2012 with a fan-produced cover. This is a brilliant example of an adult author working in collaboration with his younger fans in order to empower them through traditional publishing. This research is only in its beginning stages because we do not know yet, as a culture, how much the reader’s ability to engage with texts on a transformative level will affect textual production by mainstream publishers.

The authors of the case studies discussed in this thesis are also heavily involved with the fan communities that have sprung up around their works. While Rowling does not make many public appearances, her engagement with readers of the Harry Potter series has led to more sophisticated and in-depth narrative engagement among young fans.

The adaptation of the books into films, the opening of the Harry Potter World theme park in Orlando, Florida, and the launch of Pottermore.com, an online gaming community where fans act out the books, are the result of fans craving more of the fantasy world created by Rowling. Pottermore.com, in particular, is an online space where Rowling uploads character backstories, historical tidbits and brief explanations of the characters’ future not published in the Harry Potter series in order to satisfy the fans’ desire for more information to engage with.

By ‘engage’, I do not mean that fans blindly consume the information presented to them. Melissa Anelli (2008) notes that fans who did not agree with certain revelations made by Rowling are quick to dismiss them as author commentary which does not affect their personal reading of the texts. Speaking particularly of the revelation of Dumbledore’s homosexuality, Anelli writes: “[i]t had been applauded and decried,
reactions of all stripes filled my in-box” (Anelli, 2008, p. 326). Even facts established in the books themselves, such as the romantic relationship between Ron and Hermione, remain to this day hotly contested among fans who preferred Harry and Hermione (Maait, 2014) or, controversially, Draco Malfoy and Hermione (Melissa, 2012). Interestingly, when Remus Lupin’s sexuality was confirmed as heterosexual on Pottermore.com it was met with anger by many fans who had interpreted the character as bisexual (Aston, 2014). Rowling may provide the source material for these debates, but the young fans themselves have claimed the ultimate power of interpretation over the series.

Suzanne Collins, in a similar manner to John Green, engages with her young fans via social media outlets such as Twitter and her personal website. Fans of The Hunger Games often approach her through the equalising media of social media in order to question her about plot points and point out typos in their books for her to pass on to the publisher. It is interesting that this particular relationship between the adult author and the young fans exists almost entirely within cyber space because the online persona created by internet users acts as an almost complete individual separate from the user who created it (Seymour, Roth & Flegel, 2015).

What the online community does, essentially, is create an alternative space where traditional social barriers such as age, gender and race are secondary to the user’s ability to engage with the various platforms. Both the young fans and the adult author occupy the online space as ‘textual bodies’ described by Chris Ashford (2009), in his paper on researching online sexualities, as being constructed as entirely separate from the physical body. The textual bodies produced by younger Internet users do not have the same limitations as their physical bodies, and they are free to interact with their
favourite authors as equals; or, at the very least, as admirers of an author engaging within the reader’s preferred domain (Seymour, 2014b).

Jenkins (2006) argues that the Internet is the domain of youth – where young users can engage actively with texts which interest them in creative ways, and disseminate their engagements to the wider online community. Interestingly, he notes that fan interpretation in the online environment is almost exclusively based in textual analysis rather than author intention: “explanations must first be sought within the fictional world of the narrative before resorting to explanations based on extratextual knowledge of authorship of the production process” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 126). The online community, where young people engage through their preferred textual body in a space where knowledge is more useful than age, and allows young readers to engage primarily with each other and the text. The adult author, in this case, acts as a secondary source, or, in some cases, a textual body with insight into the canonical world that young readers may wish to engage with. The author’s presence in this space does not ultimately affect the way readers choose to engage, but it does allow her to see how they are engaging and potentially garner insight into the various nuances which young readers gleaned from her work. The online space, participatory by nature (Jenkins, 2006), creates a collaborative atmosphere allowing producers of texts to engage directly with consumers as equals (Seymour, Roth & Flegel, 2015).

The contemporary children’s literature industry is evolving to accommodate more active readers of texts. There is no longer an assumption that the reader will consume the text as it is presented to them; they expect to be allowed to engage with the author, discuss the work, and make changes to it if they choose. Children’s literature academics can no longer rely on their preconceived notions of child readers when discussing
agency in fiction, because child readers and the publishing environment is rapidly changing. Rather than prescribing aetonormativity in fiction, authors and publishers must contend with young readers who claim ownership of texts, and express this ownership by intervening, or acting as ‘prosumers’ who can disregard or appropriate any part of the text they choose (Seymour, Roth & Flegel, 2015).

