

Memes, magic and the making of meaning in re-visioning fantasy for young adults

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that

Memes, magic and the making of meaning

in re-visioning fantasy for young adults

is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged
by means of complete references.

M. Brown

Date

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Abstract

This thesis suggests that by reading certain innovative and even metafictional works of fantasy young adult readers may gain access to a flexible yet safe narrative space in which to confront the psychosocial crises attendant on coming of age and thereby begin the process of shaping adult identity. In exploring this possible link between reading and identity formation, particular aspects of young adult fantasy are read against what has been established as the discursive field of young adulthood and young adult literature including the work of developmental psychologists, literary critics and evolutionary philosophers in an attempt to insert the author's individual critical perceptions into 'a network of relations between storytellers, the participants whose experiences they recount, and the larger environment embedding those experiences, including the setting provided by the opportunity of storytelling itself' (David Herman, 2003a:184).

Since this is a large and contentious area of exploration, the study does not so much attempt to arrive at a definitive conclusion as to offer a series of loosely interlocking explorations of adolescent fantasy in relation to four key themes or what evolutionary psychologists such as Kate Distin (2005) refer to as meme constellations. Thus the first chapter of this thesis focuses on how characteristically postmodern techniques can allow works of young adult fantasy to complicate awareness of issues of time, space and causality; the second considers the way in which prevalent memes involving witches and witchcraft can be imaginatively re-visioned to highlight issues of gender; the third considers fantastic representations of ethnicity and how fiction can contribute to the postcolonial recovery of subordinated cultural memes; and the

final chapter focuses on retellings of Arthurian myth and how metafictional techniques may be used to encourage a divided and thus more aware mode of reading by foregrounding the constructed nature of story itself.

By suggesting ways in which fiction can promote complex interactions between young readers and adult authors, this study also hopes to show that Jacqueline Rose's ([1984] 1994:1) argument that children's literature is fundamentally flawed, having been corrupted by 'the impossible relation between adult and child' needs to be revisited in the light of new theoretical constructions of both the dynamics of power and the experience of reading itself.

Key Terms: fantasy, young adult, identity formation, meme, timeslip, alternate worlds, Jacqueline Rose, witch, indigenous fantasy, King Arthur, Diana Wynne Jones, Terry Pratchett, Ursula K. Le Guin, K. Sello Duiker, Witi Ihimaera.

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INTRODUCTION:

THE CHILD AND THE BOOK

In 'Out of a Book', an essay from her *Collected Impressions*, novelist Elizabeth Bowen (1950:267) recalls her childhood reading and comments: 'I feel certain that if I could read my way back, analytically, through the books of my childhood, the clues to everything could be found. The child lives in the book; but just as much the book lives in the child.'

Looking back on their own early reading experiences, most passionate readers are likely to experience an instinctive sympathy with Bowen's views. Children's literature critic Maria Tatar (2009:5), for instance, speaks of the books she loved as a child as both 'talismanic and Talmudic' and comments that 'in my daughter's room is a shelf holding seven tattered paperbacks, each one – as we discovered one day while contemplating the set – representing an important part of her identity'. Similarly, in his moving memoir, *The Child that Books Built*, Francis Spufford (2002:21-22) comments perceptively on the formative nature of his childhood reading by saying:

What follows is more about books than it is about me, but nonetheless it is my inward autobiography, for the words we take into ourselves help to shape us. They help form the questions we think are worth asking; they shift around the boundaries of the sayable inside us, and the related borders of what's acceptable; their potent images, calling on more in us than the responses we will ourselves to have, dart new bridges into being between our conscious and unconscious minds, between what we know we know, and the knowledge we cannot examine by thinking. They build and stretch and build again the chambers of our imagination.

To a certain extent, this thesis too is in sympathy with these writers' elegantly phrased assertions in that I hope to argue that reading selected works of post-modern fantasy may provide adolescent or young adult readers¹ with a flexible yet safe narrative space in which to confront the crises attendant on coming of age and thus initiate the process of shaping adult identity so that such books may become, in Spufford's (2002:9) words, 'part of the history of [the adult's] self-understanding'.

Nevertheless, looked at from a contemporary critical perspective, it is also quite clear that such statements need to be read with a degree of caution since confident assertions about the links between reading and identity formation often rest on decidedly problematic assumptions. In short, any self-aware critic reading the extracts with which this chapter begins will find himself or herself having to engage seriously with a number of questions, all of which tend to complicate or even undermine any individual's personal recognition of the link between reading and

¹ The question of terminology when speaking of literature written and/or marketed for those who are neither pre-pubescent children nor fully-fledged adults is a vexed one. The word 'teenager' is strictly applicable only to the years between thirteen and nineteen. 'Adolescent', on the other hand, has physiological overtones suggestive of individuals undergoing puberty, a stage conventionally associated with the years between twelve and seventeen although for girls it may begin as early as nine and for boys it may only end in the early twenties. 'Young adult' is an equally loose term. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1963, 1968) defines it as covering the period between eighteen and thirty-five, but publishers seem to use it for a target market ranging from precocious ten-year-olds to postgraduate students. 'Youth' is hardly any more precise. Aidan Chambers (2010:282) points out that this is defined by the United Nations as a term applying to those between fifteen and twenty-four and by the World Bank to those between fifteen and twenty-five. Closer to home, membership of the ANC's youth league is open to those between thirteen and thirty-five and the proposed South African youth wage subsidy applies to workers aged between eighteen and twenty-nine. In this thesis, largely to minimise monotony, all the terms listed above appear (although 'young adult' is used most frequently because it seems to have established the widest currency in relation to the kinds of books I discuss). In general, when any of these words are used it can be assumed that I mean to refer to those, whatever their chronological age, who have largely outgrown traditional children's books, but are only beginning to interact with the adult literary world and who are also likely to be ricocheting between what Aidan Chambers (2010:279) defines as the '[t]wo poles of adolescent need: the need to free oneself from parental and childhood ties that get in the way of becoming what you imagine you want to be' and 'the need to be rooted and safe, unchangingly identified as a *self* with the birth conditions of one's life – family history, genetic makeup, cultural background'.

living and thus, potentially, the central argument of my thesis. These questions can be summarised as follows: who is the child or young adult of whom the adult speaks and to what extent can that adult presume to speak for young people; what distinguishes a young adult novel from an adult one and what constitutes a 'good' young adult book; and in what sense can the young possibly be said to live in books or books in them? The rest of this chapter will be concerned with attempts to answer these questions in ways that allow for both a sceptical engagement with and a constructive reappraisal of the personal affirmations with which this chapter begins.

On a superficial level at least, the first part of the first question is relatively easily answered. Most societies recognise an age of majority at which their citizens attain the statutory rights while assuming the legal responsibilities of adulthood and it is therefore perfectly possible to classify as a child anyone who has yet to attain the seemingly more or less arbitrarily chosen age in question. Yet while such chronological rigidity has obvious practical advantages, as the preceding note on terminology demonstrates, the precision that it implies is largely illusory and requires one to ignore the considerable range of abilities likely to be manifested by any given sample of eighteen- or twenty-one-year-olds. Furthermore, expectations of the young vary dramatically not only from society to society but even from adult to adult suggesting an underlying fluidity to the concepts of childhood and young adulthood very much at odds with legal definitions of them.

In *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Philippe Ariès (1962) argues that even the concept of childhood as a distinct stage of life only gradually developed in the seventeenth century when norms of children's dress and behaviour

first began to diverge from those of adults.² His rigorous exposure of childhood as a cultural construct rather than a biological given has had profound implications for all subsequent theoretical approaches to both children and childhood studies. As Eva-Maria Metcalf (1997:51) points out, Ariès ‘renewed the debate about the status of children and adults, gave rise to a fundamental rethinking of intergenerational relationships, and cleared the way for a new social and cultural construct of the child that has affected much of the literature created for children since then’. In particular this renewed debate has encouraged the interrogation of the image of childhood that dominated much of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This was an image rooted in Romantic conceptions of unfallen innocence as a state of primal purity. While such a state is even now sometimes presented as desirable with regard to childhood, Jamie Kincaid (1992:70-71) points out shrewdly in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* that our conception of unfallen innocence is predicated upon inexperience and therefore on ‘an absence and an incapacity, an inability to do’ that reduces the child to a lacuna that can be and often is constructed and reconstructed to reflect dominant beliefs about humanity itself.

In Suman Gupta’s (2005:299) slightly cynical words, we now know that ‘[c]hildren’s literature is a playing field that has little to do with children as reading subjects, but a great deal to do with “children” as a politically efficacious category in the adult world. In broader terms, children’s literature emerges from, and impinges upon, a nexus of social, political and economic relations wherein adult desires are played out with “children” as a constantly and conveniently constructed category’ so that, as critics such as Gordon Tait (2012:105) and Nancy Lesko (2001: 5-6) have pointed out, it is

² Because the study of young adults and their literature is so closely linked to the study of children and their literature and often rests on similar theoretical foundations, the words ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ are commonly used in this thesis when discussing the full continuum of pre-adulthood and pre-adult reading. Where observations apply only to younger children or only to adolescents, terminology is adjusted to make this clear.

even possible to argue that childhood has perhaps only come to be viewed as a unified and natural stage of development because a range of educational and government policies and forms of intervention have come together to define its boundaries.

In general, such policies have and continue to promote a binary opposition between adult and child, a dichotomy that leaves little theoretical space for the consideration of the sub-category of adolescence since, as Alison Waller (2009:6) observes:

... the “set of meanings” contained in adolescence is quite distinct from childhood and cannot be described in straightforwardly oppositional terms. For instance, adolescence does not clearly refer to ideas of innocence, origin or moral security, and it is located, not merely as “other” to adulthood, but also as “other” to childhood. It is a liminal space onto which a distinct dichotomy of desires or fears cannot easily be projected.

Nevertheless, even if one agrees with Waller (2009:6) that ‘[t]he category of “teenager” is a recent one, and has had less time than childhood to build up those concrete layers of meaning in social history, art, religion or, indeed, fiction’, it remains clear that, as Anne Scott MacLeod (1997:125) notes, while puberty is biological the ‘nature, length, burdens, and hazards of adolescent experience are shaped by economic and social realities’.³

In this vein, Waller (2009:8) suggests that Granville Stanley Hall’s 1904 study of adolescent psychology marked ‘the “point of invention” of modern adolescence’ and it is certainly possible to argue that it was only after the first World War, a time described as both reflecting increasing group awareness among the young and the

³ Christine Griffin (1993:10-11) argues that if a child were to undergo the biological process of puberty in isolation, he or she would be unlikely to find that this triggered a state of adolescence since the latter is governed by social or cultural imperatives rather than purely physical ones.

beginning of modern scientific investigation into adolescence, as a separate and clearly marked developmental stage (Ariès, 1962; John J. Conger, 1977), that the terms ‘teenager’ or ‘young adult’ began to gain currency as meaningful descriptors of a distinct developmental phase. As increasing prosperity made the earnings of teenagers in the Western world a less important component of family incomes, society could, and did, mandate a longer period of education thus extending childhood dependency by at least four years of secondary school, a decision which led theorists to conceptualise ‘emerging adulthood’ as a new and distinct developmental period characteristic of modern industrialized societies and marked by a prolonged exploratory phase prior to the assumption of adult roles and responsibilities (Jeffrey J. Arnett, 2000). MacLeod (1997:125) also suggests that the second half of the twentieth century saw adolescents and emergent adults draw increasing attention as ‘a prime consumer market’. Since many young people had part-time jobs or more generous allowances, they became increasingly important consumers of leisure products such as films, records, magazines, and books carefully tailored to their tastes and interests.

The result of this has been the reinforcement of the teenage years as a cross-over stage during which adolescents are seen as occupying an uncomfortable transitional zone. In this somewhat nebulous space they are empowered by their looks, physical prowess, increased spending power and presence as key figures in a post-sixties social mythology that glorifies adolescent rebellion (Roberta Seelinger Trites, 2000:xi), yet simultaneously disempowered by the increased objectification of the adolescent body, their diminished power to enter into the formal labour market and what Heather Scutter (1999:251) identifies as ‘extensive adult anxiety about the disappearing child and the disappearance of childhood’. The latter factor, in particular, encourages adults to perceive teenagers as ‘getting out of hand, going out of bounds, moving beyond control’ and inscribe the spaces in which the vanishing

child/emergent adult moves as 'feral, wild, chaotic, corrupt, evil' (Scutter, 1999:251).⁴

The negative aspects of this response are a reminder that, as cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1969:95) emphasises, liminal states are rarely viewed positively or even neutrally in human cultures but, instead, are often 'likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness and to an eclipse'.

In a sense then, any discussion of adolescence as a distinct stage must be based to some extent upon the consideration of two separate concepts: the adulthood to which it aspires and the childhood from which it emerges. Since both of these are necessarily socially constructed, it is perhaps hardly surprising that, as science and technology rose to prominence in the years after the Second World War, the sociological and psychological construction of young adulthood that began to take shape was one that strongly implied not only that development could be measured empirically and precisely, but that the young could be expected to progress through a variety of developmental milestones at a fairly predictable rate. Implicit within such theories is the notion that individuals arrive at each developmental stage in 'an unalterable predetermined sequence, accompanied by a new or different *type* of behaviour or thought' (Roxanna Marie Matter, 1984:132, italics original). For instance, educational theorist Jean Piaget (1952, 1978), who began his work with children as early as the twenties, defines adolescence as the phase of 'formal operations' in which it is necessary to learn to develop self-awareness as well as awareness of others and to master logical thought. In other words, adolescence is believed by Piaget to be the stage at which a young person can make hypotheses

⁴ Evidence for this negative view of teenagers is also readily available in the work of post-war American sociologists of the Chicago School, including Schmucl N. Eisenstadt (1956) and David Matza (1969), who argue that the prolonged nature of modern adolescence leads to cultural disaffection in the young and that this, in turn, encourages them to take refuge in extravagant subcultures promoting outsider status or even delinquency.

and predict consequences in relation to abstract rather than concrete circumstances. This is, of course, a vital skill for reading especially if one accepts Paul Ricoeur's (1992:170) suggestion that the various incarnations of story deploy 'an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgement operates in a hypothetical mode'.

Piaget's theory has been further expanded by Elkind (1967, 1974, 1978), who argues that each of Piaget's stages is characterised by a different form of egocentrism and that the young adult often fails to differentiate between his or her own feelings about something and those of others, leading to a concomitant overconcentration of the former, which in turn establishes ideal conditions, as G. Robert Carlsen (1980:40) observes, for novels to become for the middle adolescent 'a way of seeing themselves and of testing solutions to their own problems'. Robert Havighurst (1953, 1972) then indicates what these problems might be by providing a list of what he terms specific developmental tasks. For adolescents, he suggests that these tasks include achieving more mature relationships with age-mates of both sexes, acquiring a gendered social role and becoming independent of adult support while also preparing for marriage and a career and acquiring a set of values that functions as a guide to socially responsible behaviour. Similarly, Erikson (1963, 1968) argues persuasively that the development of a personal identity seems to be a crucial and even universal maturational requirement of adolescence.⁵

Drawing on the work of all these developmental theorists, Lawrence Kohlberg (1981, 1984, 1985) then lays out a six phase model of moral development in which he indicates that moral decisions are initially based on expectations of an extrinsic

⁵ This particular assertion has subsequently been questioned and Erikson has been criticized for paying too little attention to cultural variances when formulating his developmental stages (see Lawrence J. Walker, 1984:677-69; M. Maqsood and S. Rouhani, 1990:829).

system of reward or punishment whereas, in what he calls the conventional stage, towards which he suggests that adolescents generally begin to move, moral decisions follow from a personal acceptance that adherence to an extrinsic moral code has advantages for society as a whole, even when there is no immediate prospect of reward or punishment for the individual concerned. In his post-conventional stage, which he suggests is reached by only a small minority of adults at widely differing ages, he proposes that individuals become capable of overriding generally-accepted moral precepts when these are perceived to conflict with a stronger moral imperative; such people, Kohlberg suggests, are capable of consistently acting according to a set of self-chosen principles based on abstract values even when these values may not be generally endorsed by those around them.

So influential has the work of these developmental psychologists been that standard undergraduate text books still tend to follow their lead in breaking down the process of adolescent identity formation into various themes or aspects while generally agreeing that in order to build an identity for themselves, teenagers need to grapple with gender roles, explore the possibilities of intimate relationships outside the family, achieve 'autonomy from parents', come to an understanding of their future social or occupational roles and begin to construct an individual moral code (D.A. Louw, 2004:156; Stanley I. Greenspan and George H. Pollock, 1991).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, the developmental approaches to adolescence exemplified by and arising from the work of researchers such as Kohlberg and Piaget did begin to be questioned on the grounds that these men focused only on white boys and then proceeded to generalise from this very limited sample. Carol Gilligan (1982), for instance has led a whole movement within women's studies to counter Kohlberg's work by showing its inadequacy for

understanding the development of girls while Geneva Gay (1994) has similarly highlighted crucial ethnic differences with regard to developmental expectations.

Significantly though, as Lesko (2001:191) points out, 'To argue that Asian-American children have a different developmental trajectory or that girls may develop moral reasoning in distinctive terms is to challenge the universalising discourse of developmental stages with a minoritizing one Under this critical stance various "minority" differences flourish, but the universal stance remains untouched'. Thus, in *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (2001), Lesko instead persuasively sets out the evidence for her argument that all current developmental schemas grew out of specific historical circumstances and particular views of evolutionary theory that privileged whiteness and masculinity 'which were seamlessly fused and unmarked in "civilisation" at the turn of the twentieth century' (2001:191). She then goes on to link ideas about adolescent development to historical imperatives for improvement in relation to both the individual and the social sciences more generally, suggesting that this has favoured certain definitions of maturity while simultaneously demoting others. Finally, she argues that imposing an evolutionary paradigm on perceptions of adolescence imposes a relentless focus on the future and linear progression towards it, prioritising certain problems and needs while eliding others. In an attempt to counter such tendencies, Lesko (2001:195) suggests that those working with adolescents should pay attention to 'the specific agency and meaning-making of individuals, but always within the collectively identified and historically provided contexts and range of possibilities' so that ideas of growth or change are investigated rather than 'presumed in *a priori* frameworks such as development' (italics original). Such an approach, she indicates, would lead to growth and change and therefore, perhaps, to seeing adolescence itself as contingent and recursive rather than absolute and

cumulative. In this way it might also begin to be possible to undermine the prevalent view that teenagers are all the same, that they are fundamentally different from adults and that they are simply the passive foci of monolithic and unalterable developmental forces.

Lesko's work thus stresses that it is crucial to remember that the adolescents described by educational psychologists are as much constructions as their counterparts in young adult fiction. As Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (1998:193) point out, both of these are 're-presentations: word children and iconic children'. However, although some contemporary psychologists and educationalists may readily acknowledge that developmental tasks such as those listed by Erikson and Kohlberg represent only 'the benchmarks of adaptation that are specific to a developmental period and are contextualized by prevailing socio-cultural and historically embedded associations' (Glenn I. Roisman *et al.*, 2004:123), such an awareness is only gradually undermining cherished popular assumptions. For this reason, in the last few decades and in many contexts, the gulf between the confident assumptions of quantifiable accuracy implied by the work of traditional developmental psychologists and the new social constructivism of historians like Ariès or academics like Lesko has gradually widened, leading to assertions made by those on either side of what has become a fundamental rift growing steadily more extreme.

In 1984, for instance, Jacqueline Rose published *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, in which she asserts categorically that relations between adults and children are governed primarily not by empirically verifiable facts but rather by adult assumptions about childhood and that therefore the very concept of children's literature is inherently paradoxical:

Children's fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between. To say that the child is inside the book – children's books are after all as often as not *about* children – is to fall straight into a trap. It is to confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child it portrays. If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp.

There is, in one sense, no body of literature which rests so openly on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee. Children's fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child *in*. (Rose [1984] 1994:1-2)

Rose's unflinching exposure of the hidden power plays potentially structuring the relationship between adult/author and child/reader thus introduces what Kenneth Kidd (2004:112) terms 'a useful hermeneutics of suspicion' into studies of children's literature. Rose's ability to do this clearly reflects changing norms and assumptions within broader academic discourse. The post-war distrust of grand historical narratives has fed a new interest in social history and created an environment in which it is possible to explore the previously marginalized lives of groups such as women, the young and colonial subjects. In other words, as dominant groups and their discursive practices have been stripped of their privileged status, mainstream culture has been freed to absorb elements of fringe discourses, becoming in the process more diversified, more colourful and more polyphonic, but also more innately suspicious of mainstream culture or conventional power structures.

In the field of childhood studies this has led to critical attempts by writers to suggest that because children 'rarely have any input in producing these [children's] books, are

often influenced by adults in choosing what to read and are subjected to the text and its demands on their reading practice' (Waller, 2010:279), their experiences are necessarily analogous to those of both women and colonised subjects. Thus, because children's literature, like women's literature, is often devalued and marginalized, it has been argued that the insights delivered by feminist theorists can usefully be applied to it (Lissa Paul, 1987:187ff.; Katharine Jones, 2006:296-299). In the same way, seen through the lens of post-colonialism, it has become apparent that the child or adolescent, like the 'primitive' or indigene, is frequently treated as 'a subject-in-formation, an individual who often does not have full legal status and who therefore acts or is acted against in ways that are not perceived to be fully consequential' (Stephen Slemon and Jo-Ann Wallace, 1991:20).⁶

The critical approaches resulting from such perceptions are often both suggestive and a necessary corrective to entrenched assumptions; but too often they also fail to acknowledge the fundamental differences between children and other marginalized groups. As Waller (2010:279) states, 'It is debatable ... whether any single adult reader has any more control over the production, distribution, and interpretation of their reading matter than does any child, and actual reading situations are often more complex than some theories of colonization allow for'.⁷ Underlying approaches such as Waller's is an acceptance that differences in class, gender, ethnicity and, more recently, even age⁸ undermine any unproblematic assumptions about identity so that it can no longer be seen as singular but needs rather, in Stuart Hall's (1996:4) terms, to be seen as 'multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and

⁶ Nancy Lesko (2001: 19-48) also provides a fascinating analysis of the historical process whereby women and indigenes came to be linked to children and childhood.

⁷ A key text in relation to this argument is Perry Nodelman's (1991:29-35) article, 'The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism and Children's Literature'.

⁸ Chris Jenks (1996:3) argues that long after concepts like gender or class first began to be seen in terms of a 'post-structuralist space of multiple and self-presentational identity sets', the simple opposition between adult and child remained unexamined.

antagonistic discourses, practices and positions'. Of course, if such an approach to identity is to be taken to its logical extreme it will negate any possibility of reaching general conclusions about either adolescents or the books that they read.

Interestingly, however, Hall (1996:1) also offers a possible way out of this potentially paralysing impasse by suggesting that certain concepts may simply have, in Derridean terms, to be put 'under erasure', implying that while they may no longer have any absolute validity 'in their ordinary and unreconstructed form ... since they have not been superseded dialectically ... there is nothing to do but continue to think with them'.

In this context it is also worth noting Jones's (2006:298) observation that

[a] focus on gender, the process of sexuation, and the construction of "women" through language ... does not rule out being able to talk about the realities of women and their lives and experiences. Similarly we can be interested in age role issues, the process of ageuation, and the construction of "children" through language without denying the material realities of children's lives, without needing to say that children cannot be spoken of or that analysis cannot start from the conditions of their lives and experiences Feminist theory is insightful in exploring this highly contentious issue within children's literature criticism To adapt the terms of these theorists, the absence of a juvenile "essential identity" does not rule out "partial fixations" and "precarious forms of identification" being established around the category of children.

It is also vital to remember that while the condition of Otherness inherent in being either female or indigene is generally inescapable short of violent social change, that of being a child is necessarily and equally inescapably temporary. As Clare Bradford (2001:11-12) is quick to point out, it is necessary to resist the idea 'that children and indigenous peoples occupy comparable positions in relation to structures of power' or that relations between adults and children are in any way 'analogous to those by

which colonizers maintain power over the colonized' (Bradford, 2001:11-12). After all, every adult has been a child and, in the normal course of events, every child is likely to become an adult.

It is in recognition of this bond that Jones (2006:306) has attempted to recast children's literature as 'child literature'⁹ arguing that adults

...do belong to the audience of child literature – we belong as former child readers of such literature, we belong because we were once children, we belong as adult authors, publishers, purchasers and critics of such literature and we belong as current adult readers of such literature.

Jones (2006:305) further strengthens her argument by introducing the term 'generational literature', which she defines 'as that which comes along with me as I age', thereby suggesting that the books adults read as children should not be seen as bound to an enduring concept of childhood but rather as being in some way the literature of a particular generation. Certainly, there is a new critical interest in the experience of rereading books first encountered in childhood and consciously noting the gaps and differences between the initial experience and its adult sequel as a way of understanding the similarities and differences between child and adult readers (Hugh Crago, 1990; Tatar, 2009; Waller, 2010) and also of disrupting the child/adult binary enough for Tatar's description of the reading experience as a 'contact zone'¹⁰ between adult and child to become theoretically tenable.

However, even if Roni Natov (2003:3) may argue that the 'world of childhood belongs to adults in memory as well as to children temporally', in line with Katharine Jones

⁹ Other attempts to rework the term 'children's literature' include Peter Hunt's suggestion of 'childist literature' (1996:2-17) and Roni Natov's (2003) 'literature of childhood'.

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of Tatar's 'contact zone' see pp. 19-20.

and others, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (1994:180-181) reminds us that the findings of psychoanalysis show that our memories of past experiences and emotions are rarely either accurate or easily retrievable. In *As If*, his powerful reflection on the Jamie Bulger murder case, for instance, British poet Blake Morrison (1997:119) describes revisiting his childhood home in a vain effort to recapture the experience of childhood itself:

I walk down beside the toothless banisters, like a ghost of my own past. All gone now, my childhood; all gone, the idea of childhood: a clean slate, a wiped-over blackboard. I should have known. It couldn't have been otherwise. Being grown-up means that I can't think as a ten-year-old thinks any more than I can fit inside a ninety cm vest or crawl under a nursery chair. I see faces, remember details. But I can't find the texture, the feel of what I thought, the feel of what I felt. As you get older, as you recede from it, childhood becomes strange and unknowable. Once left behind, it's a country you can't visit in person, a place of exile, mourned and misremembered by the adults at its gates.

Thus, as Chris Jenks (1996:10) observes, the child or adolescent is necessarily both 'familiar to us and yet strange ... he is essentially of ourselves and yet appears to display a different order of being: his serious purpose and our intentions towards him are meant to resolve that paradox by transforming him into an adult like ourselves'.

This last point is a crucial one; whereas it is possible to see men's relationship with women or colonists' relationships with the colonised as rooted in strategies designed to reinforce the latter's Otherness and thus maintain their subjection, the fundamental aim of all but the most aberrant adult relationships with children is to promote development towards the condition of the self or adulthood. The child or young adult is also unlike either women or colonial subjects in two other ways: he or she is, at least in early childhood, self-evidently incapable of surviving without adult nurture and, as Jenks indicates, his or her 'serious purpose' is to become adult. Given these

factors, it seems almost wilfully perverse either to suggest that children should nevertheless be perceived as utterly morally and emotionally autonomous or that all adult attempts to communicate with them are necessarily so fatally flawed as to constitute 'impossibility'.

In fact, as Nodelman (1997:4) observes, pushed to its logical extreme, Rose's denunciation of the very concept of children's literature

...can encourage only one clear response in us The response is, quite simply, fear. After having learned what theory has to tell us about the nature of childhood and the nature of literature, we can logically conclude only that literature in each and all of its forms and its manifestations is very, very bad for children and other human beings. And indeed many people do reach that conclusion – or get uncomfortably close to it.

Nodelman (1997:10) then goes on to argue that current attacks on children's literature based on the idea that it either desires to embed children in a corrupted cultural matrix or construct the subjectivity of the young through 'misrepresentation or oppression or limitation of their full potential' are misguided since they require the critic to assume the existence of a child 'larger than, outside of and complete beyond the construction – a whole, unified, coherent being whose unity and completeness' need to be preserved. Furthermore such approaches to the genre are also predicated on the assumption that children can, in fact, exist 'outside of human consciousness – beyond human life as we know it and could ever possibly be aware of it' (Nodelman, 1997:10).

When approached in this way, it is possible to argue that embedding children in ideology, which, as Rose quite rightly argues, all children's literature inevitably does, is also to encourage them to learn to understand themselves as social beings having

responsibilities toward others. Thus Nodelman (1997:11) concludes, 'to embed children is to encourage them to think of themselves as the kinds of people who can live and interact with and take pleasure from other people in the human community as currently constructed around them'.

What seems then, from a perspective of utter disillusionment with contemporary society, to be the alarmingly repressive tendencies of children's literature can, from a more tolerant or optimistic perspective, be embraced as a way of providing young readers with the means of 'making enriching connections with other human beings' (Nodelman, 1997:11). It is in this vein that Maria Tatar (2009:11) describes children's literature as a 'contact zone'¹¹ in which is located a propulsive force that moves 'one generation to the next, setting minds in motion, renewing senses, and almost rewiring brains'.¹²

Tatar's observation generates yet another possible response to Rose's criticism, which is to point out that many of the most successful children's writers have publicly stated that they do not write for imaginary readers but for specific, known children. Novelist Katherine Paterson (1981:7), for instance, claims that she writes for 'my own four children and for others who are faced with the question of whether they dare to become adult', while C.S. Lewis (1985:1075) insists that all authors of children's books need to enter into a dialogue with 'a child' who can either be consulted or

¹¹ Tatar acknowledges appropriating the term from Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) in which it is used to describe places where 'peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict' (Pratt, 1992:6) but Tatar does not comment on this troubling dimension of the term, preferring instead to focus on more positive interactions between adult and child within the reading space. Interestingly, Adam Gopnik (1996:96) also considers the idea of children's literature as a 'contact zone' before rejecting it in favour of the term 'conflict zone' since he sees children's books primarily as an arena in which the nostalgic adult clashes with the forward-looking child yearning to be grown up.

¹² On the topic of rewiring the brain, it is worth noting that in *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2008), Marianne Wolf shows that on a neurological level, the brain of a reader is noticeably different from that of an illiterate person.

whose responses can be predicted based on familiarity. In this way, Lewis suggests that the adult/writer and child/reader ‘modify each other’ to form ‘a community’.

Interestingly, Lewis’s confidence that interaction with children need not automatically result only in coercion or oppression seems to anticipate the work of a number of psychoanalysts and it is to the work of these that Karín Lesnick-Oberstein (1994:185) turns in trying to grapple with the crisis occasioned by the fact that, as she sees it, ‘children’s literature criticism falls apart when the existence of its claimed “real child” is challenged’. Looking at child psychotherapy in general, Lesnick-Oberstein (1994:187) suggests that by confronting ‘the precise nature of the relationship between the therapist and the patient’ as well as placing ‘priority on how important an idea or impression is to the patient, rather than simply prioritising the revelation of a strictly “provable” or “objective” “reality”’ (Lesnick-Oberstein, 1994:189), psychotherapy establishes itself, just as children’s literature could and probably should do, as a means of ‘emotional education’ capable of constructing ‘a form of freedom for children within their dependent non-free role within society’ (Lesnick-Oberstein, 1998:188).¹³ From this premise, Lesnick-Oberstein argues that Donald Winnicott’s (1971a, 1971b) idea that the success of therapeutic intervention is wholly dependent on the patient’s readiness to receive the therapist’s interpretation becomes crucial since in the therapist’s own words, ‘interpretation outside the ripeness of the material is indoctrination and produces compliance’ (Winnicott, 1971a:51) rather than progress. Following from this observation, the successful therapist and perhaps the successful writer or critic too is urged to adapt himself or herself to the child’s needs rather than ‘requiring the child to adapt to [his or her] own’ (Winnicott, 1971b:224). In this way, as Lesnick-Oberstein observes, Winnicott invites

¹³ Ironically, Virginia Blum (1995), who approaches the adult/child dichotomy from the perspective of psychoanalysis, comes to different conclusions, arguing that the theories of psychoanalysis mythologise rather than illuminate the child and that the ‘unknowability’ of the child subject remains the ‘ultimate blind spot’ (Blum, 1995:23) of psychoanalysis.

the child to “write” the therapist who writes the narrative of the therapy’ (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:225) thus pointing the way for theorists of children’s literature to enter into a similar process of mutual construction with child readers since:

Winnicott’s effort to make it possible for the patient to use the therapist in any way necessary to that patient translates into the idea that a book gains whatever importance it may have for any reader at any time precisely by allowing the reader the space to inscribe the text in his own way into his narrative of emotional meaning – by making it possible for the reader to create his own use for the book, whatever that may be. (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:225)

This view has obvious links to reception theory which, as Wolfgang Iser (2006:56) suggests, rests on a ‘basic duality, incorporating both the reception of a literary text and its effects on its potential reader’ and which accepts that the meaning found in any given text is likely, at least to some extent, to be unique to the individual reading it. Thus, Iser (1976:10) argues that ‘as text and reader merge into a single situation the divisions between subject and object no longer apply and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced’. So, just as Winnicott (1971a, 1971b) sees the child as an active partner in therapy, contemporary theorists of both reading and popular culture argue that an awareness of potentially totalising structures is not enough to explain the complexities of their reception. As John Fiske (1989:33) puts it in his analysis of art as a means of imposing values in *Understanding Popular Culture*, the critic also needs ‘an often contradictory, sometimes complementary, knowledge of the everyday practices by which subordinated groups negotiate these structures, oppose and challenge them, evade their control, exploit their weaknesses, trick them, turn them against themselves and their producers’. In this regard, children too are able to assert agency as Kathleen McDowell (2009:259) proves by recording the words of a young boy who answered a librarian’s questionnaire about his reading tastes by saying, “I

like this book because it suits my taste. I have a wild taste”.’ This statement, she argues, ‘embodies the complex combination of compliance and resistance within which children responded to adults’ inquiries about their reading’ (McDowell, 2009:259). While the boy apparently willingly admits his own preference, the cryptic nature of that admission also seems to convey a cheerful resistance to adult categorization.

Similarly, Michel de Certeau (1984:174) describes many readers, including child readers, as ‘textual poachers’ who develop tactics of resistance in relation to the strategies of dominant elites, suggesting that ‘they move across lands that belong to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Janice Radway too, in her groundbreaking study of girls’ reading, ‘Reading and Narrative Gleaning: Crafting Repertoires for Self-Fashioning within Everyday Life’ (2002), clearly observes strategies of resistance in her subjects, saying that they seem to engage in a process of ‘narrative gleaning’ whereby they pick and choose nuggets of personal value from diverse materials in order to fashion an individual sense of self, while Charles Sarland, in his *Young People Reading: Culture and Response* (1991), also shows that it is possible for the young reader to use techniques of selective appropriation to take back at least some degree of agency. All of this would seem to negate any theory that children’s literature is necessarily defined by the simple binary between Rose’s empowered, menacing adult and her powerless, molested child.

Nevertheless, even though the prevailing ideas of childhood or young adulthood may be more fluid than Rose suggests they can be, they continue to dominate literature for the young in a way that the implied adult reader rarely dominates other forms of literature. As Peter Hollindale (1988:12) argues, it is ‘the author’s textual negotiations with the child’ that make children’s literature ‘different in kind from other forms of

literature' and equally it is the critic of children's literature's attempts to grapple with ideas about childhood that make this form of criticism unique. For these 'textual negotiations' to become more than the simple imposition of adult values on the quiescent young and/or the books they read, the critic of children's literature needs to at least attempt to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable so as to position himself or herself somewhere between knowing adulthood and remembered inexperience. This approach, as Lissa Paul (1987:194) points out, is close to what Richard Schweder (1986:39) defines as 'casuistry', the vital means whereby the good ethnologist uses 'adroit rationalization' to make familiar 'what at first seemed strange, the other'. It is only by such a balancing trick that critics and writers of children's literature can hope to approximate award-winning novelist Aidan Chambers's (2010:272) ideal of speaking *for* or even perhaps *with* rather than simply *to* young readers.

The failure of critics of juvenile literature to make significant headway towards the establishment of such an ideal is nowhere more apparent than in debates over what constitutes good juvenile fiction. Significantly, Katharine Jones begins her influential article 'Getting Rid of Children's Literature' (2006) by claiming that whenever popular children's books are discussed, 'the same questions always come up: are they really for children, are they good for children; how do we evaluate such books; why do adults read them; [and] what is children's literature?'. She then goes on to suggest that '[b]ecause these questions are never satisfactorily dealt with, there is a lot of muddled thinking and discussion about children's literature' (Jones, 2006:287).

This is even truer of young adult literature which, as a fairly new field, attracted little serious critical attention prior to the closing decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ In

¹⁴ If one dismisses Louise Mack's *Teens* ([1897] 1903) as something of an anomaly, then the birth of young adult fiction is most often linked to the publication of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). However, those who consider this work as having been appropriated by young adults

fact, as recently as 1996, Caroline Hunt (1996:4) decried the absence of critical approaches to teenage fiction, saying:

The first problem is that virtually no theoretical criticism attaches to young adult literature *as such*. Theorists in the wider field of children's literature often discuss young adult titles without distinguishing them as a separate group and without, therefore, indicating how theoretical issues in young adult literature might differ from those in literature for younger children.

Since then, groundbreaking works such as Robyn McCallum's *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (1999), Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000) and Alison Waller's *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2009) have done much to lay the foundations for a new, more theoretically informed approach to young adult literature though perhaps not quite enough to change the still widespread perception that young adult literature exists in an ill-defined littoral zone between the more readily classifiable modalities of children's books and adult books. This is easily seen in any examination of the working definitions of the genre. Trites (2000:7), for instance, points out that the American Library Association finds it necessary to divide young adult fiction into three categories: 'Books Written Specifically for Adolescents', 'Books Written for General Trade Market Which Have Adolescent Heroes and Heroines' and 'General Books of Interest to Young Adults'. The links between these discrete groupings are far from obvious and the categories are themselves so amorphous that they could potentially include almost any novel at all. Yet to some extent, the very breadth of these categories is necessitated by the fact that, as Jonathan Hunt (2007:143) observes, teenagers can be 'a very tenacious

rather than specifically written for them sometimes prefer to consider Beverly Cleary's *Fifteen* (1956) as the first true example of the new genre.

audience, often much more patient and open-minded than their adult counterparts, and there is probably not a text in existence that has not been read by some teenager somewhere'.¹⁵

A further obstacle to the development of a poetics of youth literature is that novels for adolescents are often perceived as being unusually closely linked to commercial interests. Waller (2009:10) points out that, because of this, '[t]eenage fiction resides in a rather uneasy position between high and low culture' and having accorded it such an unsettlingly indeterminate location, many adults find themselves uncertain both of its merits and of the wisdom of allowing it a dedicated analytical space. As Peter Hollindale (1995:85) argues, teachers, librarians and critics often tend to dismiss realistic novels for teenagers as nothing more than simple children's books 'with added sex, violence, and family collapse'. Certainly, the novels which generally dominated the growing teenage fiction market prior to the eighties did tend to foreground social problems and how teenage protagonists might, through achieving personal growth, negotiate or, disturbingly often, fail to negotiate a way through these. Indeed the overwhelming focus on these topics led some critics to see teenage fiction as an essentially realistic genre constituted largely by what came to be known as 'problem novels' which focused, as Catherine Sheldrick Ross (1985:175) points out, on issues such as 'running away, drug addiction, premarital sex and abortion, suicide, alienation, divorce, the one-parent family and the like'. Such novels also frequently had common stylistic features such as the use of 'a first-person confessional voice and colloquial language' (Waller, 2009:19) and were seen as reflecting social issues which were also at some level 'emblematic of the young

¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Patricia Head (1996:28) argues, 'it remains important to align adolescent fiction with the genre of children's literature, rather than simply discuss it on a purely literary and theoretical level as a form of adult popular fiction because it operates to some extent as a "supragenre" that at once moves beyond the generic expectations of much children's literature' and yet remains dependent upon it.

adult's problem interior' (Kidd, 2004:110). MacLeod (1997:126) also suggests that it is partly as a result of this yoking of social problems with psychic ones that since the seventies, books for teenagers, while maintaining a focus on adolescence as a state of troubled transition, seem to have 'shifted the focus of adolescent development from adaptation to a larger world to contemplation of the inner self'. Similarly Bradford *et al.* (2011:12) indicate that contemporary young adult novels are quite clearly preoccupied with the formation of subjectivity and the development of a sense of self, typically raising 'existential questions like: who am I, why am I here, where am I going, and what does it all mean?'.

Negative reactions to the so-called 'problem novel' in both its earlier and later incarnations have been fuelled by the fact that in the field of youth literature, there is a sharp division between the social and academic structures by which it is defined, partly because, as Peter Hunt (1991a:6) observes, 'children's literature, as an object of serious, but not solemn study, has grown from a highly eclectic and involved "practitioner world", which tends to be highly intuitive and dedicated, but frequently anti-intellectual'. Consequently since the late sixties it has become common to define children's literature criticism as either child-centred or book-centred depending on whether it emerges from a generally conservative practitioner world constituted largely of teachers and librarians or the more academic world of the professional literary critic. Unsurprisingly then, teenage fiction has faced and continues to face strong practitioner resistance from those who agree with Kristevan theorist Martha Westwater's (2000:2) view that contemporary youth literature reflects western culture's state of decline since 'violence and ugliness have replaced idealism and beauty as youthful realities'.

Perhaps more worryingly, however, studies emanating from the book-centred world of academic criticism have also generated unease about the subtexts of many young

adult novels. Trites (2000:x), for instance, has questioned or complicated the standard view of young adult realism by arguing that although its primary purpose may seem to be the depiction of personal growth, the real focus of the genre is on power relations and what the adolescent needs to learn about them:

...power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth. During adolescence, adolescents must learn their place in the power structure. They must learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them: school, government, religion, identity politics, family, and so on. They must learn to balance their power with their parents' power and with the power of the other authority figures in their lives.

Somewhat chillingly, Trites then makes a convincing case for the fact that although the young adult novel may initially appear to promote rebellion and self-assertion, its protagonists soon find themselves forced into conformity by the irresistible mechanisms of social power that define their worlds. Those unwilling or unable to do so almost invariably face an early death. Thus, as Maria Nikolajeva (2010:15) observes, '[p]aradoxically enough, the adolescent novel denies the protagonists the power that books for younger children allow through carnivalization. In a young adult novel, society catches up with the protagonist, depicted in transition from being oppressed to becoming an oppressor – unless he perishes on the way'.

In addition to its seemingly repressive tendencies, the young adult realistic novel's discomfiting subject matter and apparent rejection of the happy ending so essential in works for younger readers have also led Karen Coats (1999) to use Julia Kristeva's (1995a, 1995b) exploration of the complex interrelationships between adolescence, psychic turmoil and writing to suggest that young adult literature is dominated by the 'exploration of abjection' (Coats, 1999:291). Even more disturbingly, in a discussion of a group of Swedish young adult novels written by women, Nikolajeva (2010:113) identifies the rise of what she finds a new and disturbing feminine stereotype.

Nikolajeva suggests that, judging by these novels, one would assume that ‘urban girls in Sweden normally get blind drunk every Friday when they are twelve, have their first sexual experience at thirteen, and are daily subjected to rape, incest, and drugs’. In examining why these fictional representations should be so determinedly focused on negative extremes of adolescent experience, she is disconcerted to find that this negative stereotype seems to be held up approvingly by the adult authors as ‘a role model’ rather than utilised as part of ‘a cautionary tale’. Since this is so at odds with the accepted moral codes supposedly governing adult behaviour, she is forced to conclude that the ideology that the novels convey can only be based on ‘alterity, the authors’ perceptions of their protagonists as “the Other”’ (Nikolajeva, 2010:120).

It is hardly surprising then that in *Displaced Fictions*, an overview of contemporary Australian young adult fiction, Heather Scutter (1999:11) concludes:

When we have been assailed on all sides by marketing hype about the new daring, intelligence, complexity and rawness of young adult fiction, it is salutary to remind ourselves that, in many crucial respects, the genre has been running on the spot. That spot looks backward at a green and gold world, the world of the earlier and younger self, of childhood, of the pastoral; and it looks forward at a grey and black world, the world of the future self, of adulthood, of the counter-pastoral. The problem in young adult fiction lies in the reconciliation of these once and future selves.

Implicit in Scutter’s observation is the idea that by abandoning traditional views of children’s literature as having or indeed even being able to have a didactic or ethical purpose, writers of young adult fiction have too often allowed themselves and their readers to be confined in a mode of sombre realism which, while it undermines the simplicity, stability and optimism traditionally associated with children’s literature, ironically still continues to foster reductive adult stereotypes of the young. Thus, MacLeod (1997:128) argues that while ‘[t]he 1960s and 1970s are now synonymous

with social upheavals, including the remaking of the family, adolescent fiction has responded not with an accurate picture of the new social landscape, but with the highly ambivalent adult reaction to it'.

All of these observations indicate that, while authors of much recent young adult literature may have felt they were empowering young readers by rejecting the didactic conventions of the past, they have often simply replaced one set of lessons with a different set of equally disturbing ones. Are adult authors who present promiscuity and substance abuse as necessary and even desirable characteristics of the adolescent experience any less guilty of imposing socially-constructed stereotypes on the young than their predecessors were in presenting teenagers as completely innocent of such knowledge?

In considering similar developments in adult literature in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne Booth (1988:151-152) argues that the twentieth century attempt to draw a 'distinction between genuine literature... and "rhetoric" or "didactic" literature is entirely misleading if it suggests that some stories...are purged of all teaching'. Similarly, in what David Parker (1998:14) sees as 'a significant resurgence of ethical criticism', Richard Bernstein (1991), Zygmunt Bauman and Keith Tester (2001) and Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1997) have openly criticised what they perceive as the reductive treatment of ethical concepts in contemporary literary theory, arguing that it is wrong to assume that treating literature as 'being in some sense about our lives' will lead to criticism that is 'hopelessly naïve, reactionary and insensitive' (Nussbaum, 1990:21) and that while one 'may be sceptical of any talk of ahistorical normative standards', this hardly makes the issue of what one is 'for' or 'against' disappear (Bernstein, 1991:156-157). In other words contemporary ethical criticism works from the premise that all stories are moral systems, a view endorsed by Aidan Chambers (2010:275), who writes of young adult novels: 'They propose

meanings and possibilities, reasons and motives, better rather than worse ways of living, whether their authors mean them to or not.’

In endorsing Booth’s revisiting of the view that literature may have an ethical function, Chambers (2010:280) also argues that the development of a new ethical approach to literature for the young is long overdue since ‘[i]n no sector of literary activity is a consideration of ethics more pertinent, indeed essential, than in the apprehension of youth literature, for the obvious reason that this is literature inevitably concerned both in its fictions and in its pre-adult readers with the development of human consciousness and moral perception’. Similarly, Claudia Mills (1997-1998:181) points out that such a revaluation is crucial for children’s literature since ‘most critics of the genre’ will ‘concede that one aim of a children’s book is to shape the evolving character of its readers’. Mills’s careful reference to ‘most critics of the genre’ indicates her awareness that the supposed didactic function of children’s literature has also been passionately rejected by others determinedly blind to the fact that, as Arthur Applebee (1978:129) has pointed out, some level of didacticism must be present in any work of art since by their very nature such works are rooted not in primary experience but in what linguists refer to as ‘spectator-role language’:

Any experience, whether it originates in spectator role uses of language or “in the world” is construed by individuals on their own terms; but there is an essential difference between experience gained through these two means. When we are talking of events in the world, we are talking of events which are unstructured; they are “raw” experience that will be given structure only when they are construed With spectator-role language, on the other hand, there is always a second manner of construing the experience – the manner which makes us talk of the work as a “verbal object” or a “structured whole.” This structure is a record of the author’s processes of construing, a record that is unconsciously projected into the shaped experience of the work, but governed by accepted techniques of form and structure which will allow it to be “read back” by an audience. (Applebee, 1978:129)

Arguably then, the writer who is conscious of and foregrounds his or her own biases may ultimately allow the reader a greater freedom to reject them than the author who refuses to recognise his or her own complicity in the promotion of ethical paradigms.

Such views are often strenuously resisted by those who fear a return to the simple authoritarianism and overt didacticism they see as characteristic of both traditional children's literature and Victorian rule-bound and censorious forms of reading,¹⁶ but an objective assessment of the views discussed above soon indicates that while the new proponents of ethical criticism may be tentatively reassessing traditional views of the centrality of ethics to fiction for both children and adults, they are not simply suggesting a return to the pre-war belief that 'the child's naïve, unadulterated, and uncritical view of the world should remain intact' (Metcalf, 1997:50), a belief which, Metcalf (1997:50) argues, 'combined with a heritage of didacticism and an aura of dilettantism, barred children's literature from mainstream literature'. Instead, views of what constitutes ethical literature and if, or even how, an author should set about shaping character have changed dramatically.

As Marlene Goldman (2007:810) puts it, 'Contemporary ethical criticism is not simply concerned with our relationship to literature and to the good, but, more specifically, with our relationship to the other'. For this reason, Zahi Zalloua (2009:5) suggests that what is in contention in current debates about literature and ethics is nothing less

¹⁶ The suggestion that all traditional children's books or Victorian critical approaches to literature were necessarily overtly moralising is in itself an obvious simplification. Rohan Maitzen(2005:152), for instance, argues in "The Soul of Art": Understanding Victorian Ethical Criticism' that such assumptions are strategic as much as principled before quoting David Latané's (1999:390) claim that '[m]any currents in contemporary Anglo-American criticism and theory have become energized by a dislike of the Arnoldian stance'. Similarly, Marshall Gregory (1998:195) argues that any fresh assessment of the ethical aspects of literature is made almost impossible because, '[i]nside the academy, ethical criticism seems immediately to conjure images of Plato packing the poets out of his republic, or the memory of Matthew Arnold talking about "the best that has been thought and said" or the mental image of F.R. Leavis intoning on and on about the "great tradition"'.

than 'the paradigmatic status of the face-to-face encounter as a fruitful model, or at the very least a source of inspiration for thinking differently'. She then draws on the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1969), Jacques Derrida (1993) and Derek Attridge (2004)¹⁷ to suggest that

[a]nalogously related to the self's exposure to the other, characterized in Levinasian terms by excess and opacity, the reader's relation to the work takes the form of an interpellation. In the act of reading, the reader confronts a "double-bind", a hermeneutic hesitation between two conflicting injunctions. The first is to thematize or make sense of the work's aesthetic otherness – that is, to adhere to the rules of literary discourse: to conform to the protocols of commentary in order to communicate the text's meaning to oneself and one's community of readers. The second, however, is to attend to the work's inventiveness – its seductive refractoriness – to recognise that the attempt to give meaning and the appeal to contextual markers (cultural, historical or authorial) might very well elucidate aspects of a literary work but can never exhaust that meaning nor fully meet nor answer its demands. (Zalloua, 2009:5)

In a similar way, Attridge (2004:3) argues that 'the experience of literary works consistently exceeds the limits of rational accounting'. Rather than seeing this as a restriction or flaw, however, he fiercely rejects instrumentalism or 'the treating of a text ... as a means to a predetermined end' (Attridge, 2004:7) and instead stresses the productive nature of such transcendence. By doing so he hints at a new way of

¹⁷ In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas locates what he calls the 'ethical moment' in the face-to-face encounter with the other, an experience he sees as leading inevitably to cognitive frustration since the face of the other must always 'exceed *the idea of the other in me*'. Crucially, such encounters therefore expose as illusory the autonomy and supposed self-sufficiency of the self (Levinas, 1969:50). In responding to this, Derrida (1993) questions aspects of Levinas's ethics of difference by insisting on the relationality of the other and pointing out that although it is true that there is always something surprising about the other, this is only so in relation to what we were expecting. Derrida therefore foregrounds the value of creative hesitation between the need to reject the other and the drive to assimilate it by translating it into the same. In applying these insights more directly to the experience of literary otherness, Attridge (2004:130) suggests that '[t]o find oneself reading an inventive work, is to find oneself subject to certain obligations – to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while attempting to comprehend by relating it to these'.

presenting the ethical dimension of reading by suggesting that words do not only mean but ‘show us what it is to mean’ (Attridge, 2004:109). This ‘showing’, Attridge (2004:59) explains, ‘is experienced by the reader (who is, in the first instance, the writer reading or articulating the words as they emerge) as an event ... which opens new possibilities of meaning and feeling’. In this way Attridge (2004:125) reshapes the conventions of ethical criticism by suggesting that ‘[a] responsible response to an inventive work of art, science, or philosophy ... is one that bring it into being anew by allowing it ... to refigure the ways in which I, and my culture, think and feel’.

It seems then that contemporary ethical criticism endorses active interaction between reader and text in the belief that transformed and transforming meaning arises from creative negotiation between self and other. Given this, it becomes clear that the most ethical form of narration is no longer and perhaps never was that which unequivocally reinforces received mores, but is rather what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984:6) describes as ‘double-voiced discourse’ or open-ended texts that privilege no single voice, offer no definitive interpretation, and provide no unequivocal answers for their readers. Bakhtin affirms that in such texts the author creates not ‘voiceless slaves... but *free* people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him’ (Bakhtin, 1984:6). In ethical fiction of this kind, the text attempts to reflect on various ideological positions and not simply offer a single dominant one in an attempt to open up not the well-worn track pointing the way to social conformity but a ludic space facilitating exploration and negotiation and promoting Derrida’s (1993) hesitant equilibrium between the familiar self and the unexpected other.

In response to these developments in ethical criticism more generally, contemporary attempts to articulate an ethics of youth literature increasingly privilege the metafictional elements of postmodernism including open problematization of the

authorial position in attempts to foster empowerment and power sharing. As Metcalf (1997:52-53) observes, by modelling 'several modes of action, authors let readers find their own temporary and unstable solutions in multivalent texts. The double-voiced discourse of anti-authoritarian literature that pitched the voice of the oppressor against that of the oppressed, refuting and ridiculing the dominant voice by means of carnivalesque subversive strategies, has grown into multi-voicedness or, rather voicelessness'. The result is that in both young adult novels and adult ones, Roland Barthes's (1972) 'readerly texts' are steadily being replaced by 'writerly texts' in which the communication between writer and reader is considerably more subtle and diffuse than in the past.