It would appear that despite conclusions among children’s and YA literature academics that young readers are passive (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2009; 2002; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009), contemporary readers are remarkably well placed to engage creatively and critically with texts. Since the case studies examined in this thesis construct youth activity, and the examination and intervention in aetonormative practices which marginalise them, the contemporary trend towards the presumption of a reader’s ownership of the text is particularly telling when speculating about the link between textual representation and real-world youth practices.

Arthur Slade’s engagement with his young readers took an interesting turn in early 2013 when he launched an Indiegogo.com campaign to crowd-fund a continuation of The Hunchback Assignments in graphic novel form (Kickstarter, 2013). Before this, he had limited his engagement with young readers to online social media (mainly Twitter and Facebook) and Skype-chatting with schools where his books were used as set texts. The crowd-funding campaign placed power directly in the hands of his readers; they would decide whether he would continue the story by funding the project.

Crowd-funding has become a viable option for artists who wish to expand their audience base but do not have the capital to do so. Sites such as Indiegogo.com and Kickstarter.com allow consumers to fund projects which they find interesting, and in return they receive ‘perks’ such as mentions in the acknowledgements of the finished
product, free copies of the product, or, in the case of Slade’s campaign, t-shirts, mugs and Skype-chats with the author. Slade exceeded his $15,000 goal by $2,631 in April 2013 (Kickstarter, 2013), and when he launched a second campaign on Kickstarter.com (aiming for $2,000, to be used for better quality hardback covers and a bonus for the artist who drew the comic) in October 2013, he exceeded his goal within the first five days (Kickstarter, 2013).

Crowd-funding relies directly on the consumers of media. They hold the ultimate power in these settings, particularly on Kickstarter.com, where the site’s terms and conditions stipulate that the campaigners must reach their monetary goal before the funding period ends or the campaign is declared a failure and the money collected is returned to the customers. For Slade to entrust his readers with the continuation of The Hunchback Assignments is a clear indication of the relationship between contemporary authors and readers; one which recognises the mutual experience of the text and the power of the reader to ultimately choose whether or not they wish to engage. Young people may require assistance from their parents or guardians, particularly if they are attempting to offer financial assistance to writers online, but the young reader’s desire to assist in the development of these financial campaigns (to the point of securing financial backing from the adults in their lives) is crucial to their success.

The relationship described above which contemporary young people share with texts is reminiscent of the relationship Melrose (2012a; 2012b) describes in Here Comes the Bogeyman; one of collaboration and joint experience. The young reader is neither passive nor silent in the contemporary fictional discourse, and their use of texts as platforms for creativity and critical engagement reflect this. Adult YA authors frequently engage directly with the fans of their work, and they are aware of the
relationship teen readers have with these narratives. This means an acknowledgment on the part of the author that even if they intend for aetonormative ideals to be embedded in the stories consumed by young people, the reader may not engage with, enjoy, or even notice these themes.

Beauvais (2012a) argues that the aetonormativity present at the core of YA romance ensures that the reader is aware that their power of choice is “limited in scope” (p. 74), but even Beauvais admits that “resistance of even the most committed teenage fans” (p. 75) to the conclusion of the popular Twilight saga demonstrates some measure of reader control. Beauvais (2012a) also makes the excellent point that the adult author’s political agenda is ever present in books for young people, particularly in stories where the child character represents a political change. As discussed in my case study chapters, fantasy and speculative fiction frequently portray political systems that can be changed as a result of the child character’s actions. If, however, the young character is acting as a manifestation of the adult author’s political agenda, then the young reader could be indoctrinated towards that political ideology. Beauvais (2012a) notes that these narratives construct youth as a “territory for social change” but extends that territory to “legitimise what is essentially an adult political agenda” (p.63).

While this may be true, I would like to make two crucial counter-points. First, that the young reader may not necessarily recognise the author’s political authority or agree with their point of view. Beauvais (2012a) notes this phenomenon herself when discussing how Twilight fans generally responded negatively to the glorification of traditional gender roles in the series. Fans of the Harry Potter series have been known to criticise the heteronormativity present in the narrative, as well as the clear marginalisation of characters of colour (Shoker, 2013). Young readers are politically
engaged through the Internet and the contemporary push towards political correctness (Tosenberger, 2008; Thomas, 2007), and so the presumption that the reader will agree with the political themes of a given text assumes a measure of blind submission to new political ideas which is demonstrably not the case. Nodelman (2008) and Melrose (2012b) both make the point that the adult author cannot know how a text will be received or whether their reader will understand and engage with every issue therein. All they can do is hope that the reader will respond favourably to any agenda they may or may not have – just as authors for adults must hold a similar hope. The young reader’s approval of the political ideologies embedded in the work is never guaranteed.

Second, although the political agenda may be the adult author’s own, the power of change still remains with the young character. This, as we have seen in postcolonial theory and representations of colonised people (Delgado, 1997; Rushdy, 1992; Sekora, 1987), is the crucial point. Political agendas never remain the same for very long, as demonstrated in the clear thematic shifts in fiction decade by decade (Gittins, 2008), and although there is evidence to suggest that books read by young people do impact their political thought, this indicates an intellectual engagement with multiple political ideas, rather than the blind internalisation of every political idea offered to them.

As discussed by Gierzynski and Eddy (2013) there is no empirical evidence to suggest that the political themes in YA fiction are directly responsible for the political views of readers. Aetonormativity may be at the core of the political change in books, but as long as young people see themselves as the agents of that change I would argue that the actual changes themselves are not as important to the overall development of the reader. Some readers can and do find the politics of the fiction they read fascinating, as demonstrated by the number of online forums dedicated to the discussion and
appreciation of these ideas (YA Bucket, 2014; Chaos Reads, 2014; Chronicles, 2014). The fact that they can engage with these ideas in a focused, sophisticated manner demonstrates their ability to consume without succumbing to the political pressure of the absent author. It is, after all, the young character which gives readers their window to the fictional world; not, generally speaking, the political themes of the work.

I do not argue that popular culture has no effect on the politics and personal beliefs of the people who consume it. Rather, I argue that to assume that popular culture dictates these politics and personal beliefs reduces the consumer, no matter their age, to an automaton. Doing so is an act of disempowerment on the part of the adult academic, and is not reflected in either the social context of contemporary readers (engaging, as they do, in transformative practices, critical analysis, and demonstrations of ownership) or the fiction they consume. Popular culture, particularly books engaged with by young people, portray a vast array of radically different political themes, which are the result of each author’s personal context and the inherent ability of the non-realistic genres to unpack sophisticated ideas. Gierzynski and Eddy (2013) write that although evidence suggests that the political world is developed through popular culture media, in order for change to really take place these political agendas must be supported by various other media or forms of socialisation in order for the consumer to be indoctrinated. Political socialisation does not happen by osmosis. It happens over the course of many years and involves the transmission of cultural values from a number of sources.

It may appear that I have digressed from discussing YA literature that empowers the reader to arguing that the literature’s power is limited because the reader has the right to disregard it or claim ownership of it in ways which go against the original intention of the author. It seems a juxtaposition of ideas – that the text can simultaneously empower
the reader, but is not powerful enough to disempower the reader. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that readers would be more resistant to texts that actively seek to undermine them although, like Beauvais (2012a), I believe there is strong anecdotal evidence to support the readers’ distaste for direct attempts to meddle with their chosen ideologies. However, considering the political and social context of the contemporary young reader, it makes sense that stories empowering fictional young people would have more sway in their political socialisation because they are part of a greater shift in the culture towards youth engagement. Contemporary fiction does not trigger political change – it reflects it.

My analysis of youth re-empowerment in contemporary YA texts has yielded interesting results; but even more interesting are the conclusions and speculations which can be drawn from these results. Youth re-empowerment in YA demonstrates that, instead of the powerful controlling the powerless, the fiction constructs a relationship between the experienced and inexperienced as potentially being one of joint learning and mutual support. By demonstrating this relationship in the fiction, the adult author is creating a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse which privileges adult power. This counter-narrative is engaged with by young readers with a level of sophistication that transcends physical spaces and requires a level of erudition that has rarely been seen before.