The increasing adoption of postmodernist tropes such as multiple points of view and the destabilization of the reader has also foregrounded the ethical issues around the conventional use of first person narration in young adult texts. Mike Cadden (2000), for instance, highlights the moral complications inherent in any text in which an adult writer appropriates the voice of an adolescent narrator and thus assumes what Cadden (2000:153) calls the 'unassailable, seductive, and singular voice' of the target readership. He then goes on to suggest that making irony, paradox, and complexity more visible in such works might be a way of acknowledging the writer's right to assume a persona while simultaneously satisfying the requirements for ethical fiction by alerting the young reader to the very techniques by which he or she may be being manipulated (Cadden, 2000:153). Similarly, Nikolajeva (2010:204) argues that it is impossible to avoid shaping narrative material in potentially coercive ways and that the author can only hope consciously to counter his or her own structures by deliberately complicating and undermining easy identification with single characters or viewpoints:

Subjectivity is an essential component of power. By imposing a particular subject position on the reader, whether tied to the character or the narrator, the implied author exercises power over the reader. Whenever an independent subject position emerges in a text, aetonormativity¹⁸ is subjected to scrutiny. For instance a strong female voice creates a strong subject position that, although not directly subverting aetonormativity, interrogates other norms and by extension, adult norms. By subverting identification compulsion, texts create autonomous subject positions that substantially empower the implied young readers against implied adult authors. This is perhaps the furthest adult authors can venture in their self-denial.

Significantly, for the purposes of this thesis, the increased recognition of the value of postmodern rhetorical strategies within young adult literature has also opened the door to a reevaluation of realism, previously almost unquestioningly promoted as the preferred mode for such fiction. This preference for realism over fantasy¹⁹ has indeed been so marked that Jacqueline Rose ([1984] 1994:60) suggests that although the development of children's literature has generally followed that of the adult model, 'what seems to have happened in recent discussions of children's books is that, in response to the breakdown of the realist aesthetic in the modern adult novel, writers have been arguing with increasing vehemence for its preservation in writing intended for the child'.

¹⁸ In aligning the criticism of children's literature with the central concepts of queer theory, Nikolajeva (2010:8) proposes replacing the crucial term heteronormativity with aetonormativity (from the Latin *aeto* – pertaining to age) to indicate the patterns of adult normativity governing literary works written for children.

¹⁹ Defining fantasy as a genre is a notoriously difficult task and Lucie Armitt (2000:13) complains that prescriptive labelling often closes down rather than opens up critical approaches so that important issues can be lost while critics quibble over 'whether a text is "marvellous" or "fabulous"'. In general, I follow Darko Suvin (1979:7-8) in seeing fantasy as '...a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment'. Within this broad framework, I accept that different sub-categories such as science fiction, the gothic or what Waller (2009) calls 'fantastic realism' do exist, but will argue that these should perhaps be seen in terms of Brian Attebery's (1992:12) idea that genres 'are best approached as "fuzzy sets" meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center'.

Certainly, before what Jonathan Hunt calls the ‘fantasy renaissance’ (2007:142) in the late nineties²⁰ made publishers realise just how lucrative the young adult market could be if it grew beyond its problem novel origins, fantasy novels for adolescents tended to be neglected or denigrated by parents, practitioners and more academic critics intent on maintaining positions of adult authority and guiding the vanishing child/emergent adult away from literary spaces inscribed variously as ‘feral, wild, chaotic, corrupt, evil’ (Scutter, 1999:251). Despite this, the genre remained popular with teenage readers so that adults wishing to dismiss it were regularly forced to denigrate or dismiss the clearly articulated preferences of such readers. For instance, in interrogating *The Written World* (1994), a collection of essays by Agnes Nieuwenhuizen, whom Scutter (1999:296) describes as ‘possibly Australia’s best-known literature consultant’, Scutter claims that Nieuwenhuizen summarily dismisses young people’s declared reading preferences and quotes her as saying: ‘My experience and observation tell me that opting for the romance, fantasy and horror series or the heavily promoted “popular” names is at least as much an indication of a lack of information about what is available, of guidance and of a reading environment, as of genuine individual preferences’.

There are many possible explanations for adult critics’ aversion to fantasy; these range from religious fundamentalism to lingering remnants of the modernist distaste for popular fiction or even an unspoken yet surprisingly widespread cultural distrust of pleasure²¹ since, as Northrop Frye (1976:25) has suggested, academics frequently regard fantasy as ‘delightful, and therefore detestable’. It also seems possible that many ‘book-centred’ critics of the genre may have been encouraged, either directly or indirectly, by the views expressed in Rosemary Jackson’s ([1981] 1988)

²⁰ This was led by J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, which appeared between 1997 and 2007, and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, which was published between 1998 and 2001.

²¹ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

enormously influential study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, a work rooted in both Marxism and psychoanalysis. In it, Jackson endorses Freud's view that fantasy attempts to expel desire and thus to express what is denied by culture and personality. Accordingly, she presents fantasy as reflecting a desire to exorcise the irrational and therefore as a byproduct of neurosis, inclined to 'reinforce a blind faith in "eternal" moral values, really those of an outworn liberal humanism' (Jackson, [1981] 1988:155).

However, as early as 1988, Karl Kroeber took issue with Jackson in his *Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction*, arguing that, in fact, 'fantasy provides important revelations about the strongest tendencies of modern society to exclude and exorcise whatever is neither natural nor amenable to rational explanation' (Kroeber, 1988:87). In this way he defends fantasy from the charge of neurosis, seeing it instead as a healthy response to an over-rational world, an attempt 'to restore balance to a world distorted by its total conquest by humankind' (Kroeber, 1988:7). More significantly for the purposes of this thesis, Darko Suvin (1979:4) sees the value of fantasy as lying in its ability to bring about an experience of 'cognitive estrangement'. This is a process that has much in common with what Russian formalists call *ostranenie*, often translated as 'defamiliarisation', or what Bertold Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt*, usually translated as 'alienation effect' (Raman Selden, 1989:10-12). It is this which, paradoxically, also allows fantasy to bring about what J.R.R. Tolkien ([1964] 1977) terms 'recovery', a renewed appreciation of the known and familiar since, as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980:74) observes, 'Nothing is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than constructing fictitious ones'.

Thus it is possible for Christine Mains (2009:62) to claim of fantasy that

[w]hile some criticisms of the field do have some validity – that it is politically conservative, that it appeals to children and the childish, that it is formulaic and repetitive, especially in the trend to never-ending sequels – fantastic fiction can be a way of describing an imperfect world and provoking social change.

The reason that fantasy has the potential to revise the stereotypes that define contemporary culture is perhaps because, as Brian Attebery (1992:89) suggests, ‘the body of modern fantasy comes to resemble a mythology: that is, a compilation of narratives that express a society’s conception of itself, its individual members, and their place in the universe’. This idea that myth or fantasy offers not an easy escape from the real²² but rather an alternative way of approaching it is echoed both by feminist myth scholar Estella Lauter (1984:2), who writes that, ‘[m]yth is an aspect of our capacity to reason’ and by cultural anthropologist Mircea Eliade ([1957] 1974:6), who claims that ‘[m]yth offers paradigms for all significant human acts’.²³ Similarly, ethical philosopher Margaret Somerville (2006:15) argues:

Humans share their imaginations and bond with one another through the stories they tell. A story is to human growth as a fact is to science, mathematics is to physics, or poetry is to the human spirit. Myths are a special kind of story. They capture and express realities that cannot be put directly into words and shared in any other way. Joseph Campbell

²² Jonathan Gottschall (2012:49) responds to this common criticism of fantasy by pointing out that if such works offer escape, it is a curious form of it since ‘while it may temporarily free us from our troubles ... it does so by ensnaring us in new sets of troubles – in imaginary worlds of struggle and stress and mortal woe’ since ‘[a]lmost all story makers work within the tight confines of problem structure a pattern of complication, crisis and resolution’ (Gottschall, 2012:54).

²³ The terms ‘myth’ and ‘fantasy’ are often used rather loosely and require some definition. In general, this thesis will rely on Frye’s ([1957] 1971:139) suggestion that ‘myth is generally concerned with gods or demons and ... takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable’. Fantasy, on the other hand, will be considered to have more in common with what Frye ([1957] 1971:33) identifies as romance and folktale in which a human hero ‘moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended’ and where the dominant narrative pattern is that of ‘the successful quest’ involving three stages: ‘the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero’ (Frye, [1957] 1971:187). However, recognition will also be given to Frye’s (1976) later suggestion that the accumulative power generated by the repeated exploration of the romance structure may eventually generate a secular scripture, a body of work which, while never pretending to be anything but fiction, may yet acquire something of the power of myth to explain and order an apparently chaotic world.

maintained that what is common to all humanity is the experience of awe and wonder (experiences that he would call religious) and the resulting creation of myths that help give our lives meaning and purpose.

In other words, as Robert A. Collins (1982:108-120) suggests, fantasy or myth and reality are inextricably intertwined so that defining fantasy involves defining reality and the postmodern blurring of the distinctions between the real and the imaginary has also encouraged critics to understand that

... fantasy, just as much as the “realist” novel, is about reality – about the human condition. All serious fantasy is deeply rooted in human experience and is relevant to human living. Its major difference from the realist novel is that it takes account of areas of experience – imaginative, subconscious, visionary – which free the human spirit to range beyond the limits of empirical primary world reality. In a sense, then, fantasy provides the writer with greater scope to construct his own scheme of morality, his own time structure, his own political and social order. But at no time does this apparent freedom permit the author to escape from contemporary reality. (Ann Swinfen, 1984:231)

Interestingly, John Stephens (1992:7), while suggesting that the distinction between realism and fantasy is ‘the most important generic distinction in children’s fiction’, sees all literature as essentially figurative rather than simply mimetic, explaining that whereas fantasy functions in terms of metaphor, realism operates in terms of metonymy. This is a significant distinction in that I would argue that the greater creative range of metaphor necessarily allows for a greater distance between the real and its figurative analogues than metonymy does and that this very distance makes it uniquely suited to examining those aspects of the psyche least amenable to rational analysis. Perhaps, as Peter Munz (1973:55) suggests, one might consider the possibility that ‘myths are no more than extreme cases of metaphor’ and that they

may have arisen and been used because human beings struggle to describe what he refers to as 'feeling-states' literally (Munz, 1973:76). Thus, as Maria Nikolajeva (2010:42) has observed:

The fantastic mode allows children's writers to deal with important psychological, ethical, and existential questions in a slightly detached manner, which frequently proves more effective with young readers than straightforward realism. For instance, the battle of good and evil may be less disturbing, yet more persuasive when described within an imaginary world than in the reader's immediate surroundings. The spiritual growth of the protagonist can be presented more tangibly when depicted in terms of struggle with external magical forces than in terms of inner tension. In particular, fantasy can empower a child protagonist in a way that so-called realistic prose is incapable of doing. In this respect fantasy has indeed a huge subversive potential as it can interrogate the existing power relations, including those between child and adult, without necessarily shattering the real order of the world.

In a sense, this observation builds on Bruno Bettelheim's ([1976] 1991) groundbreaking work, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, in which he suggests that the psychological value of fairy tales lies in the fact that they allow the young child to explore his or her potentially terrifying desires and emotions at a safe distance from any context in which their potentially destructive power is manifestly apparent.²⁴ Significantly, he therefore sees the worlds of fantasy as uniquely well adapted both to addressing the existential questions that Bradford *et al.* (2011:12) see as central to the formation of adolescent subjectivity and offering ethically appropriate ways of resolving them:

²⁴ To some extent, Bettelheim's work has subsequently been discredited by folklorist Alan Dundes (1987), who makes a strong case for much of the work having been plagiarised, but it remains true that it is this book more than any other that has made psychoanalytical interpretations of children's literature more acceptable to a wider public. Furthermore, although Jack Zipes (1983) and Maria Tatar (2009) also take Bettelheim to task for essentializing or ahistorical readings of particular tales, his central premise that fairy tales (and by extension, works of classic fantasy) offer not mere indulgent escapism but rather access to what might even be classed as complex forms of narrative therapy has never been seriously challenged.

Myths and fairy stories both answer the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself? The answers given by myths are definite, while the fairy tale is suggestive; its messages may imply solutions, but it never spells them out. Fairy tales leave to the child's fantasizing whether and how to apply to himself what the story reveals about life and human nature. (Bettelheim, [1976] 1991:45)

In a sense then fantasy settings and the characters populating them are only partly defined by their physical characteristics and actions; more fundamentally they can all be seen as defined by their roles in a symbolic drama. As Brian Attebery puts it, 'The entire fantasy world becomes a map of the mind, and the conflict that takes place there is like a medieval psychomachia, a contest between personified virtues and vices, or in more modern terms between integrative and destructive forces within the personality' (1980:182). For this reason, Ursula K. Le Guin (1989a:64) sees fantasy as '... the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil within the soul'.

This perception of fantasy's moral or spiritual dimension may point to a possible explanation of its popularity with contemporary teenagers living in cultures in which the young no longer undergo a period of withdrawal and ritual preparation for adulthood, but are generally left to negotiate a series of informal rites of passage such as their first sexual encounter or first experience of bereavement quite unaided. In this context it is also worth noting both Hugh Crago's (1999:181) observation that in pre-literate cultures narrative seems to have various functions including 'preserving accumulated knowledge, articulating meaning, offering cathartic release and pleasure, and promoting "healing" in the broad sense of reassurance as to each listener's place in the scheme of things' and Mircea Eliade's (1958) suggestion that

myths and fairy tales, which seem to have been the progenitors of modern fantasy, give symbolic expression to initiation rites designed to guide the young through their dangerous rebirth into adulthood.

The perception of fantasy as inherently well-equipped to address both personal morality and rituals of transition may also derive from an awareness that while its characters and settings are almost infinitely flexible and variable, its narrative structures are far more fixed. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, for instance, John Clute (1997:804, 942, 1098) suggests that what he defines as full fantasies all follow a process of identifying *wrongness*, leading on to *thinning* (a perception that the world is less than it should or could be), prior to an experience of *recognition* or *epiphany* marking a turning point and the initiation of a process of *healing*.

The predictability of this structure can encourage the dismissal of traditional fantasies on the grounds that their formulaic narrative conventions restrict interpretive freedom. Thus Farah Mendlesohn (2008:3) criticises the typical quest or portal fantasy, saying that it

... begins with a sense of stability that is revealed to be the stability of a thinned land ... and concludes with *restoration* rather than *instauration*, the making over of the world. Most portal-quest fantasies associate the king with the well-being of the land and the condition of the land with the morality of the place. These thematic elements may seem coincidental, but they serve to structure the ideology of a narrative that is directive and coercive, and that narrows the possibilities for a subversive reading.

It is certainly true that most works of fantasy operate in a comic mode in that while their protagonists are often freed from the conventional world by entry into or invasion by the carnivalesque, the end of such novels almost invariably requires a return to the point of origin. Yet I would not equate this return with the easy

restoration of social norms by improbable means so frequently found in romantic comedy. While the central figures in fantasy may indeed find themselves regularly remaking secondary worlds only to then find themselves returned to all too familiar primary ones, this does not prove that the goal of such works is 'restoration' rather than 'instauration'. Worlds, after all, are constructed by those who live in them and while the fantasy may not always or even often show social change within a primary world, it inarguably registers change within the central character and such change inevitably brings with it the potential for change in any world in which this altered consciousness finds itself. As T.S. Eliot ([1943] 2005:1366) observes,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. ('Little Gidding', ll.241-244)

Criticism such as Mendlesohn's may also be guilty of failing to recognise that young adult readers, while considerably older than the pre-schoolers who have become the usual modern consumers of fairy tales, may be almost as emotionally vulnerable.

Certainly Le Guin has stated in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (1984:82):

...there's a certain kind of hopelessness that I just can't dump on kids. On grown-ups sometimes: but as a person with kids, who likes kids, who remembers what being a kid is like, I find there are things I can't inflict on them. There's a moral boundary, in this sense, that I'm aware of in writing a book for young adults.

Le Guin is not alone in questioning whether authorial abdication of responsibility for offering young readers moral guidance and the consequent apparent abandonment

of such readers to the sometimes brutal resolutions characteristic of adolescent 'problem' novels are really justifiable. Jonathan Hunt (2007:146) questions the 'more demanding and sophisticated use of language and increasingly experimental narrative forms' characterising young adult realist fiction and Patricia Head (1996:28) notes the genre's growing preference for embracing 'cultural references that do not make for a safe read: violence, suicide, and sexuality, not conventional topics in the genre of children's literature'. Both authors then find themselves wondering whether such texts are not asking too much of adolescents by leaving them alone to confront scepticism, contradictions, and ambiguities while forcing them to make choices between sometimes equally valid ethical and behavioural codes. Yet, as Metcalf (1997:53) argues,

... the ability to make more or less informed choices even in the absence of grand narratives is a vital lesson for a child growing up in a democratic, consumer-oriented, information society. In a world in which competing authoritative discourses vie with each other for ever shorter durations of time, children are forced to grow up sooner, learn the language games, and participate in them. With the shift in the perception of childhood and in childhood experiences, authors are addressing more precocious children who share more experiences with adults than children did a generation or two ago.

It is in this context of uncertainty about the needs and emotional resilience of adolescent readers, that I would suggest that fantasy's ability to offer both the challenge of the new and the comfort of the familiar makes it peculiarly attractive to readers of young adult fiction. Mendlesohn (2008:3) criticises what she calls portal-quest fantasies for having drawn from epic and romance potentially restrictive ideas of 'sequenced adventures, journeys as transition, and the understanding that there is a destiny to follow'. Yet rather than seeing such conventions as misleading, 'directive' or even 'coercive', I would argue that they should be seen as providing a reassuring

framework within which readers may be empowered to face the threatening psychic forces inhibiting the growth to maturity since, as Bettelheim ([1976] 1991:39) argues:

In childhood, more than in any other age, all is becoming. As long as we have not yet achieved considerable security within ourselves, we cannot engage in difficult psychological struggles unless a positive outcome seems certain to us, whatever the chances for this may be in reality. The fairy tale offers fantasy materials which suggest to the child in symbolic form what the battle to achieve self-realization is all about, and it guarantees a happy ending.

Although contemporary young adult fantasy generally also guarantees a more or less happy ending, its adoption of many of the techniques of postmodernism including double-voiced discourse, metafictional playfulness and open-ended narratives means that the genre is considerably more complex and ambivalent than its preference for positive closure might suggest. The result is that the best contemporary works of young adult fantasy encourage the adolescent to engage both with himself or herself and with the world by which he or she is defined. Importantly, though, they do so not by forcing the reader to confront the inadequacies of the adult world unmitigated by any protective strategies, but rather by encouraging the adolescent reader to emerge from the cocoon of childhood by responding intuitively to the fantasy hero's awareness of 'thinning' with a shared apprehension that the world of childhood too has become a curiously diminished and no longer satisfying environment. This empathetic recognition then encourages entry into a free-floating imaginative space that yet shadows the real world, questions its norms and offers opportunities for radical change before the hero, and therefore also the reader, is returned to the familiar, having, potentially at least, been empowered to see it in new and even subversive ways.

In this way too, the general preference for first-person narration within such works can become a powerful rhetorical strategy for encouraging active engagement rather than passive compliance. Trites (2000:73), who agrees that '[a]dolescent literature is ... rife with didactic explicit ideologies, however obliquely they may be worded', also suggests that '[t]he relationship between the narrator and the implied reader often proves to be the crucible in which ideology is smelted in adolescent literature'. Thus it is possible that, in fantasy novels, the encouragement not of simple identification, but of a complex process of transference by which metaphoric resonances are established between reader and protagonist may become a way of reassuring the young by allowing them to share, however briefly, Joseph Campbell's ([1949] 1993:39) transcendent vision of the hero as being 'symbolical of that divine, redemptive, and creative image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life'.

Of course, the problem with discussing the nature of the interaction between any book and its readers is that such an interaction is, by its very nature, idiosyncratic, complex and therefore inherently unquantifiable. As Francis Spufford (2002:3-4) observes:

One of the first things you learn as you begin to read is the amazing exterior invisibility of all the rush of event and image which narrative pours through you.... I have not ceased to be amazed by the invisibility that I depend on. Other people can't see what so permeates me.... The imbalance between what's felt and what shows means I carry the sensory load of fiction like a secret. Perhaps like all secrets, it leaks in the end, but while I'm still freshly distended with my cargo of images, while I'm a fish tank with a new shoal in me, with one aspect of myself I enjoy the power of being different behind my unbetraying face.

Yet, despite the ‘amazing exterior invisibility’ of which Spufford speaks, there is considerable if largely unspoken social consensus about the power of books to influence readers. Ironically, this is most commonly reflected in attitudes to works considered to have the potential to produce undesirable effects. Thus there can be few countries in the world which do not attempt to restrict access by children and sometimes also adults to such texts and even when access to them is sanctioned by the State, individual opposition to particular novels may reach extraordinary proportions as can readily be seen from the analysis of violent reactions, including public book burnings, to works such as Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) or J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, which appeared between 1997 and 2007.

The prevalence of such commitment to intervening between book and child reader, in particular, is at least partially explicable in terms of the fact that a good proportion of adults live in close proximity to children and are therefore well placed to observe at first hand the ways in which reading may ‘leak’ into children’s imaginative lives whether by sparking searches for ogres under beds, tears when eleventh birthdays pass undisturbed by Hogwarts owls or startling conversions to anarchism or vegetarianism. Thus, while thinking adults must naturally resist claims that children exist in some form of culture-free zone, many are profoundly aware that the young are not merely discursive constructs either. As Coats and Trites (2006:151-152) observe, children

...have bodies and they cannot read without engaging them. Texts physically affect the body by invoking such somatic responses as emotions and engaging the neurons involved in the cognition of perception Textuality also relies on physical containments that are often defined by the demographics of embodiment, such as race, gender, ability, etc. Children read texts with their bodies, and texts, in turn, communicate to them about meaning that can accrue to their personal form of embodiment.

An adult's awareness of the processes by which children accrue meaning from books is usually also informed by clear memories of the transformative power of his or her own childhood reading. As Spufford (2002:9) remarks:

We can remember readings that acted like transformations. There were times when a particular book, like a seed crystal, dropped into our minds when we were exactly ready for it, like a super-saturated solution, and suddenly we changed. Suddenly a thousand crystals of perception of our own formed, the original insight of the story ordering whole arrays of discoveries inside us, into winking accuracy.

Such statements are, of course, as was discussed earlier, easy to dismiss as fanciful reworkings of unreliable memories, but recent developments in evolutionary thinking indicate that both Spufford's personal celebration of the power of reading and the social outrage sometimes occasioned by fiction may express an instinctive awareness that narrative has a very real power to influence both personal and social development, not by imposing the author's values on the reader but rather, as Spufford's seed crystal analogy suggests, 'by making it possible for the reader to create his own use for the book, whatever that may be' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:225).

While the term evolution is generally associated with Charles Darwin's observations of the biological world, Richard Dawkins ([1976] 1989, 1982, 1986), Daniel Dennett (1991, 1995, 1999), Susan Blackmore (1999), Kate Distin (2005) and others have argued that the essential elements of Darwinism are simply *replication*, *variation* and *selection* and that in any field where these are present, evolution is likely to occur.²⁵

²⁵ The scientific validity of evolutionary psychology is still in the process of being established and many literary critics are unwilling to endorse any theory that reduces identity to an essentialist understanding of biology. However, nuanced interpretations of this material that are careful to recognise the complex interactions between biology and culture are, as Waller (2009:191) notes, becoming 'increasingly influential in discussions about human subjectivity and behaviour' and thus

Thus Dawkins (1982:290) has proposed that, whereas the gene drives the evolution of the body, that of the mind is governed by the meme, which he defines as a unit 'of cultural inheritance, hypothesized as analogous to the particulate gene and as naturally selected in virtue of its phenotypic consequences on its own survival and replication in the cultural environment'. Building on this argument, Dennett (1999) and Blackmore (1999) argue that meme theory leads inescapably to the conclusion that the human mind, traditionally viewed as having the capacity for both creativity and decision making, is actually a complex of parasitic memes, a hive mind, and that any perception of the individual as exerting independent control over this is entirely illusory.

Distin (2005:52), however, rejects this view in favour of arguing that '[u]nlike genetic mutation, which is an essentially mindless process, cultural processes may be directed by intentional human decisions'. She thus contends that an alternative to the Dennett- Blackmore hypothesis is that, far from there being no distinction between the mind and the memes it contains, 'a significant part of our mental architecture is determined by our genotype' (Distin, 2005:168). She supports this contention by suggesting that children may be born with an innate capacity for acquiring concepts or memes, much as Noam Chomsky (1965) has suggested that they have an innate capacity for language learning. She then uses this premise to support her proposition that some innate mentality exists even before memes are acquired (Distin, 2005:161, 170). Distin (2005:168) therefore presents the innate mental potential of the individual as developed rather than constituted by interaction with an environment, 'a crucial element of which is memetic'. To clarify this, she draws an analogy between the mind and muscles:

seem well situated to throw new light on various aspects of human behaviour including the reading patterns and imaginative functioning of adolescents.

The difference, of course, between a muscle and the mind is that in the case of a muscle the only exercise that can strengthen it is that which stems from itself. The mind, on the other hand, may be developed by concepts that spring from sources external to itself: from other minds. This is due to the nature of memes as cultural replicators, transmissible between different people's minds in a way that exercise is obviously not transmissible between different people's muscles. Nor do the physical muscles develop as a result of instructions delivered by anything outside the body of which they are part, whereas mental development happens as a result of the executive power of the replicators acquired. (Distin, 2005:171)

Crucially then, Distin (2005:89) emphasises that memes as representations may be found 'both within human minds and outside them, in information stores like books and blueprints'.

This has obvious relevance for those interested in reading since it implies that the human mind can be 'developed by interaction with existing culture'²⁶ so that 'external representations [such as books] play an essential role in memetic replication' (Distin, 2005:90). Intriguingly though since internal brain structures are the original source of such external representations, Distin (2005:90) also suggests that this uniquely human 'combination of both sorts of meme store has led to a massive capacity for information dissemination and copying stability, which would have been impossible via only one of the storage methods'.

The massive expansion of the space available for meme storage in literate cultures can therefore be seen as something that encourages variation rather than, as Rose ([1984] 1994) suggests, something that promotes homogeneity. Since the capacity of

²⁶ Interestingly, recent neurological studies of the teenage brain seem to provide evidence that the brain itself may be shaped by cultural factors. After summarising some of this evidence in an article in *The Journal of Adolescent Research*, Howard Sercombe (2010:34) states that 'the brain as a structure is not only shaped by genetics, by biology, but also by environment, by experience. The brain does not only determine experience. Experience also determines the brain'.

the contemporary meme store is almost infinite, it can be inclusive rather than exclusive and this, in turn, ensures that memetic innovation or mutation is more likely to occur in the reading child than the child whose exposure to cultural memes is limited to those stored only in the minds of his or her adult caregivers. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Carlsen (1980:40) indicates that the peak of interest in reading often comes between the ages of twelve and fourteen, a fact which would seem to support John Abbott and Terry Ryan's suggestion as recorded by Waller (2009:190) that adolescents may be particularly open to new memes since changes in the teenage brain seem designed to encourage young adults 'to question authority, challenge earlier ways of learning, fear less and risk more', thus quickening the pace of cultural adaptation. From this perspective then, Waller (2009:96) argues, '[a]dolescence is the last valid space for fantastic empowerment before the responsibilities of adulthood commence'.

Since Distin (2005:53) also argues that recombination is promoted whenever old ways of thought are brought to bear on a new situation whether imaginary or real, both she and Dawkins ultimately concur that, in his words, human consciousness does have 'the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary the selfish memes of our indoctrination.... We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators' (Dawkins, [1976] 1989:215).