The young reader wields text as naturally as they wield spoken language (Curwood et al, 2013), and they approach YA texts with an expectation of active engagement (Tosenberger, 2008; Wilkinson, 2011). As such, the adult author is meeting the child in the ‘between space’ which is represented by the narrative, and creates a relationship which engages the reader as a sophisticated equal.
Conclusion(s)

... because the child that comes to the book is already an intelligent person and it is the writer’s job to know that the writing is not about me-the-author, but about engaging with them-the-readers (or the read-to) in exploring the connections

Melrose, 2011, p. 62

The main controversy in the children’s and YA literature discourse is the lack of (official) youth participation. As discussed in the Literature Review, the analysis of contemporary texts is often considered secondary to the sociological conclusions which can be drawn from them. There are many exceptions to this, but critics who do examine contemporary fiction often tend to focus on issues outside of the child/adult relationship – such as gender studies (Miller, 2012; Bean & Harper, 2007), eco-criticism (Guerra, 2009) and queer theory (Bittner, 2010). Instead, conclusions about modern youth and the author’s relationship with young readers are drawn from how they are constructed in texts published many decades ago (Nikolajeva, 2009; 2008; Rudd, 2013). This is a fallacy. The belief that texts which were produced, in Nikolajeva’s (2009) case, over a hundred years ago still remain relevant in a discussion about the construction of modern young people ignores the immense social and political change which has occurred since then. At best, the non-contemporary literature engaged with by many children’s and YA literature academics should demonstrate how far the genre has come, how it has evolved from its morality tale roots, and how young people have been constructed as more powerful and capable as the decades passed.

In this thesis, I have offered an in-depth analysis of the construction of youth disempowerment and subsequent re-empowerment through various narrative means. I utilised New Critical methodologies which were developed from the 1940s onwards. While no longer new, these methodologies are still relevant to the field of children’s
and YA literature because they draw from both reader-, text- and author-oriented theories of textual analysis to provide a more inclusive and all-encompassing approach to the interpretation of texts. It offers a way to take into account both the reader’s interpretive power, the author’s intentional construction of the text, and the textual clues which shape meaning-making.

With particular emphasis on narrative constructions of agency and power, I analysed my YA case studies to determine: how young people are disempowered; how they are manipulated by institutions to remain powerless; and how they are portrayed becoming powerful over the course of a series. This analysis approached each case study with a relevant theoretical framework of power in mind, in order to gage the particular strengths and exploitable weaknesses of the different protagonists and the genres in which they are constructed. This hermeneutics-based philosophy towards analysis demonstrates the narratives’ position in the wider genre of YA fiction, by linking them through the discourse of power and agency, while recognising that they exist as whole texts in and of themselves. Essentially, while each narrative portrays the young character becoming powerful, each narrative constructs this empowerment differently because the protagonists’ age, gender and historical positioning is different. They are separate texts connected by the same theme: youth power.

The case study chapters above examined each YA series through a different theoretical lens: Harry Potter through Plato’s Cave allegory, with philosophical/mathematical Game Theory as a basis; The Hunger Games through body politics and feminist ethics of care; and The Hunchback Assignments through the spectre of the face, which is grounded in postcolonial theory. My analysis demonstrated the progression of young characters from positions of disempowerment to positions of power. The Findings &
Discussion chapter drew the three case studies together by demonstrating the various thematic links between the series and discussing these findings. Of particular interest is the way the narratives construct youth empowerment to be reminiscent of Atwood’s (1972) victim positions; with each character demonstrating a clear progression through the positions to the state of creative non-victimhood. While probably not a deliberate decision on the part of the authors, the presence of real-world relationships of power in YA fantasy and speculative fiction is a telling indication of how young characters have been constructed in various adult media as being ‘colonised’ (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2002; 2009). It is also interesting to note how the expressions of youth power are constructed as being fundamentally different from expressions of adult power. While adult characters are portrayed as requiring the subordination of youth in order to maintain control, young characters are shown taking power without subordinating other characters. This counter-narrative to adult power portrays the potential for mutual support and engagement positively, while rendering the manipulative, damaging power strategies of adult power holders negatively.

Despite a linguistic shift towards referring to young characters as adults in the narrative, this is not an indication that the child has joined the ranks of their oppressors and forgotten their previous powerless state. Indeed, the fact that each of the case studies concludes with a dialogue-based confrontation with the oppressive power holders indicates a portrayed desire for understanding; the young characters hold their oppressors accountable while at the same time distancing themselves from the original power holder’s behaviours so that they will not behave in the same way.

The clear difference between youth-targeted narratives and adult-targeted narratives indicates how representation of young characters is important to different audiences,
with youth-driven narratives almost expecting the empowerment of young characters. Authors create these narratives for youth engagement, and in doing this they create a space for the reader to examine the various themes and issues presented in a text. This is frequently extended to engagements in the youth-driven online environment, where the nature of the space as being separate from the physical body creates an assumption of equality (Seymour, 2014b).

The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that young characters are portrayed in YA fantasy and speculative fiction as actively engaged in political and social discourse. While the adult characters are originally constructed as repressing or controlling the young characters, moulding them into weapons or pawns to be used for their purposes, this is constructed negatively and contrasted by the portrayals of youth power towards the end of each series. While academics (Nikolajeva, 2009; Zipes, 2002; 2009; Nodelman, 2008) have argued that the young reader is passive and submissive, the fiction itself constructs youth as a site of enormous potential for social and political change. The narrative relationship between adult characters and young characters reflects and subverts the narrative as it is outlined by children’s literature academics. By representing the child as an active agent, the adult author is entering the ‘between space’ of the text by engaging the reader with models of youth in a position of empowerment.

Aetonormative ideals expressed in fiction (i.e., the subordination of young people ‘for their own good’) are represented in YA fantasy and speculative fiction as being stifling and ultimately dangerous to the emotional and physical wellbeing of young protagonists. The case studies complicate the relationship between fictional adults and fictional young people by representing it as simultaneously nurturing and destructive.
The real-world relationship between adults and young people appears to follow a similar pattern (Holdsworth, 2005; Jacobs, 2005). Each of the case studies diverts from the real-world experience of the young reader, however, by establishing the young character as the ultimate superior in the relationship; reworking the power hierarchy of the fictional world to accommodate the agency and autonomy that the young character wishes to express. Despite being non-realistic texts, there is a clear theme of empowerment and rejection of aetonormativity present, which many academics have failed to account for in their research.

As discussed in the Literature Review, much of children’s and YA literature academia is preoccupied with the question of the adult author’s power over young readers. Ultimately it could be argued that the adult’s ideal of normativity remains present because they are, after all, writing stories which must reflect their context and understanding of the world in some way – be it consciously or subconsciously. Jack Zipes’s (2002; 2009) work serves to continually reinforce the ‘commodification’ of young people through the popular culture they consume; consumption which is heavily influenced by adults who have the financial capital to encourage or discourage reading according to their personal tastes. But some academics (Nodelman, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009) go deeper, by arguing that the reduction of the child to a blank slate for adults to mould is a deliberate construction on the part of the adult producers.

Perry Nodelman’s (2008) The Hidden Adult identifies the adult author as the power holder in the adult/child relationship by virtue of their age. Adults produce the texts which young readers engage with: “children’s literature is written by adults and that it is what it is because of how it addresses its audience, because of what adults believe children are – adult constructions of childhood” (Nodelman, 2008, p. 151). This may be
true, but Melrose’s (2012a) counterargument makes the convincing point that the young reader has the ultimate power in the relationship because they can choose not to engage with the constructions of childhood presented to them. While Nikolajeva (2009) coined the term ‘aetonormativity’ to refer to the idealised adult-centred morality which is, according to her, ever present in the text, I would argue that the author is ever present in every text, whether the text is aimed at children, young adults, or adults (despite the fact that the author ought to have metaphorically died decades ago (Barthes, p. 1968)). To argue that the author’s age indicates an intentional and unavoidable colonisation of all young people regardless of the text itself is dangerous, because it dismisses how the author constructs characters and situations, as well as how the reader interacts with the text once it is out of the author’s hands.

Authorial intent

If we engage in the intentional fallacy advocated by some children’s and YA literature academics (Nodelman, 2008; Zipes, 2002; 2009; Nikolajeva, 2008; 2009) and assume that the adult author is deliberately including aetonormative ideals in YA literature, then the demonstrations of agency and autonomy on the part of the young characters suggest that the powerful child must be considered an aetonormative ideal. This thesis has outlined the various ways that young characters are portrayed in contemporary fiction as negotiating and expressing power. Many children’s literature academics (Nikolajeva, 2009; Nodelman, 2008; Rose, 1984; Rudd, 2013; Hunt, 2005) rarely engage with contemporary literature, and so their assumptions about the intentions of adult authors are based in the history of children’s literature, when the genre was still heavily influenced by its morality tale roots.
Considering how contemporary childhood is constructed legally (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010a; 2010b), social values appear to have evolved to include the potential for young people to exercise some control over their lives. Although the majority of social changes continue to assert adult dominance over young people (Holdsworth, 2005; Jacobs, 2005) there has been a shift in recent years towards encouraging young peoples’ active engagement in issues concerning them (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010a; 2010b). By constructing young people as active and engaged in the literature marketed to them, the adult author could be attempting to insinuate these ideals into the young reader’s consciousness. By demonstrating the benefits to behaving autonomously and challenging the rule of adults, the author is essentially giving the young reader permission to act out.