Interestingly, Distin (2005:44) also points out that memes are essentially integrative and thus will have a greater chance of 'penetrating the meme pool' if they are consistent with other memes in that environment. This suggests two things of interest to the critic of children's literature: the first is that memes which are radically at odds with those already active within the reader's mind may be less fiercely resisted if they are embedded within a fantasy world which by its obvious differences from the primary one presents itself as inherently unthreatening; and the second is that meme

transmission is more likely to result in recombination if the number of dissonant memes is restricted. Thus when teenage fantasies are criticised for ‘providing the potential for radical retellings of adolescence, which test dominant discursive frameworks’ (Waller, 2009:195) but too often invoke values that are ‘conventional and even reactionary’ (Waller, 2009:195), such critics may be overlooking the fact that it may be precisely the reassuring presence of a significant number of dominant memes that can make the work of fiction concerned an effective vehicle for the subversive transmission of a limited number of more unsettling ones. Again it seems that fantasy’s unique ability to evoke wonder and novelty within the parameters of a reassuringly optimistic narrative structure may make it a particularly powerful means of transmitting challenging memetic material. In this sense, it is capable of functioning like myth, which Rollo May (1992:15) describes as ‘a way of making sense in a senseless world’, tracing ‘narrative patterns which give significance to our existence and are able to provide an individual with the inner security he/she needs in order to live adequately’.

By recognising the agency of the individual mind, the work of both Dawkins and Distin can also be seen as potentially giving credibility to Tatar’s representation of children’s literature as a contact zone in which the child’s developing mind can interact with and crucially select from an enormous range of possible memes originating in adult minds, which have in their turn been formed by a range of encounters with diverse meme complexes. In this way it also becomes possible to argue that Tatar’s ‘contact zone’ may approximate aspects of the juvenile reading experience more closely than Rose’s dispiriting vision of children passively absorbing and being absorbed by a monolithic and unvarying memetic structure generated by adults who are unable even to recognise or acknowledge their own complicity in such embedding.

Patricia Head (1996:28) argues that Rose's depiction of the impossibility of children's fiction comes from a definition in which 'children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver) but where neither of them enters the space in between' (Rose, [1984] 1994:2). However, she then suggests that postmodernist writing appears to bring 'new possibilities to reader and critic, because the relationship between author and reader is foregrounded, and the implied adult author and the implied child reader *can* enter the space in between' (Head, 1996:28, italics mine). The moral value of literature for both children and adults has therefore now come to be located, by both postmodernist critics and evolutionary philosophers, not in any fixed ideal but rather in the kind of tantalising indeterminacy that encourages the reader's active engagement with the text. Thus John Carey (2005:214) argues for the vital importance of 'indistinctness' in literature, suggesting that it is this which forces the reader into some kind of imaginative accommodation in order 'to take meaning from the text'. Similarly, Nikolajeva (2003:8) observes that although traditionally 'the majority of children's books are action-oriented' and present a world where structural and psychological forms of closure often coincide, increasingly such works now conclude with what narratologists call aperture. Gary Morson (1994:169-172) says of this that '[u]nlike structural open ending, aperture does not in the first place imply the possibility of further events (providing an opportunity for a sequel), but an indeterminacy concerning both what has actually happened and what might still happen'. Howard Sklar (2008:490) argues that such shifting uncertainties are of particular value in young adult literature since open-ended texts engender 'an intriguing confluence between, on the one hand, narratives that generate uncertainty and, on the other, the developmental and experiential uncertainty of many early adolescents'. The result of this confluence, he then argues, is to force readers to "cope" with the loss of knowability' by facilitating the discovery that much of what they 'know' is simply subjective (Sklar, 2008:490).

Arguably then through indeterminacy and aperture or open-endedness, what one might classify as postmodern young adult fantasy may be even better placed than more conventional fantasy to offer its readers access to what Nodelman (1997:13) calls ‘a vast repertoire of ways of being human to choose from, to play with, to celebrate’. Nodelman’s use of the word ‘play’ in this context is particularly significant since it builds on the general agreement that children at play are involved in intensive preparation for adulthood (Gottschall, 2012:41) while also resonating with both Bakhtin’s (1984:6) suggestion that ethical texts open up ludic spaces in which exploration and negotiation are encouraged and Margaret and Michael Rustin’s (1987:3) argument that the authors of children’s literature often create emotional depth by using ‘symbolic equivalents or containers for states of feeling’ so that books for children may achieve ‘a kind of poetic communication analogous to the symbolizations of children’s imaginative play’.²⁷

While adolescents may no longer obviously use play to try out the occupational or domestic roles of adulthood, Waller (2009:6) suggests that they nevertheless continue to try out possible identities or meme assemblages through the ‘absorption, rejection or “bricolage” of the dominant ideologies and social patterns of their parents or educators’. Thus Brian Boyd (2009:15), who often brings an evolutionary perspective to bear on literary criticism, perhaps unconsciously echoes Distin’s analogy between the mind and muscles by arguing that interaction with works of art may serve as ‘a playground for the mind’, a space in which cognitive powers are stretched, exercised and strengthened rather than being subordinated, made abject or weakened.

²⁷ For recent evolutionary perspectives on the psychosocial value of children’s creative play, see David Bjorkland and Anthony Pellegrini (2002), Paul Bloom (2004) and Alison Gopnik (2009).

Seen in this way, young adult fantasy novels may come to exemplify Arnold Weinstein's (2011:8) contention that literature operates as 'the great bridge that enables us to exit our precincts, that enables other places and other lives to come to us, asking us to "try it on," "try it out"'. In particular, Weinstein suggests that the power of all literature lies in its ability to arouse an emotional response so that where facts, statistics and discursive argument appeal primarily to the reasoning mind, literature appeals to the imagination. It is possible too that this imaginative response to literature may be particularly powerful in younger readers for whom, as Howard Sklar (2008:492) has shown, narratives are more likely to provide 'absorptive experiences' in which readers become 'immersed in the events and details of a story and the sensations that they produce'.

Of course, it is precisely such experience that Susan Cooper (1976:365) also seems to draw on when, in her Newbery acceptance speech, she claims that the reading child enters something like a trance state: 'Suddenly, for a time, the door is open, the magic is working; a channel exists between the page and that shadowy cave in the mind.' However, as I hope the body of this chapter has shown, Cooper's channel metaphor, while evocative, may also be seen as dangerously simplistic in that it presents the idea that information flows from page to mind without either obstacle or filter and thus opens the way to the thoroughly discredited idea that reading any particular work or group of works is likely to have a precisely measurable or predictable effect on any young reader.

When Fred Inglis, author of *The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction*, suggested in 1981 that 'the structure of a novel and the structure of a person are the same, and both are moral' (Inglis, 1981:31) and that, for this reason, '[a] novelist ought to create fictions that criticise the life he finds about him from the standpoint of the finest life he can imagine' so that 'his work enables his

readers to find the best and fullest, the freest and most admirably self-aware versions of life which it is possible to lead in the circumstances of the time' (Inglis, 1981:92), his views met with considerable resistance from those who argued that his reliance on the benevolence of authorial intentions and refusal to see terms such as 'best' and 'finest' as in any way culturally determined, could only be regarded as impossibly naïve in a context in which it had become increasingly clear that the culture of childhood is inescapably bound up with political questions of power and manipulation. Yet perhaps the key word here is 'inescapably'. Ironically perhaps, I would argue that it is only once it is fully understood that children's literature can never exist independently of the structures of social power that perhaps Inglis's view of the functions of children's literature can be given new validity by works, whether fantasies or realist novels, that do not simply impose monolithic moral concepts, but rather acknowledge the young adult reader's agency by consciously using metafictional techniques to highlight authorial choices and the ways in which fiction may embody and explore a range of viable social memes. Ultimately perhaps, the moral goal of such works is simply to promote tolerance and experimentation. Certainly, in Northrop Frye's 1963 Massey Lecture *The Educated Imagination*, he responds to an imagined question about what the use can be of studying imaginary worlds where 'anything is possible and anything can be assumed, where there are no rights or wrongs and all arguments are equally good' by replying:

One of the most obvious uses, I think, is its encouragement of tolerance. In the imagination our own beliefs are also only possibilities, but we can also see the possibilities in the beliefs of others. Bigots and fanatics seldom have any use for the arts, because they're so preoccupied with their beliefs and actions that they can't see them as also possibilities. (Frye, 1963:33)

Interestingly, in Margaret Somerville's 2006 Massey Lecture *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit* delivered more than forty years later, she also

acknowledges the power of literature by arguing that it provides a language by which we can gain access to 'the full spectrum of our human ways of knowing, especially moral intuition, imagination and creativity' (Somerville, 2006:72).

Certainly, many of those involved in children's literature in any critical capacity have now learned that, instead of criticising life from a single position, if we are not to fear what adults might use texts to do to children, 'we must teach them to be divided subjects in their reading and in their lives – to be involved as both implied readers of texts and critical observers of what texts demand of them in that process' (Nodelman, 1997:12). The distancing techniques by which fantasy allows its readers to think analogously about their own situations and lives are therefore also ideally suited to encouraging precisely such a divided response.

In the remainder of this thesis then, particular aspects of young adult fantasy will be read against what has been established as the discursive field of young adulthood and young adult literature²⁸ in an attempt to create a narrative bridge between myself and the adolescent other or, in David Herman's (2003a:184) terms, to insert my own critical perceptions into 'a network of relations between storytellers, the participants whose experiences they recount, and the larger environment embedding those experiences, including the setting provided by the opportunity of storytelling itself'.

Because there are almost as many types of fantasy as there are adolescents who read it, this thesis will attempt neither to establish a taxonomy of the genre nor anything more than a general and consciously flexible impression of adolescent readers. I will draw as and when appropriate on all the theoretical perspectives and

²⁸ Alison Waller (2009:6) draws on Foucauldian thinking to define a discursive field as 'a theoretical matrix where different types of knowledge, fictive representations and dominant themes intersect to produce meaning'.

‘word children’ (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1998:193) described within this chapter, but always try to remember that these are merely constructions and that, as such, can hope to approximate only part of a complex reality.

In considering the possible ways in which these variable teenage constructs might read the works I have chosen, I will also consciously strive for what Lissa Paul (1987:194) has described as a ‘kind of double-vision’ which can ‘move freely between intuitive thinking and logic and between adult experience and the freshness of child vision’. For this reason, I will also not attempt to create a prescriptive argument, but instead will offer what is essentially a series of loosely interlocking explorations of adolescent fantasy in relation to four key themes or meme constellations. Thus the first chapter of this thesis will focus on how postmodern techniques allow contemporary works of young adult fantasy to complicate awareness of issues of time, space and causality; the second will consider the way in which prevalent memes involving witches and witchcraft have been re-visioned²⁹ to highlight issues of gender; the third will consider fantastic representations of ethnicity and the postcolonial recovery of subordinated cultural memes; and the final chapter will focus on retellings of Arthurian myth to consider how metafictional techniques may be used to encourage a divided and thus more aware mode of reading by foregrounding the powers and dangers of story itself. While this approach does not lend itself easily to conclusive findings, I hope it may help to initiate a reevaluation of the constructive rather than destructive potentialities inherent in the relationship between adult authors and child readers as well as of the particular value of fantasy in encouraging creative questioning rather than passive acceptance of dominant memes.

²⁹ The term ‘re-visioned’ is taken from Adrienne Rich’s influential essay ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ (1971) and it is in Rich’s sense of returning to old worlds with a new voice that the term is used in the rest of this thesis.

The issue of text selection in a wide-ranging study such as this one is also necessarily a complex one. Just as Applebee (1978:129) argues that the structure of any novel 'is a record of the author's processes of construing, a record that is unconsciously projected into the shaped experience of the work, but governed by accepted techniques of form and structure which will allow it to be "read back" by an audience' so too the patterns governing a critic's choice of texts are necessarily revealing of his or her predilections. For this reason, I can do no more than foreground the inevitable subjectivity of my choices by admitting that the novels to be discussed reflect a highly personal selection of works from a series of 'fuzzy sets' (Attebery, 1992:12). As such, my choices will no doubt reflect not only aspects of my age, ethnicity and gender, but also the influence of my South African environment. The fiction to be analysed here is thus obviously indicative of this socio-cultural bias although I hope it is not defined by it. In addition to this, the novels share only four key characteristics. Firstly, all of them are fantasies in the broadest sense of the term since they are all shaped by 'the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition' and all deploy 'an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment' (Suvin, 1979:7-8). Secondly, while some of them could be read by pre-pubescent children and others might almost be adult novels, the works I examine here are all ones dealing with adolescent experience and all have been marketed as teenage fiction. Thirdly, since I accept Peter Hunt's (1996:16) view that children's books can only properly be perceived as such if they are written for children who represent a childhood that is 'recognizable today' and hope to demonstrate that reading can function as a creative contact zone between adults and children, each of the works discussed here has been read with enjoyment by both my

teenage daughters, Claire and Helen Lenahan, and myself.³⁰ Fourthly, because my interest is in the way in which postmodern narrative strategies interact with and mediate the grand narratives of traditional fantasy, all the texts I analyse were still in print at the time of writing, were first published during the last sixty years and either consciously show the influence of postmodernism or anticipate its rhetorical strategies in significant and readily apparent ways.

Finally, in the last fifty years, critics and authors have become suspicious of any approach to children's reading which suggests that novels either have or even should have a social or moral function. Yet, interestingly, in his iconoclastic work *What Good Are the Arts?*, John Carey (2005:167) suggests that perhaps we now need to 'switch the aim of research into the arts to finding out not what critics think of this or that artwork – which is necessarily only of limited and personal interest – but how art has affected and changed other people's lives'. He then goes on to state that 'like drugs, drink and anti-depressants, literature is a mind-changer and an escape, but unlike them it develops and enlarges the mind as well as changing it' (Carey, 2005:210). In support of this contention he quotes a report of the astonishingly positive effect of a reading programme on young offenders in a Durham institution (Carey, 2005:210-212) before concluding: 'Literature does not make you a better person, though it may help you to criticize what you are. But it enlarges your mind, and it gives you thoughts, words and rhythms that will last you for life' (Carey, 2005:260).

It is my hope that the chapters which follow will make some contribution to the dialogue Carey proposes by returning to Bowen's (1950:267) claim that 'the child lives in the book' and 'the book lives in the child' while attempting to show that 'a

³⁰ Naturally, there is a possibility that my own reading tastes subtly influenced those of my children, but the fact that the novels of William Mayne, for instance, are not mentioned here is a clear indication that their tastes were certainly not entirely overruled by mine.

more insightful description of the reading process...comes from viewing the reader and the text as both acting upon and constraining each other within the broader context of acting upon and being constrained by social practices' (Katharine Jones, 2006:290).

Chapter 1

Postmodern Positionings:

Alternate Worlds and Adolescent Choices³¹

Modern fantasy is, by its very nature, a genre of binaries. This is, perhaps, hardly surprising since it takes much of its impetus from Tolkien's ([1964] 1977:49) now famous assertion that the art of fantasy 'is the operative link between imagination and the final result, Sub-creation'. For Tolkien, the task of the author of fantasy is thus the creation of a fully-realised secondary world displaying the 'inner consistency of reality' (Tolkien, [1964] 1977:49) and therefore capable of 'commanding Secondary Belief' (Tolkien, [1964] 1977:51). This formative opposition between the world of perceived reality and its imagined rival has proved a fertile ground for the establishment of other memetic binaries that continue to haunt the genre: monster and mage, male and female, good and evil and, perhaps most important of all, I and not-I. These dichotomies are usually symbiotic rather than antagonistic since, used skillfully, each pole of the binary defines and enriches the reader's experience of its twin. Thus, as Tolkien ([1964] 1977:58) has also observed, good fantasy is a means of recovery, a way of regaining a clear view of a world that we ordinarily take for granted:

We may indeed be older now, in so far as we are heirs in enjoyment or in practice of many generations of ancestors in the arts. In this inheritance of wealth there may be a danger of boredom or of anxiety to be original, and that may lead to a distaste for fine drawing, delicate pattern, and "pretty" colours, or else to mere manipulation and over-

³¹ Material contained in this chapter has previously been published in the following journal article: Molly Brown. 2010. The Physics of Responsibility: Alternate Worlds and Adolescent Choices. *Mousaion*, 28(2):1-13.

elaboration of old material, clever and heartless. But the true road of escape from such weariness is not to be found in the willfully awkward, clumsy or misshapen, not in making all things dark or unremittingly violent Before we reach such states we need recovery. We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. In that sense only a taste for them may make us, or keep us, childish.

In spite of Tolkien's distrust of twentieth-century disillusionment with traditional aesthetic mores, it is clear that in many ways, the characteristically double-voiced genre of fantasy has benefited more than he might like to admit from changing literary tastes. In particular, the rise of postmodernism, which, Brian Attebery (1992:37) suggests, 'deliberately perpetrates illusions, adopts and even exaggerates outmoded conventions, and attempts to de-center the individual' has done much to reinvigorate some of its more threadbare conventions. Using the definition quoted above as the basis of his argument, Attebery (1992:50), for instance, asserts that the metafictional playfulness that so defines and pervades the postmodern text has much in common with the traditional ethos of fantasy and therefore that the rise of postmodernism has done much to justify the practice of fantasists, who have always used such techniques to generate stories 'in which we recognize the parts of ourselves that defy any other means of analysis'.

Patricia Waugh (1984:2) is rather more tentative about the links between fantasy and revelation, claiming instead that postmodernism celebrates 'the power of the creative imagination while remaining uncertain about the validity of its representations'. Essentially, she argues that postmodernism doubts the possibility of any reality existing independently of individual consciousness and thus, by implication, also any possibility of mediating such a reality to others through the medium of language. As a

result, she suggests that it also questions traditional literary givens such as a single narrative voice arising from a fixed subject position and capable of transmitting an unequivocal view of the world. This approach to postmodernism is certainly evident in a number of more recent fantasies for young adult readers, all of which demonstrably resist fixing the position of their subjects in either time or space and several of which also experiment with ambiguous or multiple narrative voices.

Heterotopia, a term used by Michel Foucault (1986) to denote discordant human environments, has become a familiar concept to postmodern critics anxious to emphasise the shifting and ambiguous relationship of much contemporary fiction to conventional representations of the world particularly in relation to the twin restrictions of space and time. Interestingly, postmodern perceptions of both spatial and temporal constraints as fractured or fluid rather than fixed and linear are, to some extent, paralleled by contemporary work in physics and mathematics.

According to John Gribbin's (1992:202) interpretation of Hugh Everett's many worlds theory, for instance, the number of possible universes is infinite. This conception of space-time runs parallel to much postmodern thought in that it stresses multiplicity by suggesting that 'whenever the universe...is confronted by a choice of paths at the quantum level, it actually follows *both* possibilities, splitting into two universes'. The result has been a move away from a unitary or even binary conception of the universe towards an acceptance of the possibility of heterotopia, the idea that we may, in fact, be surrounded by a seemingly endless number of dissonant and dissimilar worlds.

As Maria Nikolajeva (2002:25) has observed, heterotopia, like other postmodern characteristics such as heteroglossia or multiple voices, multifocalization, indeterminacy, intersubjectivity and metafiction has had profound implications not only for adult fiction but also for works written for younger readers in that it

'interrogates the conventional definitions of children's and juvenile fiction based on simplicity, stability and optimism'. However, far from seeing this interrogation as destructive, I would argue that the indeterminacy inherent in heterotopia as a literary trope may be used to reflect the 'split mind' that Nikolajeva (2002:26-27) also claims characterizes contemporary adolescents, most of whom, she suggests, exist 'in a marginal, unstable zone between childhood and adulthood'.

It is difficult to pinpoint the first use of heterotopia in fantasy for younger readers. Glimpses of its possibilities can be found as early as C.S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* ([1955] 1984:36), in which the protagonists, Polly and Digory, are magically transported to a glade of tall trees and calm pools, each of which leads to another world. Polly, who has been expecting to find herself in one of the traditional secondary worlds of fantasy, is initially puzzled but Digory understands that the wood is not a world at all but a sort of 'in-between place' that is not in any world but, once found, offers access to all of them. However, having allowed his readers this glimpse of potential multiplicity, Lewis seems to draw back from it by allowing Polly and Digory to dive into only two pools: the one leading to Narnia and the one leading to the dying world of Charn.

It seems to be generally agreed that the first author of fantasy for younger readers to have consciously exploited the concept of heterotopia is Diana Wynne Jones. In an interview with her, Charles Butler (2001:165) comments that although the concept of parallel worlds is not uncommon in contemporary fiction, it was used only rarely in the mid-seventies when Jones first began to explore it. Jones then replies:

I think the idea of parallel worlds that you could move between was new, really. At least it was new to fantasy – some science fiction writers had done it. I did it not because I particularly *wanted* it to be new: it

was that I felt claustrophobic having just the world to write about.
(Butler, 2001:165)

Interestingly, when Butler (2001:166) goes on to ask if Jones was influenced by the theories of quantum mechanics, Jones replies: ‘...this was talked about later, after I’d done it. I was highly delighted, thinking; “Now the scientists are really saying it’s possible!”’.

In her *Chrestomanci* sequence, begun in 1977, Jones posits an alternate world strongly reminiscent of late Victorian England but in which a number of people have magical abilities of some kind. We gradually come to understand that the frame world of the narrative is one of a sequence of related worlds including our own. All these worlds are subject to the authority of an enchanter with nine lives, the Chrestomanci, whose task it is to watch over the use of magic in them.

In the fourth novel of the sequence, *The Lives of Christopher Chant* (1988), the eponymous hero is both a nine-lived enchanter and an adolescent made miserable by his warring and irresponsible parents. In his dreams, Christopher escapes his unhappiness by going to ‘The Place Between’ that, like Lewis’s transitional space, offers access to multiple worlds:

Christopher always knew in his dream that you could get to Almost Anywhere from The Place Between....He set off sliding, scrambling, edging across bulging wet rock, and climbing up or down, until he found another valley and another path. There were hundreds of them. He called them the Anywheres.

The Anywheres were mostly quite different from London.They were hotter or colder, with strange trees and stranger houses. Sometimes the people in them looked quite ordinary, sometimes their skin was blueish or reddish and their eyes were peculiar, but they were always very kind to Christopher. (Jones, 1988b:9)

The treacherous and unstable terrain of this transitional space contrasts with the orderly calm of Lewis's 'Wood Between the Worlds' but its unformed qualities seem to echo something of Christopher's own anger and confusion. Significantly, he risks returning to it again and again because it offers the promise of access to alternate worlds where he will be valued and treated with the kindness he craves.

The Chrestomanci of Christopher's time, Gabriel de Witt, is anxious to find a successor and therefore adopts Christopher. The boy, who has dreamed of becoming a famous cricketer, strongly resents this and flagrantly defies De Witt's authority whenever he can. As a result, his unscrupulous Uncle Ralph finds it easy to persuade him to travel between the worlds and bring back powerful but banned magical items such as dragon's blood and mermaid's flesh. Eventually, Christopher, who has not always realised what he has been bringing back for Ralph, has to face the fact that his behaviour has made him complicit in a number of hideous crimes, including the slaughter of a whole tribe of mermaids (Jones, 1988b:174). Sickened by this discovery, Christopher then has to watch Gabriel de Witt, who has been magically turned into a boy, grow to adulthood again. By allowing Christopher to watch a speeded up version of De Witt's development, Jones lets her readers see that time too turns each of us into heterotopic incarnations of ourselves:

...Gabriel was growing up in bursts. First he was a young man with a floral silk tie and a keen, wistful look; then he was an older keener man in a dingy suit. After that he was middle-aged and bleached and somehow hopeless and desperate, as if everything he hoped for was gone. The next instant, this man had pulled himself together into a brisk, silvery gentleman; and then the same gentleman, older and grimmer. Christopher stared, awed and rather touched. He realised that Gabriel had hated being the Chrestomanci, and they were seeing the stages by which he had come to terms with it. I'm glad I'm going to find it easier than *that!* Christopher thought, as Gabriel finally became the grim old man that Christopher knew. (Jones, 1988b:245, italics original)

If Christopher's story is viewed from the perspective of contemporary myth criticism, it can be seen as a 'mindscape', a work that reflects the internal world of the psyche rather than any external reality. The multiple worlds that Christopher visits thus echo his own chaotic and only partially-formed worldview. Similarly, the defamiliarisation brought about by Jones, who uses alternate worlds both to frame the narrative and embed difference within it, acts as a metaphoric parallel to the mixed emotions felt by all adolescents as they are forced to cast aside the certainties of childhood and reappraise the world for themselves. In the same way too, Christopher's struggle to manage his enormous and potentially destructive powers seems to confirm Nikolajeva's (2002:27) theory that uncontrolled and uncontrollable magic in fantasies is often 'yet another component of the instability of the young protagonists' psyches'.

Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000:54ff) has proposed that the most prominent concern of all adolescent fiction is the question of power or authority. In this case, Christopher's self-absorbed parents have failed to exert any real authority over him. As a result of this, he resents and dismisses De Witt's attempts to guide him, with potentially disastrous consequences. Significantly though, his experiences bring him to a point where he realises the importance of restraint and co-operation so that, by the end of the novel, he is able to reach a compromise whereby De Witt agrees to allow him more freedom and contact with his peers while he, having come to terms with the necessity of becoming the next Chrestomanci, is now willing to begin to subordinate his egotistical desires to the needs of others.

Nikolajeva (2002:27) suggests that 'in all Diana Wynne Jones's novels, the young protagonists discover some form of superior – sometimes divine – authority that governs every single parallel world and has control and power over the fates of their

inhabitants'. In the case of the *Chrestomanci* sequence, this authority is invariably benevolent as the adult Christopher intervenes to protect his own successor, Cat, from the machinations of his selfish sister, Gwendolyn, in *Charmed Life* (1977), to stop a feud between warring families of wizards in an alternate Italian city state in *The Magicians of Caprona* (1980) and to prevent the persecution and burning of young witches of both sexes in *Witch Week* (1982). However, in *The Homeward Bounders* (1983), this is not the case and the result is a much darker and more disturbing work.

Jamie Hamilton, the central figure and narrative voice in this novel, is thirteen years old and lives, like Christopher Chant, in a late Victorian world. Perhaps because this world is so similar to the frame world in the *Chrestomanci* sequence, the reader does not initially link it to our own and thus shares Jamie's surprise when it is revealed towards the end of the novel that his point of origin is indeed Victorian London. Jones is unusual among writers of fantasy in that she only rarely begins novels in our own world and the defamiliarisation that results from this may encourage her readers to question habits and values they may previously have taken for granted.

Unlike Christopher, Jamie has loving parents who run a small grocery shop. Jamie, however, is a typically restless teenager and regularly plays truant or dodges his chores in an attempt to alleviate his boredom. While exploring one afternoon, Jamie climbs over a wall into a triangular garden surrounding a mysterious castle. When he peeps into the castle, he sees tall, grey, hooded figures playing what appears to be a form of war game. When he is discovered, he is told that he has now become a 'discard' (Jones, 1983:23) and will be exiled to walk the bounds, meaning that he will be shifted from world to world whenever a move in the game ends.

Gradually, as Jamie is wrenched from life to life in a seemingly endless sequence of dislocation, both he and the reader come to realise that all the people he meets are merely game counters for the mysterious figures referred to only as *They* and *Them*. These beings reflect what Mendlesohn (2005:44) refers to as ‘the thread of rage that runs through Jones’s work, directed at those who seek to restrict the moral or creative agency of others’. Often, Mendlesohn argues, Jones’s protagonists are thwarted by oppressors who have turned convention into law so that while Jones regularly parodies fantasy conventions, Jones

... reserves her real ire to attack the assumption that adulthood is synonymous with submission to convention. Jones cements her arguments between the building blocks of her worlds. The magical structures that combine to deny agency such as the skeletons of expectation and dependency that go into prophecy-based fantasies are all excoriated. Particularly in Jones’s sights has been the prevalence of gods, secret rulers, and god-games in fantasy and the way in which protagonists are expected to abandon their agency and become as little children. (Mendelsohn, 2005:44)

Predictably then, all that keeps Jamie going after the discovery that human beings are being used as pawns by the game-playing masters of the multiverse is the anger that propels him to keep searching for his own world since *They* have promised him that, should this happen, he will be free to resume normal life.