It is more likely, however, that the majority of authors’ agendas are less deliberately manipulative. Many authors, such as JK Rowling and Markus Zusak, had their target audiences chosen by the publisher or the marketplace, but did not have a target audience in mind when they were writing (Anelli, 2008; Green, 2006b). In fact, several publishers originally turned down Rowling because *Philosopher’s Stone* did not fit into their children’s literature categories – being too long, too disturbing, and engaging with the ‘unpopular’ boarding school genre (Anelli, 2008). Many YA authors claim not to be writing for a particular audience, but instead find themselves writing stories which they themselves would enjoy reading, and then publishers and marketers characterise them as YA (Eaton, 2013).

Some inclination towards a particular target audience would seem likely given the general difference between portrayals of young people in texts aimed towards adults versus texts aimed towards younger readers, as discussed in the *Findings & Discussion*
chapter. The contemporary social context of adult authors is, as discussed above, favourable towards a more active representation of young people (although more social change needs to take place before young people can exercise genuine agency in the real world. The adult author could either have internalised the ideal of the powerful child or, more likely, is attempting to trial or examine the growth of young people’s power through the non-realistic mediums of YA fantasy and speculative texts in order to examine the result. Fantasy and speculative fiction allows the author to portray the young characters as being gifted with extraordinary power or skill. By drawing the child’s power to an exaggerated conclusion and then examining the result, adult authors are entering a prolonged discussion or collaboration with young readers by offering them the opportunity to engage vicariously with the kind of power wielded by their fictional counterparts.

This is in line with Harbour’s (2012) work, which describes how narratives offer a vicarious experience for young readers. I write ‘collaboration’ in the above paragraph because, despite Zipes’s (2009; 2002) assertions that the young reader is primarily a consumer with little taste or ability to distinguish between texts, empirical evidence suggests that young readers are not only actively engaged with texts on both critical and personal levels (Tosenberger, 2008; Thomas, 2007), but they are aware of their position as the target readers of certain texts and take this role very seriously (Hoffman, 2010). Hoffman (2010) writes that the child reviewers in the Spaghetti Book Club “deal yet another blow to the common image of children as a relatively ‘passive’ or vulnerable audience, by unpacking their sophisticated negotiations between real-world experience and narrative or fictional experience” (p. 238). Readers, especially young readers, have power over texts in various ways, and the contemporary adult author is aware of this
fact. The collaborative nature of contemporary narrative is particularly evident in the relationship adult authors maintain with their young readers via the Internet.

**Empowering the reader**

As discussed in the *Literature Review*, attitudes towards youth and young people have gradually changed to accommodate the construction of a more actively engaged child. Young readers approach a text, see a fictionalised young person topple a dictatorial regime or stand up against the ingrained, out-dated normativity of adults, and develop an understanding of youth power which is continually reinforced over their lifetime. This could be an active decision on the part of the author, however it is more likely that it is the reflection of the author’s context – subconscious or not – which adds appeal to powerful young characters.

As described by the postcolonial narrative theorists, colonised individuals tend to become empowered in predictable ways. Richard Delgado’s (1997) work on internalised narratives that naturalise slavery stresses the use of storytelling in maintaining a status quo in society. Those at the centre of the culture, the power holders, create stories and a shared reality that supports their superior position. Those people in positions of power do not consider their treatment of marginalised groups to be oppressive, and “[t]heir complacency – born of comforting stories – is a major stumbling block to racial progress” (Delgado, 1997, p. 239). In order to counteract this cultural maintenance of the status quo, the suppressed groups can develop counter-narratives. These counter the oppressive traditions to the dominant group by creating a story that argues against the general mindset supporting their superiority. These counter-narratives are meant to insinuate themselves into the dominant ideology and subtly work against it; turning the powerholders towards introspection. When working
directly against the stock narrative held by the powerholders in a society – children need guidance; colonisers must protect the colonised, etc. – powerholders tend to react defensively (Delgado, p. 1997).