One of the worst aspects of being a ‘homeward bounder’, as the discards call themselves, is the inability to make any but the most superficial bonds with others. Jamie comments that he meets others in his position and that they are always friendly to each other but only ‘in a quick, jolly, shallow sort of way’ (Jones, 1983:58). The loneliness of Jamie’s rootless existence is almost unbearable until he makes friends with Helen, an outcast with a magical arm. She explains their predicament by asking him to imagine that he is sitting holding a candle in a space made of glass.

“All round you, at once, there are reflections, going back infinitely, until your glass place is multiplied many times over. That is like the worlds, in a way. Except that it is not, because now you have to imagine other people in the reflections of your glass place, and lights lit on the outside of your place of glass too, so that you can see these lights reflected, outside and inside also, over and over again, along with your own place. By now there are myriads, all shining and overlapping, and you do not know which is real. This is the way of the worlds. All are real, lights and reflections alike. We pass from one to another, like light.” (Jones, 1983:81)

The friends discover that if Helen holds on to Jamie at the moment of transition from one world to another they can remain together instead of being flung into separate worlds. Their growing fondness for each other, though often masked by the awkwardness typical of the uncertain fumbblings towards intimacy characteristic of all adolescent relationships, offers them both more stability and this, in turn, empowers them to reach out to others. Eventually, the teenagers team up with a demon hunter and some contemporary children to defeat the game players and restore free will and agency to the worlds and their inhabitants.

Significantly, this is done by tilting the balance of reality away from the space where the game is played, thus suggesting, in an essentially postmodern way, that reality is largely a question of belief rather than a statement of immutable fact. Prometheus, whom Jones seems to suggest may have been the game players’ first victim, explains the importance of attachment to a single world or place by saying:

“I saw that a place is less real if it is seen from outside, or only seen in memory; and also that if a person settles in a place and calls that place Home, then it becomes very real indeed. You saw how this valley faded because I had not been in it for a very long time. Well, it came to me that if reality were removed from the worlds, it could be concentrated in one place. And reality could be removed if someone to

whom all the worlds were Home never went to any world, but only remembered them.” (Jones, 1983:209-210)

Thus, at the moment of victory, Jamie realises that someone has to volunteer to keep walking the bounds and remembering all the worlds rather than loving only one of them. This is necessary so as to anchor the multiverse and prevent *Them* from returning. Knowing that, while he may have returned to his world of origin, he can never return to the time or family into which he was born, he volunteers to do this, saying poignantly to the implied reader,

If you like, you can all think of it as my gift to you. I never had much else to give. You can get on and play your own lives as you like, while I just keep on moving. This story of it all can be another gift....And if you read it and don't believe it's real, so much the better. It will make another safeguard against *Them*.

But you wouldn't believe how lonely you get. (Jones, 1983:224)

By employing metanarrative to make the reader question his or her relationship to standard fictional conventions, Jones thus ends the novel on a profoundly unsettling note.

Again, if the novel is considered as a 'mindscape', it is easy to see that Jamie's adventures begin with an act of transgression whereby he questions adult authority and defies parental expectations. The new lives into which he is thrust are initially terrifying and almost impossible to navigate but, as he gains experience, he also regains some measure of control over his existence and is comforted by the establishment of a close bond with an age mate, Helen. Like Christopher, he is also forced to reassess his past and take responsibility for his actions including allowing himself and Helen to fall into the hands of cannibals. (The encounter with the

cannibals neatly comments on that with the initial gamers in that both the cannibals and the gamers dehumanize others by reducing them to either food or toys.) By contrast, as the novel progresses, Jamie becomes increasingly sensitive to the needs of others until, eventually, he is ready to redeem the worlds through which he has wandered.

Interestingly, by choosing to remain a 'homeward bounder', a rootless wanderer from world to world, Jamie not only guarantees the independence of the worlds, but in accordance with Einsteinian physics, moves into a realm where time barely operates. He realises that when Helen is an 'old, old woman' (Jones, 1983:224), he will still be about thirteen. One cannot help feeling that if the freedom and indeterminacy of heterotopia have been used by Jones to evoke the bewildering liminality of adolescence, then perhaps she may also be suggesting that the achievement of adulthood may require a return to and acceptance of the mundane. Those who, like Helen, commit to living stable lives in a single loved space relinquish boundless possibility, but grow to maturity by doing so.

There are clear parallels between the presentation of heterotopia in *The Homeward Bounders* and that in Pullman's award-winning trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. This complex work begins by tracing the adventures of eleven-year-old Lyra Belaqua in a world that is both like ours and yet entirely different from it as the first line of *Northern Lights*, with its compelling blend of the domestic and the strange, clearly reveals: 'Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen' (Pullman, 1998a:3). The daemon in question, Pantalaimon, is not, as one might expect a minor devil but an externalized conscience or soul and we learn that, in this world, every person has one. The daemons are initially protean but settle into a fixed animal form of one kind or another when the child to whom they are spiritually and telepathically bonded reaches

adolescence, operating thus as a concrete representation of the achievement of individuation so crucial to maturation even in the primary world. As Sarah Cantrell (2010:306) puts it,

[t]he uncanny or double nature of Lyra's world is due to its simultaneous near-replication and distortion of the readers' definition of the ordinary.... Lyra's Oxford deliberately defamiliarizes readers' understanding of the "known world" in order to question readers' definitions of the real and possible.

Lyra, who is something of a wild child, leaves the Oxford college where she has grown up and embarks on a quest to find her friend, Roger, who has been kidnapped by a mysterious entity, the Oblation Board. The Board seems to be an agent for the all-powerful church that dominates her world. Its scientists are experimenting with separating children from their daemons in an attempt to protect them from 'Dust', mysterious particles that surround adults and seem to correspond to some degree with Blake's notion of energy. Lyra's adventures, like those of Christopher and Jamie, thus begin with an act of rebellion. In spite of her ignorance and inexperience, Lyra eventually rescues Roger, only to deliver him into the hands of her father, Lord Asriel, who splits the boy from his daemon in order to generate the energy needed to open a gateway to another world.

When, at the end of *Northern Lights*, Lyra and her daemon turn 'away from the world they were born in' (Pullman, 1998a: 399) and walk into the sky, they enter what Pullman refers to in his Patrick Hardy lecture as 'phase space', 'a notional space that contains not just the actual consequences of the present moment, but all the possible consequences' (Pullman, 1998c:47). Like Jones's protagonists, therefore, they enter into heterotopia, a shifting perspective of limitless possibilities that mirrors both the enormous potential and the terrifying insecurities of adolescence.

In the second volume of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* (Pullman, 1998b), we are introduced to its other main character, twelve-year-old Will Parry, who lives in a world that may perhaps be our own. Will takes care of his mother, who suffers from psychiatric problems. When he accidentally kills a mysterious stranger who threatens them, Will is forced to flee. He travels to Oxford where he stumbles on a gateway to another world, Cittagazze. Interestingly, this coastal city echoes his own new isolation in that it is inhabited only by feral children because the adults have all been attacked and drained of their essence by sinister psychic vampires, the Spectres. Here Will meets Lyra and both children are shaken by the encounter as it forces them to adapt their preconceptions about normality in order to reach beyond Self to the Other. Lyra, who is initially afraid of Will, soon realises that he is as human as she is. This is suggested by her saying, ““You *have* got a daemon...inside you”” (Pullman, 1998b:26) and Will, moved by Lyra’s helplessness when they return to his own world, claims her as his sister (Pullman, 1998b:69). It is also in Cittagazze that Will acquires the subtle knife of the title, an ancient blade that can cut through the membranes separating one world from another. This encourages both children to confront the almost infinite ramifications of choice for the first time as they recognize that their paths have been shaped by thousands of tiny but significant choices, each of which might lead or even, on some level, has led to very different outcomes:

They both sat silent on the moss-covered rock, in the slant of sunlight through the old pines, and thought how many tiny chances had conspired to bring them to this place. Each of those chances might have gone a different way. Perhaps in another world, another Will had not seen the window in Sunderland Avenue, and had wandered on tired and lost towards the Midlands until he was caught. And in another world, another Pantalaimon had persuaded another Lyra not to stay in the retiring room, and another Lord Asriel had been poisoned, and another Roger had survived to play with that Lyra for ever on the roofs and in the alleys of another unchanging Oxford. (Pullman, 1998b: 276)

The third volume of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* (2001), made literary history by being the first work for children to win the Whitbread Book of the Year Prize. In it, Lyra and Will travel to the underworld where they find Roger and free the dead from their shadowy half-lives by cutting a door through to the world of the living. Once free, the shades dissolve into the natural world that surrounds them with ‘a vivid little burst of happiness’ (Pullman, 2001:382). Interestingly, before they can free the hosts of the dead, they need to win the co-operation of the harpies who guard the gates of the underworld. Lyra achieves this by realizing that the harpies hunger for true stories. When she spins a fantastical tale for them, they fly at her, screaming that she is a liar. The accusation is a perversion of her own name and this makes her realize the value of honestly-lived experience. When she begins, instead, to describe the events that have led her to their kingdom the harpies fall silent. Will asks them why they accept the second tale but reject the first and No-Name replies in a cackling rush of enthusiasm:

“Because it was true.... Because she spoke the truth. Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us. Because we couldn’t help it. Because it was true. Because we had no idea there was anything but wickedness. Because it brought us news of the world and the sun and the wind and the rain. Because it was true.” (Pullman, 2001:332-333)

It is agreed that, in the future, the price of redemption will be the true story of each life since as one of the harpies remarks of people, “If they live in the world, they *should* see and touch and hear and love and learn things” (Pullman, 2001:334). Similarly, when Mary Malone, the scientist who has befriended Will and Lyra, is unsure of how to guide them, she finds the door to the afterworld and one of the ghosts beckons to her, whispering:

“Tell them stories. That’s what we didn’t know. All this time, and we never knew! But they need the truth. That is what nourishes them. You must tell them true stories and everything will be well, everything. Just tell them stories.” (Pullman, 2001:455)

By transferring the harpies’ desperate need for nourishing stories to Will and Lyra, Pullman prepares his readers for the eventual loss of the infinite potentials of adolescence by affirming the value of the story of a single life lived to the full, but, curiously, he also calls into question his own role as storyteller and the value of the very tale he has been telling. Perhaps he would argue that *His Dark Materials* is a true story in essence if not in its particulars, but one cannot help feeling that, like Jones, Pullman is subtly employing metanarrative techniques to heighten readers’ awareness of the very literary tropes that have been used to engage their attention, thus adding yet another level of complexity to an already challenging work.

Lyra and Will then witness the death of the god figure, the frail ‘ancient of days’ (Pullman, 2001:432) against whom Lyra’s father has been rebelling. This decrepit remnant represents the superior authority at the heart of all the parallel worlds. However, like the grey gamers of *The Homeward Bounders*, whom Jones (1983) seems to associate with the Titans and therefore also with outgrown deities, his power is entirely dependent on human compliance. His existence has been cruelly prolonged by what Pullman suggests is a web of untrue and debilitating stories established by his regent, Metatron. Indeed, so fragile and weak is this suffering figure that, when he is removed from the diamond carapace that has preserved him, he dissolves with a sigh ‘of the most profound and exhausted relief’ (Pullman, 2001:432) emphasizing Pullman’s view that, if the worlds are to be redeemed, it will not be by any omnipotent Chrestomanci figure but by people ready to assume agency for themselves.

After this the two children travel to the world of the mulefa, beings who have previously lived in complete harmony with their ecosystem but who now find their existence and that of their entire world threatened by the fact that life-giving Dust is somehow leaking out of it. In this world, Lyra and Will experience sexual intimacy for the first time. Their physical awakening transfigures them, but their joy cannot continue as they learn that it is the doors cut by Will's knife that are allowing both Dust to drain from the worlds and Spectres to move into them. The angel, Xaphania, explains that Dust is created by human thought and feeling and human beings cannot make enough to replace what is lost through the gashes the knife has left in the fabric of the worlds:

“Understand this,” said Xaphania: “Dust is not a constant. There's not a fixed quantity that has always been the same. Conscious beings make Dust – they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on.

And if you help everyone else in your worlds to do that, by helping them to learn and understand about themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious... Then they will renew enough to replace what is lost through one window. So there could be one left open.” (Pullman, 2001:520)

Initially, Will and Lyra hope to use this single door for themselves, but then Lyra reminds Will of the door they have cut from the world of the dead. Her experiences of hostile dystopia have made her realise the value of love and compassion, supporting Millicent Lenz's (2005:1) contention that Pullman does not give his readers answers to the problems that surround them 'but rather ways of meeting them with courage and surviving them with grace'. Slowly and painfully, Will and Lyra come to realise

that they cannot snatch happiness at the price of condemning all humanity to an afterlife in the shadows. Instead each of them must return to their separate worlds to make a life alone since, as the ghost of Will's father has already warned them: "We can travel if there are openings into other worlds, but we can only live in our own.... we have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere" (Pullman, 2001:382).

Several critics, including David Gooderham (2003) and Kristine Moruzi (2005), have found the trilogy's resolution unsatisfying. Moruzi (2005:67), in particular, argues that Pullman's decision to conclude Will and Lyra's journey 'with subordinate relationships to other adults' is a missed opportunity in that it suggests that 'it is acceptable to venture forth to save the world, but afterwards you must return home to the appropriate position in the social hierarchy'. However, Cantrell (2010:307) counters this by suggesting that 'this closing off of space signifies Lyra and Will's ability to act on behalf of others rather than themselves' and that, like Jamie, they find that their experience of radical multiplicity has only confirmed a surprisingly conservative yet ultimately reassuring truth about the unity and importance of all worlds, all people and each individual life.

Part of the reason why critics like Gooderham (2003) and Moruzi (2005) struggle with Pullman's conclusion is that Will and Lyra grow and learn so much during the adventures described in *His Dark Materials* that one is startled to be reminded that, while they are exceptional young people, they are still technically minors who need to be subjected to adult guidance. The length of time which has elapsed since they entered into heterotopia thus seems disproportionately short in relation to what has been learned there. This disjunction can be seen as typical of fantasy since it is a genre which shares the characteristics of what Bakhtin ([1941] 1993) terms 'the carnivalesque' in that it subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style

or primary world in radical ways but always ends by restoring rather than permanently challenging these.

Maria Nikolajeva (1996:121) also invokes Bakhtin's notion of 'the chronotype' which she defines as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' to emphasise that narrative time and space are mutually dependent and form an indivisible unity. Because fantasy is licensed to break free, even if only temporarily, from the spatial constraints that shape the realist novel, this implicitly allows it to challenge the temporal ones as well. Because of this, the secondary worlds of fantasy are as likely to be temporally distinct from our own as they are spatially different. Furthermore, readers, familiar either with the mythology of fairyland or the theories of twentieth-century physicists, are well aware of the links between space and time, so much so that it has become conventional to represent time in even spatially-defined secondary worlds as progressing at a different rate from that in the primary one. This is clearly stated by C.S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ([1950] 1976). When the older Pevensie children question Lucy's tale about her visit to Narnia on the grounds that she has only been hiding in the old wardrobe for a matter of moments, the Professor to whom the wardrobe belongs says only:

“That is the very thing that makes her story so likely to be true. If there really is a door in this house that leads to some other world...if, I say, she had got into another world, I should not at all be surprised that the other world had a separate time of its own; so that however long you stayed there it would never take up any of *our* time.” (Lewis, [1950] 1976: 48)

Frequently, in fact, as Nikolajeva (2000:127) also indicates, time in the primary world simply stands still while the characters are out of it, resulting in what she terms

paralepsis.³² Thus the Pevensie children grow to adulthood and reign for many years as kings and queens in Narnia yet, even more emphatically than Will and Lyra, they revert to childhood at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*:

And next moment they all came tumbling out of a wardrobe door into the empty room, and they were no longer Kings and Queens in their hunting array but just Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy in their old clothes. It was the same day and the same hour of the day on which they had all gone into the wardrobe to hide. (Lewis, [1950] 1976:170)

The binary structure of traditional fantasy whereby characters move from a primary world that mirrors the reader's own reality into a secondary world that contrasts with it therefore often also involves temporal distortion and this seems even more marked in novels where the secondary world is temporally rather than spatially differentiated from the primary one.

In earlier fantasies, this convention seems to function simply as a mechanism to allow characters like those in E.E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* ([1906] 1959) and *The House of Arden* ([1908] 1986) to escape into time while still being home for tea. The traditional binary relationship described in the opening to this chapter thus also governs the dichotomy between now and then which structures more traditional time fantasies. The fact that their adventures do little to disrupt the child protagonists' daily routines thus mirrors the minimal effect their temporal dislocation seems to exert on their psychological well-being. The children in Hilda Lewis's *The Ship that Flew* (1940), for instance, magically travel backwards and forwards in time seemingly without suffering either confusion or any real concern about whether their actions

³² The use of this term is perhaps questionable given that narratologists generally apply it to secondary stories which do not impinge on the main narrative. In fantasy, the protagonists may enter secondary worlds, but their adventures there generally constitute the main narrative thrust of such novels and can, therefore, by no means be dismissed as side stories.

may change the world to which they belong. Frequently it seems that in early time slip novels such as these, the ability to move between past and present is no more than a convenient way of teaching historical facts while leavening didacticism with the comic incongruencies that inevitably result from juxtaposing past and present social norms: 'Backwards and forwards through History they went, until the story of their country became a living glowing world to them' (Lewis, 1940:308).

Gradually, however, these narratives have become more complex and have also begun to focus more on the nature and consequences of movements outside linear time. In Allison Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* (1941), for instance, the central character, Penelope Taberner Cameron, is able to slip between an early twentieth-century present and the Elizabethan past which permeates the family farm, Thackers. As with the Pevensies, her adventures in time are over in a heartbeat: 'Like a dream which abolishes time and space, which can travel through years in a flash and to the ends of the world in a twinkling, I went into another century and lived there and returned before the pendulum of the grandfather clock had wagged once behind the bull's-eye glass' (Uttley, 1941:99). Significantly though, unlike her fictional predecessors in the novels by Nesbit, Hilda Lewis and even C.S. Lewis, Penelope achieves access to the past not by activating an exterior talisman, whether an amulet, Frey's ship *Skidblander* or an old wardrobe, but by her own inherited ability to see what others cannot. Perhaps because her ability to step out of her own time is embedded in herself and not externalized, its consequences are both more profound and potentially more destructive.

Penelope's initial glimpses into the Elizabethan manor housing the Babbington family are fleeting and uncertain, but gradually she slips into the past for longer and longer periods until, worryingly, she begins to lose track both of her own identity and origins:

As I became accustomed to this journey in time and this transformation of scene, I found myself remembering less of the present, I became more absorbed in the past through my love for those whom I met there....I brought no consciousness of my travelling, I lost all as one forgets a dream on awakening. (Uttley, 1941:151)

The increasing psychological complexity of Penelope's responses to time are beautifully conveyed by Uttley's use of first person narration (cf. Nikolajeva, 2000:153-154) and the situation is made even more complex because the narrator is reminiscing about rather than being firmly rooted in the ostensible primary world of the novel. This is made clear in the opening lines of *A Traveller in Time*, when we are told that Penelope is looking back on her childhood from the vantage point of an unspecified future so that the 'real' narrative present is forever hidden from us: 'I, Penelope Taberner Cameron, tell this story of happenings when I was a young girl' (Uttley, 1941:15). Similarly, Uttley is careful never to introduce a specific date into the frame narrative so that the time of Penelope's childhood remains curiously undefined and is thus perhaps not as obviously privileged, in the sense of being established as primary or 'real' time, as one might expect it to be. Significantly too, Penelope is purely a fictional creation whereas Anthony Babbington is a real historical character. All these help to destabilize the fictional locality of what is 'real' and thus mitigate against the traditional clearly-defined binary opposition between primary and secondary worlds.

Increasingly, Penelope finds herself torn between her ties to the family into which she has been born and her growing love for one of the Thackers 'ghosts', Francis Babbington. When she is away from the farm, she is no longer able to enter the sixteenth century and finds, disturbingly, that the strength of her emotional attachment to her Elizabethan life is such that it influences her perception of her surroundings, inverting the relationship between what is past and what is present,

what is real and what is unreal: 'Sometimes they were more real than the people round me and then they became phantoms, swirling in dim motion, disappearing like the summer mists' (Uttley, 1941:170).

The novel shows itself to be for young adults rather than children most clearly by the tragic way in which it ends. Anthony Babbington escapes to France after his disastrous involvement in the plot to save Mary, Queen of Scots, from execution; Thackers is left in the care of his brother, Francis; and Penelope returns to her own time. In this way the novel seems to conform to the home-adventure-home pattern characteristic of most literature intended for pre-adolescents. However, the happy resolution implied by this archetypal pattern is denied Penelope. Unlike Hilda Lewis's characters, she receives no easy gift of oblivion and, unlike the Pevensies, she also knows that she will never enter the beloved secondary world again. When her Aunt Tissie gives her a treasured mahogany box and says that she hopes it will hold love letters one day, Penelope replies that she will never marry or 'fall in love with anybody in the whole world' (Uttley, 1941:291). While one may be tempted to dismiss this as a temporary and overwrought reaction to an extraordinary situation, Nikolajeva (2002:157) notes that in the opening sentence of the novel Penelope uses her maiden name and that this may indicate that, unlike her generally male predecessors in the time fantasy genre, she is neither morally enriched nor otherwise strengthened by her experiences; instead she develops a divided self that prevents her from maturing as she otherwise would have and that prevents her from forming time-appropriate bonds with those of her own world and historical period.

Ironically, Penelope, who has been a ghost in the past, ends by becoming something of a ghost in her own life, a situation which echoes that of the narrator in Diana Wynne Jones's *The Time of the Ghost* ([1981] 2001) in which we only gradually become aware that we are reading about a form of time displacement. Appropriately,

given their shared concern with the psychological effects of moving beyond linear time, both Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* and Jones's *The Time of the Ghost* are strongly focused on the experiences and emotions of the central characters. As we have seen, *A Traveller in Time* even employs first-person narration although this occurs so rarely in fantasy that John Stephens (1992:251) views it as one of the radical differences between the realistic novel and its fantastic counterpart while *The Time of the Ghost* fluctuates between first person narration and third person narration strongly coloured by the voice of the 'ghost' so that the shifting narrative structure of the novel echoes the unsettling effects of the ghost's unstable consciousness. Initially, in particular, Jones's 'ghost' is so disoriented and her relationship with space, time and even her own identity is so frighteningly vague that she hardly qualifies as speaking from a fixed subject position of any kind:

What's happened to me? she thought.... *Perhaps if I ask myself questions, my memory will come back. What did I have for lunch?*

That was no good. She could not remember lunch in any way. She realized, near to panic, that she could not remember anything about the rest of today at all.

That's silly, she told herself. *I must know!* But she didn't. Panic began to grow in her.... *All right!* she told herself hysterically. *All right! I'll ask something easy. What am I wearing?*

This ought to have been easy. She only had to look down. But first she seemed to have forgotten how to do that. Then when she did –

Panic spread, roaring, to its fullest size. She was swept away with it, as if she were truly a huge balloon, tumbling, rolling, bobbing, mindless....

She made herself stand still. She was so frightened that everything she could see was shaking – quivering like poor reception on the telly. She had a notion that if it went on shaking this way, it would shake itself right away from her, and she would be left with utter nothing. So she made herself stand there.

After a while she managed to make herself look down again.

There was still nothing there.

I've turned into nothing! she thought. (Jones, [1981] 2001: 8-9)

The use of free indirect speech in the passage albeit obscured by the presence of a third-person narrative seemingly contrasted with the direct access to the ghost's italicised thoughts immediately immerses the readers in the ghost's view of events so that the reader's perception of events is clouded by the narrator's self-deceptions thus enabling him or her to share in rather than knowingly observe her slow process of self-discovery.³³

In some ways, the experience of fragility and dissociation described in this passage is deeply disturbing but it may be less alarming for a pubescent reader than it is for an adult. It is widely accepted that the years between seven and eleven mark a period of latency in which the rapid growth characteristic of early childhood slows. Lisa Damour (2003:22) argues that this period thus provides the child with 'an unprecedented continuity in the sense of self'. However, this ceases with the onset of puberty when, as Damour points out, the physical changes associated with pre-adolescence are usually experienced as 'unwelcome, embarrassing and unhelpful' (Damour, 2003:22). Interestingly, later in the novel, Jones seems to make the association between the uncertain presence's disembodied state and the humiliations of adolescent self-consciousness even more explicit when the narrator floats past a group of boys playing tennis and imagines them laughing at her and saying, "Look at that girl –got nothing on – not even her body!" (Jones, [1981] 2001: 31).

³³ Mendlesohn (2005:55) suggests that Jones's narrative technique might best be defined as what Dorrit Cohn calls psychonarration, a mixture of omniscience, which is the term applied to texts in which the narrator knows more than the character, external focalization, which is the term applied to texts in which the character knows more than the narrator, and fixed internal focalization, which is the term used when the narrator and character seem to know the same amount.

Gradually by an effort of will, Jones's ghostly narrator manages to ward off the disintegration that threatens her. Finding herself instinctively drawn towards a very familiar building housing a boys' school, she enters it and soon becomes quite certain that she is one of the headmaster's four daughters though she remains entirely unsure of which one she is. Brian Attebery (1992:75) points out that

[t]he ghost faces a problem very like that confronted by a reader trying to get to know a character: how to assemble the clues of various sorts – bits of conversation, random memories, relationships with other characters – into a coherent personality. Only in this case, her very existence depends on her ability to construct a self from clues.

In a sense, the ghost's problem is also not unlike that of any child desperately trying to break free from her siblings and the family that has nurtured her in order to make a new and separate adult identity for herself. Attebery (1992:75) argues that the ghost begins this process by 'accepting the testimony of others'. By doing this, she gains temporary relief when her mother, Phyllis, apparently senses her presence and, without looking at her, distractedly reprimands her for straying out of their private living quarters, saying, "Your father's told you. I've told you. How many times have you been told to stay behind the green door, Sally?" (Jones, [1981] 2001:14). However, as Attebery (1992:76) warns us, this is not a real resolution of the ghost's problem. Phyllis cannot actually see her daughter and any way, like all young people, 'in order to identify herself, to turn from actant into actor, she [the ghost] needs to do more than be named by a parent'. Yet ironically after first accepting and then rejecting her identification as Sally, the ghost finally learns that Phyllis's initial instinctive response to her was the correct one and that her slide into the past has occurred as a result of her having been critically injured by an abusive boyfriend, some seven years after the events she experiences in her ghost form.

In revisiting the past she also remembers that the sisters had initiated the worship of an old rag doll whom they called Monigan, a name that immediately brings to mind the bloodthirsty Celtic goddess, the Morrigan. The worship begins as a game but metamorphoses into something more serious when Sally and one of the boys, Julian Addiman, make a blood sacrifice to the goddess thereby seeming to evoke an ancient power who then claims the right to take a life in seven years. Sally immediately assumes that her injuries and subsequent loss of self are simply a prelude to Monigan's extortion of her tribute. When she tells her sisters this, they try to take steps to protect her, although Charlotte, affectionately known as Cart, argues vehemently that it is impossible to alter the past:

“The only thing you can alter is the future. People write stories pretending you can alter the past, but it can't be done. All you can do to the past is remember it wrong or interpret it differently, and that's no good to us.” (Jones, [1981] 2001:125)

Mendlesohn (2005:55) points out that by allowing Cart to voice this belief, Jones sets herself a literary puzzle: ‘...how to create a time travel narrative while asserting one cannot change the past.’ However, Jones cleverly ensures that Cart's words both establish the problem to be confronted and the solution to it as Sally learns that her sister Imogen and she herself have indeed remembered the past wrongly, forgetting that Imogen has offered Monigan the dream of her career as a concert pianist in return for Sally's life.

Interestingly, *The Time of the Ghost* resists the fantasy conventions to which Cart alludes in other ways too. Jones insists that time in the secondary world should be no different from that in the primary. Thus Sally moves back and forth between present and past in real time since, as Mendlesohn (2005:55) observes:

Monigan ensures that every minute Sally experiences in the past is a minute used in the present. The tension of the book increases as we realize Sally might be running out of time. Time in this book is an absolute; it cannot be cheated by traveling outside of time.

Ironically too, it is the utterly fixed nature of time that allows Sally to travel through it (cf. Mendlesohn, 2005:565-57); it is the fact that time is immutable that allows all times to co-exist and the essence of the ghost to slip from one to another. Sally realizes that for Monigan all times run 'side by side' though some times are 'off at the edges of her attention' (Jones, [1981] 2001:217). It is this awareness that allows Sally to slip into the past and remind her sister Imogen to make the crucial sacrifice of her musical talent to the goddess, a sacrifice which, of course, she has, in some sense, already made.

Once Sally has done this the reader relaxes in anticipation of the 'determinate closure' that John Stephens (1992:41-42) contentiously claims is typical of all Jones's work. At this point, the nurse brings the sisters the news that Julian Addiman has died in a car crash (Jones, [1981] 2001:222). Has Monigan been tricked by the sisters or has she perhaps tricked them by letting them believe that she meant to take Sally while her real target has all along been Julian Addiman? The puzzle remains unresolved as does the question of Monigan's existence. Are Jones's readers really asked to believe that Sally has bested an ancient and malevolent force or has the injured girl simply created the narrative out of pain, drug-fuelled dreams and the complex and potentially deceptive functions of memory? It is these confusions which allow the book to hover troublingly in what the Franco-Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov (1975: 41-57) famously calls 'the moment of hesitation' between the 'marvellous' (works that deal with impossibilities) and the 'uncanny'

(works where events are finally explicable though still potentially frightening and unsettling).

What *is* made clear is that, by re-experiencing her earlier life as an objective observer rather than a subjective participant, the ghost begins to reassess the characters of all four sisters and thus renegotiate her own relationship with the past by learning to 'remember it differently'. While doing this, she initially becomes more and more uncertain of her own identity as her empathy for her sisters grows while her attitude towards herself becomes steadily more critical. Her sisters' criticisms of Sally, whom the ghost believes herself to be, initially provoke a very defensive response: '*I'm not like that....They're just seeing their own faults in me! And I don't grumble and criticize*' (Jones, [1981] 2001:29, italics original). However, when she meets her younger self, her new objectivity prevents her from identifying with the girl she sees in any real way:

Not the least of her troubles was that she could not bring herself to think of this girl...as herself. She knew the girl was Sally. There had been no mistake there. Yet she had no sense of identity with her. She had no idea what this Sally thought and felt. She seemed just someone else she was forced to hover over and watch, as she had watched Sally's sisters. (Jones, [1981] 2001:103)

Farah Mendlesohn (2005:34) believes that the essential message of the book is that identity can only be achieved through self-awareness:

In the first half of the novel, the ghost's central concern is finding out who she is, but the method by which she does this is part of the message of the novel. The ghost uses two tactics: she tests herself against the external image of the four girls as she perceives them, and she tests herself against others' external perceptions of the four. Lesson number one, as it turns out, is that no one can be judged entirely by the image he or she presents to the world and, number two,

is that one cannot define one's own character by how others want or expect one to behave. Looking inward is the only solution, but this ghost cannot, at first, look inward. When she does she finds only a hollow, dug through her own compliance with others' demands.

Clearly, in terms of the novel, identity can neither be established from how one presents oneself to others nor from what others want or expect of one, but only by finding the psychic strength to confront and acknowledge one's own individual self. This makes it particularly significant that Jones establishes early in the novel that Sally is the only one of the daughters who unquestioningly accepts her slightly bohemian and more than slightly neglectful parents' own entirely positive view of themselves. When the eldest sister, Charlotte or Cart, complains that Sally 'can't seem to believe they are not the most perfect parents anyone could have', the ghostly Sally's only response is to shout defiantly, "*Well, I think they are!*" (Jones, [1981] 2001:27, italics original). Sally's inability to engage critically with the grand family narrative inscribed by her parents anticipates her equally wholehearted acceptance of her boyfriend Julian Addiman's grossly inflated sense of his own worth. One is left suspecting that her disembodied powerlessness as the ghost is simply an extreme form of the self-effacing accommodation that has characterized her entire life.

The folly of Sally's refusal to take issue with others' views of themselves and thus, by implication, also of herself is entertainingly paralleled and driven home by the regular comical references to the improbable delusions of one of the schoolboys, Nutty Filbert, who has been persuaded that he has two heads:

"Really," Howard assured them. "Stinker started it yesterday. 'Nutty,' he said, with an absolutely straight face, 'Nutty, we think you may not have noticed your other head. We thought we ought to tell you because you forgot to comb its hair. It looks a sight.' And Nutty says, 'What do you mean? I haven't got another head.' "Oh yes you have,' says Stinker.

‘You mean you’ve gone all these years and not noticed?’ And Nutty said, all puzzled, ‘If I’d got two heads, I’d have seen them in the mirror, wouldn’t I?’ ‘Oh no,’ says Stinker. ‘The one behind’s behind the one in front, you see.’ And Nutty, being Nutty, believes him! Ever since then, he’s been turning round suddenly about once a minute, trying to catch a glimpse of his other head before it dodges out of sight.” (Jones, [1981] 2001:61)

Brian Attebery (1992:77-78) suggests that the novel’s structure can help clarify ‘the relationship of character to such concepts as Self and Other or individual and group’ and that the entire work is essentially a story that the ghost tells herself in which the other characters exist at the ‘boundary of the Self and the Other’. Because the ghost cannot establish such a boundary for herself she is vulnerable not only to the goddess but also to the callous and abusive Julian, both of whom feed on her uncertainty and desire to please. The ghost only reverts to being Sally, who is capable of agency and possesses a voice that can be heard, when, in Attebery’s (1992:78) terms, ‘she learns to draw the magical circle of identity around her Self’. Significantly too, her achievement of individuation comes about not through conciliation but through daring to confront both Monigan and the truth about her own past actions. The narrative complexity of *The Time of the Ghost* is thus used as a tool whereby Jones guides all her adolescent readers but, perhaps, more particularly the female ones, to an awareness of the importance of staking claim to one’s own identity by learning to perceive the world rather than simply be perceived by it.

Nikolajeva (1996:71-74) points out that the complexity of works such as *The Time of the Ghost* should be seen as resulting from significant changes in the way we now view our world. She argues:

The evolution of science and technology has radically changed our attitude towards a rich variety of phenomena dealt with in fantasy

novels. These include parallel worlds, non-linear time, extra-sensory perception and other supernatural events that modern science cannot explain but accepts as possible. This wider attitude is manifest throughout world literature, especially in so-called post-modern literature. Naturally children's literature could not but be affected by the shift, and modern fantasy for children must therefore be viewed against this general cultural background. Since modern science tolerates alternative explanations, writers can also allow for ambivalence, encouraging young readers to draw their own conclusions and accept the existence of more than one truth. Today's readers who are aware of scientific progress, possess different and more sophisticated codes than their grandparents, which means that writers can use more complex codes without fear of being misunderstood. (Nikolajeva, 1996:71-2)

While the increasing sophistication of children's literature in general and young adult literature in particular must be apparent even to the most casual reader of either, many adults still resist books for younger readers that are too unmistakably neither simple nor optimistic. Thus few books have divided critical opinion as much as Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1973), which deliberately evokes contemporary physics to question the spatial location of the characters in its opening pages. When Tom's girlfriend, Jan, wonders idly where the cars rushing down the M6 are going, Tom replies:

"Let's work it out. That one there is traveling south at, say, one hundred and twenty kilometers per hour, on a continental shelf drifting east at about five centimeters per year....on a planet rotating at about nine hundred and ninety kilometers per hour at this degree of latitude, at a mean orbital velocity of thirty kilometers per second....in a solar system traveling at a mean galactic velocity of twenty-five kilometers per second in a galaxy that probably has a random motion –"

"Knickers."

"– random knickers of about one hundred kilometers a second, in a universe that appears to be expanding at about one hundred and sixteen kilometers per second per megaparsec." (Garner, 1973:7)

The apparent mathematical specificity of Tom's explanation ironically only serves to negate any possibility of stability or certainty so that his mischievous insertion of Jan's random interjection, "Knickers", seems as meaningful as anything else. The title, *Red Shift*, refers to the colour shift observed by astronomers as galaxies speed away from each other, a phenomenon that Garner uses to reflect the increasingly unbridgeable distances between his characters. The book's refusal to privilege one point in time over another has infuriated critics who reject such complexity in works for younger readers so that T.M. Wagner (1998:s.p.), for instance, describes *Red Shift* as burying 'thematic points in inscrutable writing that offers little detail for the reader to grab hold of, as well as reams of infuriating, choppy, incomplete Harold Pinter-esque dialogue'.

It is not only the language of *Red Shift* that defies easy interpretation. The novel moves backwards and forwards through time while telling the interlinked stories of three young men living in the same part of Cheshire in very different periods: Tom, a highly intelligent modern teenager, is still completing his schooling and lives in a caravan with his conservative parents; Macey, a British tribesman born in the second century and valued for his extraordinary fighting skills while in trance state, travels with three men who may once have been Roman soldiers and even possibly members of the vanished Ninth Legion; and Thomas, a man who suffers from epilepsy and has obvious intellectual limitations, is caught up in the horrors of the English Civil War.

Nikolajeva (1996) has shown that the action in both the second and twentieth centuries covers a period of about nine months but that the action in the seventeenth century occupies only a matter of hours. She explains the significance of this by citing Alan Garner's claim that the structure of the novel is meant to evoke that of 'a giant hour-glass with a narrow passage in the middle, through which time can slowly

flow back and forth' (Nikolajeva, 1996:144). She also stresses the spatial structure of the novel by reminding her readers that 'the three plots take place within a huge equilateral triangle with its corners at the church in Barthomley, the folly at Mow Cop and Alan Garner's own house near the Jodrel Bank telescope' (Nikolajeva, 1996:144). As the earliest of the narratives in *Red Shift* clearly indicates, Mow Cop is also a sacred place which the British tribesmen believe is the 'netherstone of the world', the place where the skymill turns to grind the stars (Garner, 1973:65).

Red Shift is not a novel that involves time travel, which, as Nikolajeva (1996:73) suggests 'implies the characters' active and conscious participation' but rather time displacement, which she indicates 'often occurs without the character's knowledge'. Macey, Thomas and Tom never meet but are bound together in multiple and complex ways. All three young men are psychologically disturbed. When Macey is forced to look at a light source through the spokes of a rotating wheel, he 'flips' as the blue silver turns to red (Garner, 1973:31) and enters a fugue state in which he becomes a beserk killer. When Thomas's epilepsy is triggered by 'the blue and white flashes of the winter sun' (Garner, 1973:125), he fires his musket and thus inadvertently triggers the battle that possibly ends his life. Tom's emotional instability causes him to act out his frustrations violently and there is a suggestion that this may result finally in his suicide. Traditionally, epilepsy has been and, in some communities, still is linked to possession by evil spirits. Significantly, when Macey tells the British corn goddess, who has been kidnapped and raped by his band, that he or his true self is 'outside' when the man he chillingly refers to in the third person as Macey enters into his characteristic beserker rage or killing frenzy, she replies calmly: "Then the god is in you" (Garner, 1973:60).

However, Garner hints that, in some way, it is the three men who, in fact, possess each other. Early in the novel, Tom runs from the room after his parents have

suggested that he and his girlfriend, Jan, are sexually active. Rendered inarticulate by his distress and frustration, he presses his palms against the kitchen window until it breaks without shattering and ‘shallow pale lines craze his skin’ (Garner, 1973:21) emphasizing his own fragility. Immediately the narrative focus shifts to Macey, who runs filled with terror. When Logan tries to calm him down, Macey seems to indicate that he has, in some way, shared Tom’s experience:

“Blue and silver – makes me so chickenshit I can’t remember what all next. It was changing. But when – that guy – killed him hereabouts – when I killed him – on the road – blue and silver – I freaked – but I could see him, what I did – but there was two hands – pressing at me – a long way off against my eyes – and then near – and then noplac – big as all there is.” (Garner, 1973:23)

The reader is thus left with the strong impression that the years separating Tom from Macey while spanning a chasm “big as all there is” nevertheless form a barrier that may, under sufficient pressure, be breached in an instant. Interestingly, just before Macey ‘flips’ and begins the attack on the British village only a few pages later, he cries out, “Let there be no strife...for we are brothers! The distance is gone between us!” (Garner, 1973:31). Similarly, when John Fowler, the rector’s son, tries to ask Thomas what he sees during his fits, he gets a reply that, particularly with its reference to ‘backward echoes’, definitely suggests some measure of temporal dislocation and concomitant loss of identity:

“Do you hear words?”

“Not proper. I can’t say. It’s just before, when I’ve got to lie down quick, or else. Sounds. All sorts. Echoes backwards.”

“What do they mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you see anything?”

“Oh yes.”

“What?”

“Nothing real.”

“But what?”

“I don’t know. They don’t have names, don’t these. I make them up. I see a face.”

“Whose?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is it God?”

“Eh?”

“Do you see God?”

“How should I know? I’ve never.”

“Tell me about the face.”

“It’s scared. It scares me. He’s caught. He sees he’s caught. I know him, but I can’t tell where. Happen it’s through being badly. I think I’ve seen him that many times. But I know all about him. Is it me?”

“I don’t understand you,” said John.

“Is it me? Is it me? Is it me? Is it me?” (Garner, 1973:77-78)

Charles Butler (2001:78) suggests that ‘the three men become, in effect, a single supra-historical personality, all of whose experiences are contemporaneous’.

Apart from their shared location and the apparent psychic bonds between them, Macey, Thomas and Tom are also linked by three other important factors: their shared possession of an ancient votive axe, their desperate need to be held and the ways in which their different experiences reflect and refract the ballad of ‘Tam Lin’.

The axe in question, which functions as a shifting corollary to the traditional totemic objects that allow the children in earlier fantasies to break free of linear time, is said

by Tom to be three thousand five hundred years old and must therefore already be ancient when the child Macey seizes it to defend his people from Roman attack (Garner, 1973:60). Macey clearly feels that he has abused the axe by appropriating it as a weapon and implies that it is this sacrilegious act that lies behind the gulf that occasionally opens between himself and his actions. At the end of the book, the corn goddess poisons her captors before she and Macey leave Mow Cop and step out into an uncertain future. Secure in her love, Macey buries the axe in the mound above the Wulvarn, close to the burnt remains of the village from which she came. Centuries later, Thomas finds it while preparing defences against a Royalist attack. His wife, Margery, prevents him from shattering it into pieces, an act that he believes will offer protection from lightning. Instead, Margery wraps the stone in her red shift, one of Garner's many postmodern plays on the words of his title, and protects it through the violence that follows. After she is raped and then helped to escape by Thomas Venables, a Royalist who courted her before the war broke out, she takes the axe head with her and embeds it in the chimney of her new home on Mow Cop. This is where Tom and Jan find it. Jan is immediately drawn to it, calling it her 'real and special thing' (Garner, 1973:84) and claiming that, if they take turns to look after it, they will never be apart.

One of the strongest fantasy conventions is the impossibility of carrying objects between secondary worlds and the primary one and this is especially true of time slip novels. However, objects survive people and so can constitute physical links with the past. As has been noted, it is partly this sympathetic magic that allows Nesbit's children to travel into time in *The Story of the Amulet* ([1906] 1959). Like Nesbit's amulet, the axe in *Red Shift* seems imbued with power though the way this is manifested is less predictable and considerably more dangerous. Yet another function of such talismans is to act as keepsakes, physical symbols of emotional commitment. Thus in *A Traveller in Time* (1941), Penelope finds the locket that once

belonged to Master Anthony in a crack in the village church and wears it ever after as a tangible link to the world and people she has lost. Garner rejects this convention too when he allows Tom to sell the axe head to the British Museum as an act of revenge when he discovers that Jan is not a virgin but has had an affair with an older man. The loss of the numinous axe, which Tom dismisses as “a chunk of diorite” (Garner, 1973:156), thus signals both the end of the relationship between Tom and Jan and the end of the link between the three men:

“I’ll get it back.”

“You can’t.”

“I didn’t see how much it mattered.”

“That’s what you can’t get back,” said Jan. (Garner, 1973:135)

The act of holding or being held is another recurring motif in *Red Shift*. It seems far more powerful than sex in cementing bonds to the here and now. Although the renegade legionaries regularly rape their captive, Macey’s relationship with her is never consummated and the affection he shows her seems all the more valuable because of this. The bond between them is wonderfully evoked when after Macey has buried the axe, he asks the captive woman to hold him and she replies, “That’s why I’m here” (Garner, 1973:153). Similarly, Margery constantly holds and rocks Thomas, affirming the power of love and commitment to offer the only possible stability in a shifting universe. The couple are childless and Thomas’s defensiveness about this makes one wonder if he is capable of sexual intercourse, yet their love for each other is unquestioned and he tells her that her rape has not influenced his feelings for her in any way (Garner, 1973:158). Ironically, when Tom and Jan do have sex, he shows himself, unlike Thomas, to be incapable of reaching beyond Self to the Other since he uses emotional coercion to effect a form of rape to punish her

for her previous affair. The act is clearly one of betrayal rather than love and afterwards it is Jan who weeps and asks him to hold her. Being held with all its connotations of love and protective stability is similarly the only possible counter to Tom's plaintive cry "Poor Tom's a-cold" in which he echoes the recurrent lament of Edgar in *King Lear* (III, iv) after he is found ostensibly mad and defenceless in a hostile world. The end of their relationship is thus powerfully signalled by their inability to hold on to each other or make any real contact as the fractured perspectives of the following passage show:

Jan wanted no more than to hold him. His words vented. Meaning meant nothing. She wanted him to let the hurt go. He could talk for ever but not stop holding her. Each second made him less dangerous. And she's not even listening. Why can't I use simple words? They don't stay simple long enough to be spoken. I have not come to terms with her eyes or the smell of her hair. (Garner, 1973:128)

The links between the three parts of the novel and the ballad of 'Tam Lin' can be seen as working to place the various couples in mythical time, a zone that has little relation to any conventional time scale. Like all remnants of oral culture, the story told by the various versions of the ballad in question has no single fixed form. However, it has key elements which remain fairly constant. Essentially, Janet, who is sometimes called Margaret, is the heiress to a forest. Her parents warn her against going there as it is a haunt of fairies and they fear that she will be seduced, or possibly raped, by one of them, Tam Lin. Janet rejects their advice, visits the wood and comes home pregnant. When she returns to the wood to confront Tam Lin with her pregnancy, he tells her that he is not a fairy but a human captive whom the fairy queen plans to sacrifice to pay her tithe to hell. To save him, Janet needs to drag him from his horse and hold him fast even while he undergoes a series of dreadful transformations.

Finally, she must wrap him in her green cloak. The redoubtable Janet then does all of this, thus affirming the power of constant human love.

Although Alan Garner has publicly acknowledged the centrality of this myth to any reading of *Red Shift* ([1975] 1997:111), the parallels between the ballad and the novel are not immediately obvious and Neil Philip (1981:104), for instance, has suggested that he finds this link ‘hard to accept’. However, Charles Butler (2001:77) argues that the relationship seems slight only because ‘Garner has so thoroughly assimilated the myth...that relatively little of his material has remained unchanged’. Butler then notes the parallels to the ballad inherent in Garner’s use of the names Tom, Thomas, Jan and Margery as well as in the rapes and subsequent pregnancies, whether actual or potential, of the three female protagonists before going on to consider what he describes as less overt correspondences between the ballad and the novel. These include Tam Lin’s possession by the fairies and the idea of the tithe to hell. He also points out that the idea of possession can be ‘located in the mental disturbances to which the three main male characters are subject’ (Butler, 2001:78) and the frequent images of entrapment that attend them. He also comments that the reader’s sense of ‘the irrelevance – even the non-existence – of linear time corresponds with one of the most frequent motifs associated with fairy abduction’ (Butler, 2001:79) since in such stories there is little or no correspondence between time spent in fairyland and time passing in the world of mortals. Thus abducted men and women often find, on returning to the world of their birth, that centuries have passed since they left it, even though they themselves have experienced the time away in terms of days rather than years.

The idea of who will pay the tithe to hell in Tam Lin’s stead is evaded in the ballad but becomes more important in *Red Shift* perhaps because of what Butler (2001:79) calls ‘Garner’s longstanding concern with myths of substitution’. By refusing to let Macey

eat her poisoned bread, the corn goddess allows him to escape the blood tithe she exacts for the desecration of her shrine. Similarly, Butler (2001:79) suggests that in Garner's seventeenth-century narrative 'the most obvious analogue to Tam Lin is John Fowler who, in refusing to identify himself to the Royalist army officer sends most of the village to hell on his behalf' and that the ballad's raising of the issue of substitution also underlies Jan's final outburst when 'she accuses him [Tom] of spiritual and emotional parasitism' (Butler, 2001:79), a charge which his response, a jumble of quotations, only seems to confirm:

"You can't put two words of your own together! Always someone else's feeling! Other people have to go to hell to find words for you! You're fire-proof."

"Take heed o' the foul fiend. Obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array. Tom's a-cold." (Garner, 1973:156)

At the end of the novel, Jan ends the relationship with Tom, saying "It would like to go now, please. It feels sick. It's had enough. It has a train to catch" (Garner, 1973:156). Her use of the third person evokes her sense that Tom is trapped within his own solipsism and sees her as only as an object. Unlike Janet in the ballad, the nameless corn goddess, Margery, or even Thomas, it is impossible for him even to try to save Jan by holding her fast as they attempt to navigate the shifting perils of a life in time.

It is possible to see the novel's conclusion as a bleak portrayal of the failure of love in the modern world but, as Nikolajeva (2000:164) suggests, because the novel takes the perspective of Jan, the female protagonist, rather than Tom, the male one, it is also possible to see the final pages as a rejection of a long-established cultural paradigm that requires selfless and redemptive love from women but not from men.

Looked at in this way, Jan can be seen to turn her back on a pre-scripted and prescriptive social narrative by boarding her train alone. Similarly, if the novel is read as a mindscape it becomes clear that, by her action, Jan demonstrates the importance not only of defying the linear time of history but also of resisting the equally powerful recurring currents of myth. In *A Traveller in Time* (1941) Penelope loses herself by committing to precisely the sort of self-abnegating love for Francis that traditional narratives prescribe for women while, in *The Time of the Ghost* ([1981] 2001) Sally, by contrast, learns to define herself in opposition to the expectations of her parents and lover. However, Garner's Jan makes the most radical assertion of all by reaching individuation as a result of resisting and interrogating the norms underpinning her whole culture, norms made almost irresistible by the power of the narratives in which they are embedded. Like Pullman's harpies in *The Amber Spyglass* (2001), she defiantly insists on narrative truth.

By questioning the patterns of narrative itself, Garner to some extent abdicates his own power as a writer in order to set his readers free to make their own lives and find their own truths. Shorn of all creative allusion/illusion the world Garner shows his readers is a cold but also liberating one in which time's ability to erode everything is unflinchingly expressed in the increasing frequency with which the text moves from one protagonist to another until they seem to blur into one so that the last line of the novel is both unattributed and unattributable: 'It doesn't matter. Not really now not any more' (Garner, 1973:158).

It would seem then that the writers discussed in this chapter all use heterotopia not only to reflect the liminal potentials and uncertainties of adolescence, a time precariously poised between past norms and future hopes, but also to question and reshape what Tolkien ([1964] 1977:70) calls 'eucatastrophe', the 'happily ever after' that is perhaps, in the end, the most illusory element of all fantasy. By rejecting this

comforting and traditional narrative formula, these innovative writers show their readers that life is not a story to be neatly resolved at a single point but a continuous struggle to make and preserve meaning both for ourselves and for others.

In this way, the novels discussed here also challenge the social conventions whereby Lesko (2001:107) claims individual adolescents are placed 'into a temporal narrative that demands a moratorium of responsibility yet expects them at the same time to act as if each moment of the present is consequential'. By disrupting linear time and fixed space, fantasy is thus able to foster perceptions of individual agency by encouraging its readers to question the imposition of linear models of development and understand that change may be recursive and contingent on individual choice rather than linear, cumulative and driven by external and irresistible mechanisms.

The works discussed in this chapter thus defy traditional conceptions of both time and space in ways that set their readers free to move away from the comfortably familiar timelines of childhoods spent within the confines of the known spaces defined by home and family. By re-visioning these familiar assumptions and foundational memes, fantasies that explore multiple worlds and layered times allow young adults access to spaces in which they can dare to confront the bewildering possibilities of independence while learning empathy through coming to understand that all people are shaped by the socio-political forces operating in the worlds in which they find themselves. By shaking their protagonists, and therefore also their readers, free of temporal and spatial givens, such novels bear out Dawkins's ([1976] 1989: 215) contention that, by the exercise of the imagination, the human mind can resist 'the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary the selfish memes of our indoctrination'. When characters like Jamie and Sally are forced to assume an outsider's perspective on the worlds and characters they encounter, readers who share in their sense of dislocation are nudged into seeing the conditions of their own

lives as stemming ultimately from human choices whether consciously or unconsciously made.

The significance of choice is further emphasised by the fact that at the end of all of these novels the young wanderers, who have each experienced kaleidoscopic patterns of possibility or been presented as embodying enigmatic variations of inter-related narratives, all find themselves having to make difficult choices. The novels may suggest desirable solutions to the impasses their characters face, but except perhaps in the case of the earliest novel, *A Traveller in Time* (1941), these solutions are not simply imposed by external agency: Lyra and Will *choose* to return to their respective worlds; Christopher *accepts* his role as the next Chrestomanci; Jan *decides* to leave Tom; Jamie *elects* to become a rootless wanderer and in a melancholy inversion of the norm, even Penelope resists narrative pressure to forget Francis and submerge herself in her own time.

As has been previously mentioned, some critics see the withdrawal from infinite possibility presented in these novels as a reductive capitulation to socially imposed norms or as evidence only of the inevitably conservative reassertion of adult narrative authority, but I would argue that instead these defining choices empower young readers by revealing that the great task of adulthood may, in fact, be to turn one's back on the endless but ultimately sterile temptations of an indeterminate multiverse (or for that matter an infinitely prolonged adolescence) in order to make a life and a true story of one's own within a single world, a single loved space. Importantly though, the most suggestive fantasies clearly indicate that such a space should not simply be blindly accepted, but consciously chosen and constantly re-visioned. It is only in this active engagement with the here and now that choice becomes meaningful, allowing whatever world is chosen to be understood not only in terms of what it is, but also in terms of what it is not. Such an understanding is also only

achievable when a young adult has, in Attridge's (2004:125) terms, brought a novel into 'being anew' by allowing it to 'refigure the ways in which [he or she] and [his or her] culture think[s] and feel[s]'. When this has been done readers may at last find themselves confidently able to endorse Lyra's realisation at the very end of *The Amber Spyglass* that 'we shouldn't live as if [anything] mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place' (Pullman, 2001:548).