This is where the relationship between the adult author and the young reader gets very interesting. Counter-narratives that attack the stock narrative outright cannot be targeted towards adults, because the adults would become defensive in response to these outright attacks, but children are in the state of becoming. Ordinarily the text would insinuate itself into the subconscious of the powerholders and slowly begin to assert itself. Counter-narratives are meant to not only empower the powerless or colonised, but to invite the powerholders to question their received wisdom. YA narratives make interesting counter-narratives because they appeal directly to the powerless without addressing the powerholders directly.

The powerholders, adults, establish the conversation by entering the ‘between space’ of the text. Young readers enter later. Young readers will be a part of the cultural centre eventually, unlike other marginalised groups, and so they will carry these counter-narratives into the next stage of their lives. The counter-narrative exposed in the case studies examined in this thesis portrays young people as powerful, and constructs them as taking place at the top of the social hierarchy without abusing the power they have to subordinate the next generation. The case studies construct a positive relationship between adults and children as being collaborative. As a counter-narrative to adult control, the YA genre is strong enough to empower the reader, but not strong enough to disempower them.
The next stage…

The next stage of this research would be to establish what effect these texts, and the representations of powerful young characters within these texts, have on the young reader. My aim, in analysing contemporary texts consumed by young readers, was to establish the credibility of academic arguments that adult authors use fiction to glorify adult values, and I have speculated about what this could mean for the real-world relationship between the young reader and the adult author. Before investigating whether or not the young reader is genuinely influenced by the literature, I first needed to establish how the literature represents young people. In this way, any conclusions I would draw in later research would be based in heavy textual engagement, rather than my personal biases towards the material.

The obvious follow-up to my research would be an empirical study to bring young people into the discourse, and allow them to speak to their own understanding of where young readers stand in their relationship to fiction. Given the empirical studies used to address young readers’ responses to other fictional themes such as moral traditions (Lennard, 2007; Senland & Vozzola, 2007), rape culture (Park, 2012), and the construction of identity (Francois, 2013), the fact that there is as yet no empirical data regarding themes of adult oppression of youth is a troubling irony. A qualitative study with young participants engaging with contemporary fiction would be ideal. The study would investigate whether and how much of youth empowerment in contemporary YA fiction influences young readers’ sense of agency, and to identify how this impacts on real-world negotiations of power in relationships with adults. At the moment, all we as academics have is the observed responses to texts found online.
Burns’ (1978) analysis of real-world leaders and their upbringing takes this retrospective approach by isolating moments in the histories of world leaders and drawing conclusions as to their significance based on policy decisions made later. I believe that this approach is useful, but it relies too much on the researcher’s discretion in selecting events for analysis. If we assume that the child is not a blank slate to be worked upon, but rather an active, thinking individual, then there is scope for children’s literature researchers to engage with the readers and work with them. In this way, researchers could take an empirical approach to the analysis of the relationship between the child reader and the adult author; one which references both parties, rather than drawing conclusions from assumptions made about the reader’s judgement and the author’s (supposed) intentions.

Each of my case studies employs an animal metaphor to describe the young characters. This metaphor links them in their objectification – employing animal traits to reduce the protagonist to a symbol or object – but they also symbolise their empowerment. Harry Potter dies a pawn of Dumbledore’s Game and, like a phoenix, rises again to destroy Lord Voldemort through a more co-operative Game strategy. The mockingjay is a running joke in The Hunger Games universe; the mixed-breed offspring of jabberjays, which were meant to be spies for the Capitol, and wild mockingbirds. The mockingjay is a creature the Capitol did not intend to exist, but it is too resilient to destroy. This concept carries such resonance with the people of Panem that when Katniss survives the Hunger Games by using her relationships with other tributes to her advantage, she becomes the Mockingjay. Katniss uses this power to destroy the Capitol and any other threats to the children of Panem. Modo’s ability to change his face and body are often compared to a chameleon. He can adapt and change to suit any situation, making him the perfect spy, but also separating him from a genuine connection with his peers. His
inability to find closure and a strong social centre are the crux of his character arc, and when he takes ownership of the face he was born with, he begins to develop the agency necessary to remove himself from the toxic environment of the Permanent Association. The negotiation of each protagonist between how they see themselves and how adults see them develops over the course of each series, and becomes central to their development into power and agency.
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