Chapter 2

Engendered Magic: Reclaiming the Witch

I met my first witch at the age of three in a children's fairy story. She was a warty, black-clad old hag who lived alone in the depths of a forest, snared and dined on juicy children, and turned those who displeased her into toads. She presented an image of menace, cunning, pure evil.... What the story books did not tell, but what the European witch-hunters of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries claimed, was that this wicked witch also had sexual intercourse with the Devil, suckled demons and her familiars, stole and ate penises as well as babies, and participated in orgies with fellow witches. The image of the "witch" [thus] incorporated both the hideous hag and the irresistible seductress. (Rountree, 1997:212)

Kathryn Rountree's compact summary of witch folklore evokes humour rather than fear simply because the cumulative effect of the negative attributes she piles up so swiftly is undercut by the unqualified extremism made apparent by the listing of each individual claim. The lurking cannibal may give rise to a shudder of atavistic horror but when the reader learns that the same figure also participates in orgies and has sexual intercourse with the devil, rationality is forced to reassert itself so that he or she generally draws back from endorsing such an obvious caricature. Yet each one of the attributes Rountree lists so baldly undeniably forms part of the rarely-scrutinised witch meme most readers carry with them and which many writers of contemporary fantasy continue, albeit usually more subtly, to exploit.

Because fantasy, like its predecessor the romance, tends to use the cultural power invested in such archetypes to power its narrative impetus, writers within this genre may find it more difficult than others to resist potentially destructive gender conventions such as those inherent in archetypal depictions of witches and

witchcraft. As Ursula le Guin (1993a:10) puts it, when discussing her portrayal of gender and magic in the early part of the *Earthsea* series:³⁴

The tradition I was writing in was a great one, a strong one. The beauty of your own tradition is that it carries you. It flies, and you ride it. Indeed, it's hard not to let it carry you, for it's older and bigger and wiser than you are. It frames your thinking and puts winged words in your mouth. If you refuse to ride, you have to stumble along on your own two feet; if you try to speak your own wisdom, you lose that wonderful fluency. You feel like a foreigner in your own country, amazed and troubled by things you see, not sure of the way, not able to speak with authority.

The problem is that, as Colin Manlove (1980:287) recognises, 'Fantasy is a profoundly conservative genre. It usually portrays the preservation of the status quo, looks to the past to sustain the nature and values of the present, and delights in the nature of created things'. Brian Attebery (1992:87) similarly recognises the reliance of fantasy on inherited narrative memes or conventions, warning that 'a willingness to return to the narrative structures of the past can entail as well an unquestioning acceptance of its social structures'. Given the established patterns of gender discrimination evident in world history, the structures of fantasy almost inevitably privilege masculine power since, as Le Guin (1993a:9) observes, in the 'hero-tales of the Western world, heroism has been gendered: The hero is a man'. Thus, she notes that, even within the mindscapes created by fairly recent works of fantasy, the fundamental power, magic, tends to belong to men because 'the establishment of manhood in heroic terms involves the absolute devaluation of women' (Le Guin, 1993a:11).

³⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all references to *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1972), *The Furthest Shore* (1973) and *Tehanu* (1990) are taken from *The Earthsea Quartet* published by Puffin in 1993. Hereafter, when comments are made about the cycle as a whole, including *Tales from Earthsea* (2002) and *The Other Wind* (2003), it will simply be referred to as *Earthsea* though references to individual works within the series will be more specific.

The impact of such gendered memes on young female readers of fantasy works is, of course, difficult to quantify. In her popular study of girlhood, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, Mary Pipher (1994:4) argues suggestively, however, that teenage girls may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of gender stereotyping since, when the development of secondary sexual characteristics deprives them of the protective semi-androgyny of childhood, many undergo profound psychological change as well:

In early adolescence studies show that girls' IQ scores drop and their maths and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and "tomboyish" personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies.

Pipher (1994:7) explains this by suggesting that teenage girls experience 'a conflict between their autonomous selves and their need to be feminine, between their status as human beings and their vocation as females'. Annis Pratt (1981:29) in her study of archetypal patterns in women's fiction similarly suggests that every element of the young woman's desired world including 'freedom to come and go, allegiance to nature, meaningful work, exercise of the intellect, and use of her own erotic capabilities...inevitably clashes with patriarchal norms' so that ultimately the adolescent girl experiences 'a collision between the hero's evolving self and society's imposed identity'.

While works of fantasy are far from being the only or even a primary source of information about gender norms and expectations, they undoubtedly feed into a cultural matrix that affirms female docility to such an extent that despite the 'great and ongoing revolution' in gender attitudes which Le Guin (1993a:12) regards herself as having lived through, at menarche significant numbers of adolescent girls still

follow the destructive path first described by Simone de Beauvoir (1952), who observed more than fifty years ago that the majority of teenage girls seemed to respond to ongoing cultural imperatives that encouraged them to stop being and start seeming, to abandon the hero's independence and agency in favour of the heroine's passivity and dependence.

To some extent this may be explicable in terms of the very different nature of male and female coming-of-age rituals in various cultures. Until fairly recently, the transition between childhood and adulthood in almost all societies was marked by appropriate initiation rites. Significantly, in relation to boys, Attebery (1992:87) points out that sometimes 'accompanying the rituals and sometimes serving in their place were spoken narratives. These told of a young hero's displacement, transformation and return – the fundamental pattern of both the hero monomyth as described by Joseph Campbell, and of the fairy tale, as analysed by Vladimir Propp'. The connection made by Attebery (1992:87) between initiation rites and heroic narratives is a crucial one. The idea that 'spoken narratives' may complement or even function as substitutes for such rituals is obviously significant in contemporary urban contexts in which traditional coming-of-age rituals have been so attenuated that only their shadows linger on in the form of matric dances or elaborate twenty-first birthday parties. The boy who feels the need of something more empowering is free to turn to the fantasy shelves of his local library where proxy rites of passage may be found in stories which trace the adventures of youthful heroes gradually discovering their own strengths and adult roles. Indeed, in some ways, as Attebery (1992:104) points out,

[t]hough lacking the authority of ritual, narratives are in some ways better suited to the needs of an evolving society. Because the reader undergoes only a vicarious induction into a new identity, that identity remains provisional and subject to further testing and growth. As such narratives proliferate, they serve to complement and comment upon one another.

The adolescent girl, on the other hand, has generally been rather less fortunate. Whereas the three-stage process of male initiation focuses on movement out of a sheltering community into a challenging external world before allowing the young man to return transformed by trial to his original social grouping, women's initiation rites, centring as they often do on first menstruation and not requiring physical withdrawal from the nurturing community of women, tend to involve a period of seclusion within the community rather than movement beyond it (Mircea Eliade, 1958:47). Thus Bruce Lincoln (1981:101) argues that such rituals are less visible and easier to overlook since they require a three-step progression of a different kind, focusing on 'enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification) and emergence'. When such a process is so marginalized as to vanish altogether, Caroline Heilbrun (1979:104) argues that girls may suffer 'a lack of selfhood and of the will to autonomy that only the struggle for identity can confer'.

Unlike their male counterparts too, Western girls are likely to struggle to find narrative substitutes for the diminished coming-of-age rituals typical of contemporary urban culture. As Le Guin (1993a:5) notes, within Western hero tales,

[w]omen may be good and brave, but with rare exceptions (Spenser, Ariosto, Bunyan?) women are not heroes. They are sidekicks. Never the Lone Ranger, always Tonto. Women are seen in relation to heroes: as mother, wife, seducer, beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden.

The first two of these traditional roles belong to mature women rather than adolescent girls and the last three require a passivity which as Diana Wynne Jones (1989:130) remarks ran counter to her own teenage sense of what heroism entailed since 'heroes go into action when the odds are against them....and for this reason

they impinge on a hostile world in a way others don't'. Thus within the tropes of conventional fantasy, the only active role open to young women is that of Rountree's (1997:212) 'irresistible seductress' whose appeal as a female role model is considerably diminished by the frequent links between such a figure and the 'hideous hag' of conventional witch lore.

Of course, to believe that in order to be empowered or entranced by the reading experience young readers need to be able to identify with characters of their own gender and approximate age is to fall victim to what Maria Nikolajeva (2010:185) calls the 'identification fallacy'. Both Ursula le Guin (1993a) and Diana Wynne Jones (1989) record taking pleasure in masculine hero narratives though both also admit to a feeling of startled delight when first encountering Spenser's female knight, Britomart. Similarly, Caroline Heilbrun (1979:150) argues that the girl reader need not necessarily confine herself to female roles but can, for instance, recognise in Sleeping Beauty's prince 'that part of herself that awakens conventional girlhood to the possibility of life and action'.

Nevertheless, the desire to foster models of female agency rather than feminine dependence in both life and literature encouraged second-wave feminists³⁵ to challenge the entrenched memes apparent in much heroic fantasy. In her very successful *Song of the Lioness* series ([1983-1988] 2005), for instance, Tamora Pierce creates a female hero, Alanna, whose adventures challenge society's conception of female roles by allowing a girl to experience the displacement, transformation and return pattern more usually associated with the male hero. Yet

³⁵ Wave approaches to the history of feminism have been criticised by a number of critics including Sheila Ruth (1998), Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995) and Kimberly Springer (2002). However, like Susan Archer Mann and Douglas Huffman (2005), I feel that the term makes sense when applied to the ebb and flow of mass-based feminist movements. Furthermore, the terms second-wave and third-wave feminism are now so familiar to most feminist critics that they can be used to convey a complex network of ideas and assumptions in a fairly concise manner.

simply allowing a nominally female figure to take on male heroic attributes is not enough for all women writers of heroic fantasy. As Diana Wynne Jones, whose *Fire and Hemlock* ([1985] 2000) remains probably the most satisfying and complex exploration of female heroism in adolescent fiction, observes, she and many of her contemporaries wanted rather 'a narrative structure which did not simply put a female in a male's place' (Jones, 1989:135). Such desires were and have continued to be strengthened by the fact that, as Attebery (1992:91) notes, 'Few women even today can find in their own lives any analog of the male hero's freedom of movement or his expectation of power and rank at the end of his quest'.

Partly as a result of this desire to find new models of female power rather than simply appropriate male ones, Annis Pratt (1981:139-143) analysed a number of women's stories and suggested an alternative pattern for female coming-of-age stories, one that involves separation from family, being provided with 'green-world' tokens or guides, taking a 'green-world' lover, confronting parental figures; and a descent into the subconscious that leads ultimately to social integration. Similarly, other women writers and thinkers began actively re-reading and reclaiming for radical feminism the history of both witches and witchcraft. In *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), for instance, Robin Morgan presented witches as emblems of feminist resistance to male oppression while Mary Daly (1979) attempted to recover a hidden 'herstory' of powerful women by means of 'hag-iography'. For such writers, the holy trinity at the heart of witchcraft, then being reinvented not only as a literary stereotype but also as an alternative religion, reflected the changing stages of female life in the form of the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone. Daly argued that the revulsion conjured by the standard portrayal of the witch arose from the fact that patriarchal society had privileged the fertile or potentially fertile woman and thus the Maiden and Mother while ostracising and neutralising the unsettling power of the hag or Crone. In this vein, the first manifesto of the political protest group WITCH (Women's International

Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) deliberately challenged the traditional representation of the witch by defiantly stating: 'Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary' (cited by Rachel Moseley, 2002:410).

As feminist thought has continued to develop, the figure of the witch has become even more hotly contested. More recent feminist critics have rejected or modified the 'hag-iography' espoused by Daly (1979) and some of her contemporaries, finding such work compromised by an essentialist mode of thinking which tends to homogenize disparate modes of female experience and thus risks merely replacing one narrowly circumscribed female role with another. In a recent article, 'Rise of the Third Wave', Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman (2005:58), while considering the achievements of the postmodern feminists of the eighties and nineties, often defined as third-wave feminists, comment on the inherent difficulties in the use of the term 'wave' itself, suggesting that

[w]ave approaches too often downplay the importance of individual and small-scale collective actions, as well as indirect and covert acts [thus] there is a tendency for attention to be drawn to the common themes that unify each wave, and this often obscures the diversity of the competing feminisms that actually exist.

What Archer Mann and Huffman (2005:58) indicate is the concern many contemporary feminists have about any suggestion of essentialism or the idea that definitions of collective female identity have any validity at all. In order to counter charges of being prescriptive or of marginalizing any of the experiences of very different groups of women, modern feminist theorists thus acknowledge differences (of age, race, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation) amongst women even as they simultaneously continue to suggest areas of common ground amongst them. It is this

tendency that has developed into the fluid and highly individualistic movement now often referred to as fourth-wave or, in a nod to postcolonial theorists, subaltern feminism.

However, despite the move away from second-wave idealisations of older witches, in particular, as icons of female power, later feminists have continued to revisit the contested figure of the witch, arguing, like Elizabeth Reis (cited by Moseley, 2002:411), that historically, ‘the concept of “witch” and the charge of witchcraft help[ed] to set and police the boundaries of female normality and acceptability’ by denigrating and punishing female power and agency. Similarly, writers of fantasy novels for young adults have responded to the challenges of feminist critics by beginning to interrogate conventional literary representations of the witch, encouraging their readers to see ‘myth as a myth: a construct which may be changed; an idea which may be rethought, made more true, more honest’ (Le Guin, 1993a:17). By so doing they have offered young women access to forms of imaginative female agency that command power and respect rather than fear and contempt.

In *Earthsea Revisioned*, for instance, a reflective essay in which Le Guin (1993a:11-12) reconsiders the first three volumes of *Earthsea* some twenty years after they were originally published, the author acknowledges the impact of feminist thought on her work as a writer of fantasy, saying,

[b]y the early seventies when I finished the third book of *Earthsea*, traditional definitions and values of masculinity and femininity were all in question....The artist who was above gender had been exposed as a man hiding in a raincoat. No serious writer could, or can, go on pretending to be genderless. I couldn’t continue my hero-tale until I had, as woman and artist, wrestled with the angels of the feminist consciousness. It took me a long time to get their blessing. From 1972

on I knew there should be a fourth book of *Earthsea*, but it was sixteen years before I could write it.

Significantly though, Le Guin never simply repudiates the first three novels in the series. Instead she suggests that 'it doesn't seem right or wise to revise an old text severely, as if trying to obliterate it, hiding the evidence that one had to go there to get here. It is rather in the feminist mode to let one's changes of mind and the processes of change, stand as evidence – that minds that don't change are like clams that don't open' (Le Guin, 1989b:7). Thus, having been written over a period of almost thirty-five years by a woman writer deeply conscious that '[w]hen the world turns over, you can't go on thinking upside down' (Le Guin, 1993a:12), *Earthsea* becomes an ideal starting point from which to explore the way in which writers of contemporary fantasy for teenagers have found themselves having to re-vision both the nature of their female readers and the functions of witches and witchcraft within the genre.

In the opening chapter of Ursula le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, first published in 1968, the reader is told, 'There is a saying on Gont, *Weak as woman's magic*, and there is another saying, *Wicked as woman's magic*' (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:16). As the chapter progresses, the Othering of female power inherent in both proverbs is then made even more explicit. Ged, the eponymous hero of the novel, displays signs of magical ability from an early age. Seeing this, his aunt, the village witch, offers to teach him her skills, but then secretly tries to bind him to her service. Fortunately for Ged, her greed and deceptiveness are matched only by her incompetence and the attempt to control him fails. In the first volume of her acclaimed fantasy series, Le Guin ([1968] 1993b:16-17) thus quite openly presents real power as a masculine preserve, saying of the village witch:

Being an ignorant woman among ignorant folk, she often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends. She knew nothing of the Balance and the Pattern which the true wizard knows and serves.... Much of her lore was mere rubbish and humbug, nor did she know the true spells from the false. She knew many curses, and was better at causing sickness perhaps than at curing it. Like any village witch, she could brew up a love-potion, but there were other uglier brews she made to serve men's jealousy and hate.

Given the gender bias evident in this description it is hardly surprising that when Ged's village is threatened by Kargish raiders, his aunt is powerless to help her people. Instead it is the untrained twelve-year-old boy who weaves a magic mist to hide his village and baffle the invaders.

In protecting the villagers, Ged exhausts his untrained powers and is only brought back to himself by the famous mage Ogion, who later offers the boy a choice between remaining his apprentice or joining the all male school for wizards on the island of Roke. As Ged leaves behind him all contact with women and their magic, the omniscient narrator gives way to a narrative closely bound to the young wizard's own point of view. Women make only fleeting appearances in the rest of the novel in which they are presented as either passive innocents or seductive traps.

Significantly, it is Serret, the young daughter of the Lord of Re Albi, whose mother is an enchantress (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:31), who taunts Ged with his inexperience and so provokes him into reading a forbidden spell for summoning the spirits of the dead (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:30). Later Ged's rivalry with a fellow student, Jasper, is exacerbated by the visit to Roke of the Lord of O and his lady at whom the old Masters look 'sidelong, disapproving' but the young men 'with all their eyes' (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:54). In an attempt to best Jasper, who is asked to work an illusion for the lady, Ged uses the proscribed spell to summon the spirit of Princess Elfarren, whom Melanie Rawn (2008:130) describes as 'Earthsea's version of Helen of Troy'. Like Helen, Elfarren brings destruction in her wake. In her life, we are told by Ged's

friend Vetch, “for her sake all Enlad was laid waste, and the Hero-Mage of Havnor died, and the island Soléa sank beneath the sea” (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:54).

Ged’s attempt to summon Elfarren’s spirit, charged as the eidolon or insubstantial image is with all the destructive sexual allure invested in women by his celibate community, is equally disastrous. The young magician is only saved by the intervention of the Archmage Nemmerle, who sacrifices his own life to check the ungoverned spell which nevertheless leaves a shadow behind it. This shadow relentlessly pursues Ged from that moment. Realising that he cannot shelter on Roke forever, Ged then leaves the island.

After an encounter with the mysterious Dragon of Pendor, he meets the young witch Serret again. Now fully grown into the seductive power of an enchantress she tempts him to free himself of the shadow by using the power of an old and terrible spirit imprisoned in a block of stone (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:108-110). Significantly Serret, despite her confidence in her new powers, is too weak and ignorant to grasp the true nature of the evil that uses her; she claims, ‘I have touched it. I have spoken to it. It does me no harm’ (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:110). The enchantress’s limitations are made even more apparent when she argues that only the stone can defeat the shadow pursuing Ged, since ‘only darkness can defeat the dark’ (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:112). Despite her beauty and rank, Serret therefore knows no more of real power than any village witch. Ged’s superior masculine wisdom comes to the fore when he explains that ‘the Old Powers of earth are not for men to use’ (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:111) and only light can defeat the dark (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:112). It is this realisation that allows Ged to escape while Serret perishes, torn apart by the malformed primeval creatures recalled to life by the malign power of the stone (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:115-116).

Thereafter Ged takes refuge with Ogion, who persuades him that he can only hope to master the shadow if he is willing to become the hunter rather than the hunted. Ged turns to pursue the shadow which itself then turns and flees before him. When the man finally corners the shadow, he masters it by recognising it not as an extrinsic threat but an intrinsic part of himself:

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name, and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: "Ged." And the two voices were one voice.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one. (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:164)

Yet although Ged has learned to embrace his own repressed darkness, his Jungian 'shadow', by the end of the book he is no closer to acknowledging the repressed feminine within both himself and his world; his 'anima', the witch within, still eludes him.

The second book of the series makes a more conscious attempt to grapple with feminine paradigms of power in that it has a female protagonist, Tenar, from whose point of view the story is told. *The Tombs of Atuan* (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b) is set in the patriarchal Kargad empire which is ruled by a Godking who, rather like the Roman emperors, is considered divine by his people. Predating the worship of the Godking, however, is the worship of the Old Powers of the Earth, which has been conducted since time immemorial in a desert temple complex populated only by women and eunuchs and known simply as the Place. The most important figure within this community is Arha, the priestess of the 'Nameless Ones'. Whenever this priestess dies, a search is undertaken for a female child in whom it is believed that the priestess's soul will have been reincarnated. Tenar is such a child. While still very

young she is taken from her mother and subjected to a symbolic execution in which her life is offered to the 'Nameless Ones'. Thereafter she is known as Arha, or the 'Eaten One'. As Elizabeth Cummins (1993:43) writes:

[t]he Place mirrors female experience in Kargish society. Ostensibly protected by its walls and guards and eunuchs, the women are actually imprisoned. Ostensibly honoured by their society, they are actually punished by being isolated, perhaps a reflection of the male fear of the female principle. Ostensibly powerful in their roles as religious leaders, they are actually functionaries who have internalised male standards and enforce them. The women have become their own prison guards.

The descriptions of the Place clearly reflect the illusory nature of the power which the priestesses seem to enjoy. The buildings are overgrown and crumbling and everything is overlaid by dust. As Tenar gets up from the execution block before the enormous empty throne, the narrator comments that

[t]he jewels inset in the huge clawed arms and the back were glazed with dust, and on the carven back were cobwebs and whitish stains of owl droppings. The three highest steps directly before the throne, above the step on which she had knelt, had never been climbed by mortal feet. They were so thick with dust that they looked like one slant of grey soil, the planes of the red-veined marble wholly hidden by the unstirred, untrodden siftings of how many years, how many centuries. (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:178-179)

If Tenar's experience is seen in terms of Bruce Lincoln's (1981:101) argument that female coming-of-age rituals require a three-step progression involving 'enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification) and emergence' then it is apparent that the girl's progress to adulthood is an incomplete one. While Tenar is enclosed within the Place and undergoes a ritual process controlled by women whereby she loses her own identity and takes on that of Arha, the purpose of this metamorphosis is not to

empower her for emergence into adulthood but to trap her in a dark chthonic space of repressed power and frustrated agency.

This is emphasised by the contrast between Tenar's experience of gaining a new name and that of Ged. Within *Earthsea*, names have power and must be carefully guarded since they encapsulate the essence of the thing or being that bears them. Much of Ged's training is thus taken up with learning lists of names and a wizard can show no greater trust than to allow another knowledge of his true name. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged undergoes a rite of passage in which he crosses the Ar river at its source. As he enters the icy water, his witch aunt takes from him the name Duny which his mother had given him as a baby. 'Nameless and naked' (Le Guin, [1968] 1993b:24), he walks through the icy river and then as he comes to the opposite bank, Ogion reaches out a hand and whispers his true name, Ged, into his ear. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Tenar also loses her name, but instead of gaining a new one to mark her new adult identity she remains trapped in nameless stasis since Arha is simply an indicator that she has been eaten alive and thus has lost any claim to either physical or spiritual independence. As a result, the priestesses can offer 'her life and the years of her life until her death, which is also theirs' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:178) to the 'Nameless Ones'.

When Tenar is older, she learns that the Place is built over a vast Labyrinth that she alone may enter. The Labyrinth evokes images of the womb in that it is entered by 'a narrow slit' leading into a darkness that seems 'to press like wet felt upon the open eyes' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:199). Arha squeezes through this into a central cavern surrounded by what is described as a 'vast, meaningless web of ways' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:222). The adjective, 'meaningless', points to the fact that the Place preserves only the memory of what may once have been real feminine power. The womb is associated with life and nourishment but its sacramental equivalent, the

Labyrinth, is a place of destruction in which Arha's first duty is to sentence three traitors to a slow death by starvation (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:201-203). The insubstantial nature of the priestesses' power is further emphasised by the emptiness of their rituals; as they walk down the hill from the Tombs, they chant 'a word so old it ha[s] lost its meaning, like a signpost still standing when the road is gone' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:179). It is hardly surprising that Arha's mentor, the High-Priestess Kossil, is found to have 'no true worship in her heart of the Nameless Ones or of the gods' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:220), holding nothing sacred but power.

In this dry and static enclave, the days and years go by, 'all alike' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:185) until, on one of her trips into the Labyrinth/Tomb through which she moves like the ghost she has become, Arha sees a man carrying a light which transforms the great vaulted cavern into 'a palace of diamonds, a house of amethyst and crystal, from which the ancient darkness had been driven out by glory' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:224). Horrified by what she experiences as a desecration, Arha calls out and the man flees. Unable to find him, she locks the entrance to her ancient sanctuary so that he is trapped beneath the earth. Yet even as she prays to the ancient powers, she sees in her mind's eye 'the quivering radiance of the lighted cavern, life in the place of death' (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:227). The cognitive frustration that disturbs Arha's familiar incantations is indicative of the fact that in her face-to-face encounter with Ged she has experienced Levinas's (1969:50) 'ethical moment', which necessarily exposes as illusory the autonomy and supposed self-sufficiency of the self.

The reader learns later that the trapped man is Ged, who has come to the Place to search for the missing half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe, a mystical talisman of great power engraved with the lost rune of dominion and peace without which no king can rule well. Despite herself, Arha becomes fascinated by Ged and, after he has drawn

on his power to find and restore her given name of Tenar, she leads him to the Great Treasury to search for the other half of the ring. In the Treasury, all the life-denying properties of the Place are intensified:

In the Great Treasury of the Tombs of Atuan, time did not pass. No light; no life; no least stir of spider in the dust or worm in the cold earth. Rock, and dark, and time not passing. (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:263).

Outside the treasury, however, Kossil discovers that Ged is Arha's prisoner and demands his death. Arha claims to have buried him in the undertomb, thinking that the other woman will not dare enter it. However, she then finds Kossil with a lantern probing for the supposed grave. Arha fears for her life but, more importantly, loses her faith, saying to Ged:

"She was there with a lantern. Scratching in the grave... to see if there was a corpse in it. Like a rat in a graveyard, a great fat black rat, digging. And the light burning in the Holy Place, the dark place. And the Nameless Ones did nothing. They didn't kill her or drive her mad. They are old, as she said. They are dead. They are all gone. I am not a Priestess any more." (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:264-265)

Interestingly, Ged denies that the Nameless Ones are dead, saying instead: "They do not die. They are dark and undying, and they hate the light: the brief bright light of our mortality" (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:265); however, he does tell Tenar that the ancient powers she has served and that are quite obviously associated with feminine power, albeit of a repressed and warped kind, are not worth worshipping. He suggests to the shaken girl that darkness gathers in the places given over "to the ones whom we call Nameless, the ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the Light, the powers of the dark, of ruin and madness" (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:266) and urges Tenar to leave the tombs with him, saying that "to be reborn one must die" (Le

Guin, [1972] 1993b:273). At this stage, Ged holds the missing half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe but has given the original half to Tenar as an expression of his trust in her. Tenar slips this off the chain she has used to secure it around her neck and Ged magically repairs the great ring before Tenar slips it onto her arm. Together they then leave the Tombs, which are destroyed by a massive earthquake as soon as they do.

Judith Evans (1995:18) points out that the radical feminists of the mid-seventies encouraged the exploration and a celebration of the differences between men and women and claims that it was this that led to attempts to remake figures like the witch as well as attempts to resurrect a Goddess from pre-patriarchal mythology to supplant the Judeo-Christian male God, the worship of whom was seen as antithetical to feminine aspirations to transcendence. Bearing this in mind, one could argue that in allowing Ged to dismiss the 'Nameless Ones' as unworthy of worship, Le Guin discounts any possibility that the shadowy remnants of such female power can ever be resurrected, preferring instead the traditional equation which Others the feminine by associating it irrevocably with the Darkness against which the masculine forces of the Light are perpetually pitted. Thus it is significant that Ged's first incursion into Arha's world is marked by light and that the night after Arha regains her birthname she dreams that she is buried alive but that out of her anguish a bird of flame is born that carries her into the light:

Her arms and legs were bound with grave cloths and she could not move or speak. Her despair grew so great that it burst her breast open and like a bird of fire shattered the stone and broke out into the light of day.³⁶ (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:257)

³⁶ While this image evokes the rebirth of a phoenix, it also anticipates the dragon imagery so central to *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales from Earthsea* (2002) and *The Other Wind* (2003) and which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Certainly, the narrator presents Tenar's escape from the Tombs as a triumphant victory of freedom and trust over enslavement and fear. Furthermore, the remaking of the ring subtly echoes a marriage ceremony and Ged seems to accept Tenar as an equal, saying, "You have set us both free.... Alone, no one wins freedom" (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:274).

Yet, as Le Guin (1993a:9) acknowledges,

Tenar, a heroine, is not a free agent. She is trapped in her situation. And when the hero comes, she becomes complementary to him. She cannot get free of the Tombs without him.

Tenar thus emerges into the world not as an autonomous adult but as the child she thought she had left behind. She gains no new name but simply resumes the name of her infancy. Ged summons a rabbit to kill for their supper but when she asks him if she could learn to do that, he shows that he too has reverted to the assumptions he brought with him to Kargad by implying that she is unlikely to have the power necessary for such magic. He is clearly more than a little uncomfortable with her childlike dependency, saying, when he learns that she entered the Place at five, "You are – more than I had realized – truly reborn" (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:287). When Tenar faces her own powerlessness and says, "All I know is of no use now...and I haven't learned anything else but I will try to learn" (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:288), Ged looks away 'wincing as if in pain'. Similarly, when she asks if he will stay with her when they reach Havnor, he replies that he cannot because where he goes he must go alone. To comfort her, he tries to find her a new name and role, saying:

"They'll welcome you in Havnor as a princess....They'll call you the White Lady because of your fair skin, and they'll love you the more

because you are so young. And because you are beautiful.” (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:288)

Tenar refuses to accept this new incarnation as a passive heroine inspiring rather than performing action because she is aware that the acts she has committed and the burden of guilt she bears equip her ill for such a role. Ged too is finally forced to admit that she has emerged into a world with no place for a woman of power who is neither hag nor seductress. Tenar will therefore have to remake herself according to the norms of the Hardic lands and so, in the last line of the book, she comes ashore in Havnor not as Ged’s equal but ‘holding his hand, like a child coming home’ (1993b:300).

Perhaps because its writer sensed the stresses generated by the introduction of Tenar into her hero tale, *The Furthest Shore* (Le Guin, [1973] 1993b), the third book of the series, has no significant female characters at all. It deals instead with the ageing Ged’s attempt to counter the damage inflicted on the world by a renegade magician, Cob, who finds a way to deny death. Helped by Arren, heir to the throne of Havnor and the ring of Erreth-Akbe, Ged confronts Cob and heals the rift in the fabric of the world that has breached the barrier between the living and the dead. To do so, Ged is forced to expend every vestige of his power. He and Arren are then rescued by the dragon Kalessin who allows them to mount his great barbed neck. Kalessin brings both the men to Roke but Ged, who like Tenar at the end of *The Tombs of Atuan*, now finds himself reborn into powerlessness, mounts the dragon again and flies away ‘between the sunlight and the sea’ (Le Guin, [1973] 1993b:477).

Tehanu (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b), the fourth book in the cycle, marks such a radical stylistic and thematic change from the first trilogy that it initially drew considerable

critical fire.³⁷ It opens with Goha, a middle-aged farmer's widow, refusing to leave her farm to live in town with her newly-married daughter, Apple. Le Guin ([1990] 1993b:483) gives the reader clues to Goha's past by writing, 'People said she had been some kind of great person in the foreign land she came from, and indeed the mage Ogion used to stop by Oak Farm to see her' and allowing the widow herself to observe that she has 'generally lived near tombstones' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:483), but it is not until the end of the second chapter that her identity is confirmed for readers when the dying Ogion recognises her at his door and calls, "Come in, Tenar" (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:497). The revelation that the girl who once served the ancient nameless powers of the earth and restored the ring of Erreth-Akbe to Havnor is now the middle-aged mistress only of 'a flock of sheep, ... four fields, an orchard of pears, two tenants' cottages' and an 'old stone farmhouse' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:483) comes as something of a shock, representing, in Lisa Hammond Rashley's (2007:26) terms, 'a fictional experiment in the feminist appropriation and subversion of the hero-tale'.

When Kalessin brings the shattered Ged to Ogion's cottage, Tenar cares for him and it is he who eventually voices the reader's lingering disquiet when he says that having recognised her power in the labyrinth, he was disappointed to hear that she had left Ogion's care to marry a farmer. Tenar's response articulates all the latent gender issues implicit in the unsatisfying final chapters of *The Tombs of Atuan*:

"When Ogion taught me,...here – at the hearth there – the words of the Old Speech, they were as easy and as hard in my mouth as in his. That was like learning the language I spoke before I was born. But the rest – the lore, the runes of power, the spells, the rules, the raising of the forces – that was all dead to me. Somebody else's language. I used to think, I could be dressed up as a warrior, with a lance and a sword and a plume and all, but it wouldn't fit, would it?"

³⁷ See Donna White (1999:108).

What would I do with the sword? Would it make me a hero? I'd be myself in clothes that didn't fit, is all, hardly able to walk."

She sipped her wine.

"So I took it all off," she said, "and put on my own clothes." (Le Guin, [1972] 1993b:560)

Elizabeth Cummins (1993:39) argues that in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged's coming of age requires 'a journey inward to knowledge of the self' whereas in *The Tombs of Atuan*, Tenar matures by learning to focus on 'the journey outward to knowledge of the relationship between self and human community'. It is this awareness that allows the girl to understand more quickly than her masculine counterpart that the world of Earthsea cannot accommodate a woman whose magic is neither 'wicked' nor 'weak'. Once she understands this, Tenar chooses to maintain the momentum of her 'journey outward' by marrying Flint and entering as fully as possible into the farming community on Gont even while recognizing that by doing so she is accepting 'only the authority allotted her by the arrangements of mankind' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:509). In Le Guin's (1993a:18) terms, the mature Tenar has not been reborn but has borne, 'given birth to her children and her new selves'. Secure both in the community she has chosen and in her regenerative powers, Tenar has the courage to adopt Therru/Tehanu, a child who has been raped and abused by her own father and then thrown into a fire and left to die. Together with Aunty Moss, the witch of Re Albi, Tenar and Tehanu begin to explore what a powerful witch wearing her own clothes might look like and what she could achieve.

What Le Guin (1993a:18) calls Tenar's act of 'rebearing' echoes the way Le Guin herself re-visits and re-visions both the fictional world of Earthsea and, on a meta-level, her own creation of it. The change is so fundamental that Mike Cadden (2005:86-89) suggests that the last three books of *Earthsea* shift generically so that

while the earlier books are governed by epic conventions, the later ones and *Tehanu*, in particular, rely more on strategies associated with the novel. Certainly, as Marek Oziewicz (2008:135) observes, in the second *Earthsea* trilogy Le Guin adopts the perspective of those ‘who wash the dishes rather than feast in halls; who live unknown rather than get celebrated in deeds; who are powerless rather than powerful; [and] who are victims rather than victors’.

This change of perspective is crucial in enabling a reassessment of witches and their craft. Firstly, in writing about Tenar as a middle-aged widow, Le Guin responds to the second-wave feminist drive to reassess female stereotypes by redefining the Mother within the witch trinity of Maiden, Mother and Crone as not only powerful and nurturing but also as subversive. When Tenar eventually takes Ged into her bed, her experience allows her to assume the lead so that the consummation of their love becomes a site for resistance against patriarchal stereotyping and through her Ged is able to gain access to an archetypal energy that nurtures change and becoming. Similarly, Tenar’s adoption of Tehanu in the full knowledge that the child’s maimed body and ruined life can never be made whole is an act of heroism different from but quite the equal of any of Ged’s celebrated triumphs. Significantly, Ged himself recognises this, saying:

“I don’t know... why you took her, knowing that she cannot be healed. Knowing what her life must be. I suppose it is a part of this time we have lived – a dark time, an age of ruin, an ending time. You took her, I suppose, as I went to meet my enemy, because it was all you could do. And so we must live on into the new age with the spoils of our victory over evil. You with your burned child, and I with nothing at all.” (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:547)

When Tenar takes Tehanu into her home, she voluntarily brings upon herself a life of ‘averted faces, the signs against evil, the horror and curiosity, the sickly pity and the

prying threat, for harm draws harm to it' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:549). As Marek Oziewicz (2008:137) points out, 'Inasmuch as it is not a short-term commitment such as the male hero's task usually involves, the kind of heroism Tenar presents...surpasses in its quiet way, spectacular quests of the first trilogy'.

As Tenar guides young readers to a new awareness of maternal power rooted as it is in unassuming actions arising out of love, empathy and compassion, she in her turn comes to a new understanding of the apparently utterly repellent figure of Aunty Moss, an archetypal Crone, of whom the third person narrator, whose views often seem coloured by Tenar's, initially says:

Moss's nose leaned out over her toothless jaws and thin lips; there was a wart on her cheek the size of a cherry pit; her hair was a grey-black tangle of charm-knots and wisps; and she had a smell as strong and broad and deep and complicated as the smell of a fox's den. "Come into the forest with me, dearie!" said the old witches in the tales told to the children of Gont. "Come with me and I'll show you such a pretty sight!" And then the witch shut the child in her oven and baked it brown and ate it... (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:510)

However, when Aunty Moss coaxes Tehanu to venture out with her, she does no harm but takes the child to see a lark's nest in the hay or to gather wild mint and blueberries. As Tenar wryly observes, 'She did not have to shut the child in an oven, or change her into a monster, or seal her in stone. That had all been done already' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:510).

In this neat reversal of fairy tale norms, Le Guin reminds us that as fathers are not always loving protectors so witches need not be always be malevolent threats. In fact, in *Tales from Earthsea* (2002:4), Le Guin lists the duties of witches as 'the care of pregnant beasts and women, birthing, teaching the songs and rites, the fertility and order of field and garden, the building and care of the house and its furniture, [and]

the mining of ores and metals'. In *Tehanu* we are shown how Moss and Ivy, the witch of Middle Valley, perform these duties with diligence and care although they have little access to either formal training or words of power.

Despite Moss's awkwardness with words and ideas, contact with her seems to initiate a process of rediscovery for Tenar thus endorsing Jane Caputi's (1992:433) view that 'as a harbinger of rebirth, the Crone's appearance signals a call to profound transformation and healing'. At one point, Moss openly challenges Ged's equation of darkness and the old powers with ruin and madness, saying:

"I go back into the dark! Before the moon I was. No one knows, no one knows, no one can say what I am, what a woman is, a woman of power, a woman's power, deeper than the roots of trees, deeper than the roots of islands, older than the Making, older than the moon. Who dares ask questions of the Dark? Who'll ask the Dark its name?" (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:528)

Significantly Tenar answers that she is prepared to confront the dark, saying simply that she has lived long enough in it to do so (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:529). The importance of this moment is easy to overlook partly because it takes place in a deliberately domestic setting while the two women are splitting reeds and partly because Aunty Moss's rocking and chanting encourage the reader to dismiss her comments as senile ramblings, but it is after this exchange that Tenar begins to talk about her early life in the Tombs thus confronting her suppressed past and thereby regaining access to lost aspects of her own nature and the marginalised roots of feminine power. It is Aunty Moss too who gives Tenar and therefore the reader an alternative perspective on the differences between masculine and feminine magic by saying:

“Ours is only a little power, seems like, next to theirs...But it goes down deep. It’s all roots. It’s like an old blackberry thicket. And a wizard’s power’s like a fir tree, maybe, great and tall and grand, but it’ll blow right down in a storm. Nothing kills a blackberry bramble.” (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:572)

Subsequently, Tenar has a dream which echoes the one that preceded her escape from the Tombs:

That night as she lay going to sleep she entered again into the vast gulfs of wind and light, but the light was smoky, red and orange-red and amber, as if the air itself were fire. In this element she was and was not; flying on the wind and being the wind, the blowing of the wind; the force that went free; and no voice called to her. (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:573-574).

The dream prefigures the long-delayed emergence into full adult power which allows Tenar to return to Oak Farm and resume life on her own terms. In a sense, the quiet weeks with Aunty Moss in Ogion’s house complete the truncated coming-of-age ritual begun in *The Tombs of Atuan*. Tenar withdraws for a while from her chosen community and, guided by Moss, begins to reassess the patterns that have shaped her experience thus finally undergoing what has previously been defined by Lincoln (1981:101) as the three stages of female initiation: enclosure, metamorphosis (or magnification) and emergence.

The dream is also significant in that its images of fire and flight anticipate the transfiguration of Tehanu, the youngest of the novel’s three women of power and the character who both exemplifies and challenges the powers vested in the Maiden archetype of the witch triptych. Raped, beaten and burned, Tehanu, like Tenar at the end of *The Tombs of Atuan*, has experienced too much to be easily subsumed in an

archetypal figure structured about an ideal of untouched beauty and innocence. Her scarred face and clawed hand are instead vivid reminders that such an ideal exists only by the permission of forces against which it is utterly defenceless. She is, as Le Guin (1993a:19) points out, 'helplessness personified: disinheritance, a child dehumanised, made Other'. Thus although Tehanu does technically grow into womanhood, Le Guin (1993a:24) suggests that in many ways she has been 'ungendered by the rape that destroys her "virtue" and the mutilation that destroys her beauty. She has nothing left of the girl men want girls to be. It's all been burned away'. Even Tenar, when she mourns the fact that Tehanu's life has been eaten away by the fire more comprehensively than her own ever was in the symbolic sacrifice of it to the Nameless ones, sighs over the child, thinking, 'And never a man's arms. Never anyone to hold her. Never anyone but Tenar' (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:549). In her anxiety about Tehanu's future, Tenar listens to the sorcerer Beech who, seeing Tehanu from a masculine perspective, suggests with no great confidence that she might be apprenticed to the village witch since "as a witch, her ... appearance wouldn't be so much against her – possibly" (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:628). However, when Ivy is approached with this suggestion, she rejects it even while acknowledging Tehanu's power:

"I see you go about with her as though she was any child, and I think, What are they? What's the strength of that woman, for she's not a fool, to hold a fire by the hand, to spin thread with the whirlwind. They say, Mistress, that you lived as a child yourself with the Old Ones, the Dark Ones, the Ones Underfoot, and that you were queen and servant of those powers. Maybe that's why you are not afraid of this one. What power she is, I don't know, I don't say. But it's beyond my teaching..." (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:632)

Like Tenar before her, Tehanu is both a woman too damaged and a witch too powerful to be contained within the conventional gender patterns of Hardic society.

When Ged and Tenar are attacked by the wizard Aspen, who robs Tenar of language in a grotesque embodiment of the silencing of women's voices within Earthsea as a whole, Tenar is galvanised into an awareness of her true nature and calls on Kalessin, who not only comes at her bidding but acknowledges her as the daughter whom he has long sought (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:688-689). Although she is unable to speak, when Tenar sees the great dragon flying towards her, she laughs aloud (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:687). Susan Bernardo and Graham Murphy (2006:141-142) link her response to Hélène Cixous' presentation of Medusa as an emblem of reviled witchcraft. Cixous (1976:885) suggests that if one looks directly at Medusa one may see her not as deadly but as 'beautiful and ... laughing'. Like the snake-haired Medusa, both Tenar and Tehanu are, in some sense, hybrid beings whose affinity with serpentine dragons signals both their Otherness and their power.

The idea that people and dragons are inextricably bound together is hinted at from the very first book in the series in which Ged speaks to the ancient dragon of Pendor and demonstrates that they share a common tongue, the language of magic and making. Among the many things that Ogion tries to teach Tenar, it is with this language alone that she feels entirely comfortable. Also, in the second chapter of *Tehanu*, Tenar tells the story of Ogion's encounter with the Woman of Kemay about whom the wizard said he did not know if she were a woman disguised as a dragon or a dragon disguised as a woman. When he asked her which she was, she offered a story in reply and told him that dragons and people were once a single race but some among the dragon-people loved flight and wildness while others came to value and hoard material possessions. Eventually it was agreed that the latter would remain in the eastern reaches of the world while the former would fly into the west. At the end of the story Tenar records Ogion as having said to the dragon-woman:

“When I first saw you I saw your true being. The woman who sits across the hearth from me is no more than the dress she wears.”

But she shook her head and laughed and all she would say was, “If only it were that simple.” (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:493)

The complexity of the human-dragon bond is also shown by the ancient fan belonging to the weaver who gives Tenar fabric to make Tehanu a dress. On one side the fan shows men and women and on the other dragons but when it is held up to the light the two paintings flow into one another so that ‘the clouds and peaks [a]re the towers of the city, and the men and women [a]re winged, and the dragons look with human eyes’ (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:577).

In *Tales from Earthsea* (2002), Le Guin reinforces this link between dragons and women in the tale of Irian, a girl who travels to Roke where she challenges the deranged Summoner, the most powerful of its mages since, as a dragon-woman, she need not fear any wizard. Significantly, Melanie Rawn (2008:139) points out that while Irian is beautiful, her beauty is far from traditional as it is located in her ‘large size, outspokenness, charisma, courage and strength’. Like Moss, Irian will not accept the wizards’ resistance to either women or the Old Powers of the dark. When the Patterner says, “Dark is bad”, she replies, “*Only in dark the light*” (Le Guin, 2002:244). In other stories in this collection, Le Guin reveals that the true founders of the school on Roke were women (Le Guin, 2002:54-106) and that Ogion’s master Heleth was himself taught by a woman, Arda, who had access to the Old Powers of the earth (Le Guin, 2002:160). In his essay on gender in *Tehanu* and the *Earthsea* trilogy, Perry Nodelman (1995:179) suggests that ‘[in] continuing her story past the now only apparently concluding events of *The Furthest Shore*, Le Guin clearly signalled that she had new thoughts about her old conclusions’. Certainly, once Tenar is at peace with her multiple identities as eaten child, priestess, ring-bearer,

mage's apprentice, wife, mother and widow, the monolithic myth governing magic and its uses on Earthsea begins to splinter into new patterns of complexity and interdependence.

In escaping the social conventions of gender binding the men and women of Earthsea, both Tenar and Tehanu gain access to a different and more formidable power. At the end of the series, Tehanu takes on dragon form and flies out of the narrative on wings of flame but in *Tehanu*, Tenar, rooted as she is by love for Ged and her children, even more impressively resists binary thinking and refuses to limit herself by becoming either dragon or woman. Instead, by an act of will, she succeeds in absorbing the dragon's spirit in her woman's body. Thus when Tehanu is threatened by the return of one of her rapists, her foster mother laughs in the way of Kalessin or Medusa and her body burns like 'a rod of fire' but she constrains the power, saying, "it was not so simple for a human and a woman. The fire must be contained. And the child must be comforted" (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:581).

Once Tenar begins to live as her complete self, a witch in touch with both the marginalized powers of the earth and the ferocious energy of wind and fire, her wholeness opens the way for the events of *The Other Wind* (2003) in which Le Guin reveals that the land of the dead to which Cob opened a door in *The Furthest Shore*, a door which Ged spent his power to close, is itself the maimed creation of the human fear of mortality. Azver, the Patterner of Roke, explains to Arren, now crowned and known as Lebannen, that the ancients of Earthsea envied the dragons their ability to fly outside time where the self might be forever and that they used their arts of naming to lay "a great net of spells upon all the western lands, so that when the people of the islands die, they... come to the west beyond the west and live there in the spirit forever" (Le Guin, 2003:27-8). The consequences of this fearful negation are disastrous:

“But as the wall was built and the spell laid, the wind ceased to blow, within the wall. The sea withdrew. The springs ceased to run. The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night. Those that died came to a dark land, a dry land.”

“I have walked in that land,” Lebannen said, low and unwillingly. “I do not fear death, but I fear it.” (Le Guin, 2003:228)

Lebannen’s words echo the earlier observation by Seppel, the Pelnish wizard, that Alder, the mender who dreams nightly of the imprisoned dead and comes to Ged and Tenar for help, is simply responding to the ‘the desire of the dead to die’ (Le Guin, 2003:167). Yet it is only when Tenar, like the white spider for which her first husband named her, deftly weaves connections between the wizards of Roke, the King of Havnor, a Kargish princess and her dragon daughter that sufficient power is generated to breach the wall separating the living and the dead. When this happens the grey hosts of the dead crowd forward and are gone: ‘a wisp of dust, a breath that shone an instant in the ever-brightening light’ (Le Guin, 2003:239). In the Patterner’s words, “‘What was built is broken. What was broken is made whole’” (Le Guin, 2003:240).

Once the great task is completed Tehanu takes to the air as a golden dragon. The highest rays of the rising sun strike her there and she burns like her name, ‘a great bright star’ (Le Guin, 2003:240). The maimed child who evoked shudders of horror becomes finally an emblem of joyous transcendence. When she fades from view, Seppel has to call away the transfixed watchers, saying softly, “‘Come friends, ... [i]t’s not yet our time to go free’” (Le Guin, 2003:241).

Like Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan*, Tehanu moves out of darkness and obscurity into light and recognition but this time the novel does not end there. Instead Le Guin

persistently affirms the value of more mundane heroism rooted in love and the thousand small choices and sacrifices which make a human life well lived. Thus Tenar weeps for the loss of her child but then picks herself up and returns to Gont where Ged is waiting for her. When she sees him, she does not elevate her experiences above his, but eagerly says, “[T]ell me what you did while I was gone” and he replies simply, “Kept the house” (Le Guin, 2003:346). The extraordinary reversal of roles evident in this brief exchange re-visions traditional heroic memes by recognising that heroism may be found in both masculine and feminine roles and that these may, in turn, be occupied by both men and women. Tenar, who has moved from darkness into light, and Ged, who has moved in the other direction, finally come together in a twilight homecoming which renders all magic irrelevant.

Earthsea is set in a fully-realised and sealed magical world and may thus be categorized, using Farah Mendlesohn’s (2008:59) taxonomy, as an immersive fantasy in which the reader is positioned between ‘the shell [layer of fictional reality] that surrounds the narrative and the shell that protects the world as it is built from any suggestion that it is not real’. Margaret Mahy’s *The Changeover* (1985), on the other hand, is set largely in a familiar world of shopping malls, secondary schools and complex contemporary family structures. The witches of the novel might thus be expected to evoke horror or fear, hallmarks of what Mendlesohn (2008:115) defines as intrusion fantasies in which the fantastic erupts into the primary world and must be confronted and ‘negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came or controlled’. Yet *The Changeover*’s teenage protagonists never seem to question either their own powers or those of the magical adults they encounter so that the novel is perhaps best seen rather as what Mendlesohn (2008:182) describes as a liminal fantasy, a work ‘which estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist’. This estrangement between narrative voice and at least initially resistant reader helps to free the liminal fantasy from the generic predictability with which Le

Guin struggles. Instead, as Mendlesohn (2008: 244) also notes, the reader's response to such works rests ultimately on 'a moment of recognition for the reader that some event or person is to be interpreted within the lines of the unwritten', an observation that echoes Attridge's (2004:136) observation that '[t]he *singularity* of the artwork is not simply a matter of difference from other works ... but a transformative difference, a difference, that is to say, that involves the irruption of *otherness* or *alterity* into the cultural field'. Certainly, this playful confounding of narrative expectations allows Mahy to re-view and re-present conventional portrayals of the witch while also demonstrating that, as Francis Spufford (2002:171) observes, she understands 'how inchoately sexy magic is, at a point in your life when real sex is still three wishes away, and gleams with as much mixed fascination and alarm as if it were truly a spell'.

In *The Changeover*, which was awarded the Carnegie medal, the narrative point of view is that of fifteen-year-old Laura Chant, who lives in Gardendale, an economically-deprived suburb of an unnamed New Zealand city, with her divorced mother, Kate, and three-year-old brother, Jacko. In the opening chapter, Laura has a premonition of danger that anticipates the destabilizing experience of reading the novel itself. Laura describes her 'Warning' as a moment in which the foundations of the world she, like all children, takes for granted unexpectedly tremble:

“...when the look of everything changes ... things stop flowing into each other and stand separate, a bit silly-looking but scary. The world gets all accidental. It's as if you had a house which seemed to stand up by being propped against itself and suddenly you realized nothing was really touching after all.” (Mahy, 1985:8)

Laura claims to have had similar experiences in the past: once shortly before her father left home and then again when the improbably named Sorensen Carlisle,

whom Laura claims is a witch, enrolled at her school. Kate dismisses Laura's fears thus encouraging readers to view them equally sceptically, but later in the day, Laura and Jacko find a new shop in the centre where their mother runs a bookstore and while they are there, the owner, a decrepit man named Carmody Braque, puts a stamp representing his own face on Jacko's hand. Jacko screams and shortly afterwards becomes gravely ill. Laura, convinced that he has been bewitched, turns to Sorensen for help.

Sorensen lives with his mother and grandmother in an old farmhouse suggestively named *Janua Caeli* or the gate of heaven. The Carlises, who are all witches, accept Laura's assessment of her brother's situation and tell her that her only hope is to become a witch herself and put a stamp of her own on Braque, a lemure or spirit of the hungry dead, who has taken human form and unnaturally prolongs his pseudo-life by feeding off the psychic energies of others. After some initial hesitation, Laura agrees to undergo a transformation rite. She emerges from this knowing that she is now a witch but also that, like all young adults, she is no longer simply an amalgam of her parents' genes and her community's memes, but 'through the power of charged imagination, her own and other people's, ha[s] made herself into a new kind of creature' (Mahy, 1985:152). Empowered by the transformation and aided by Sorensen with whom she has begun to forge a romantic bond, she confronts and vanquishes Braque, thus saving her brother.

Mahy's witches, like those in the novels in the *Earthsea* cycle, are marginalized figures; however, instead of having been displaced by male mages, they have been sidelined by the forces of rampant capitalism. Sorensen's great-uncles, who are all businessmen and 'big in the city' (Mahy, 1985:90), have forced the Carlisle women to sell their farm though they have kept the house and its gardens. Tellingly, Miryam, Sorensen's mother, presents the advance of the city as having been like the advance

of an army (Mahy, 1985:89-90), a traditional symbol of masculine aggression. She also describes it in terms of advancing artificial light when she tells Laura that “on rainy nights the city’s lights began to take over the whole sky” (Mahy, 1985:90). As in *Earthsea*, therefore, witchcraft in *The Changeover* is associated with powers inherent in nature, darkness and the moon; as Sorensen’s grandmother, Winter, remarks, “We are not without our powers, you know ... We are the daughters of the moon” (Mahy, 1985:88).

Even more threatening to these witches than electric light and urban sprawl, however, is the unquestioning complacency of a rational society that resists their very being. Kate’s mother initially surprises the reader by acknowledging that the Carlisle women are witches, but then shows that she is speaking from a perspective so distanced from the possibility of the supernatural that even the term ‘witch’ has lost its true significance:

“Lolly, if you had thought all day I don’t know if you could have come up with an unlikelier witch than poor Sorry Carlisle,” she said at last. “He’s the wrong sex for one thing, which in these non-sexist days shouldn’t matter much, but from what I can make out he’s about the best-behaved boy in the school....Now,” said Kate starting to sound really enthusiastic, “if you’d mentioned his grandmother, Winter, or even his mother. Quite a different story – witches to a man – a woman that is ... They’ve got the sort of craziness that gives them class!” (Mahy, 1985:11)

The gender assumptions that muddle Kate’s syntax and inform her laughing dismissal of any possibility that Sorensen may be a witch are also central to the novel’s engagement with the relationship between women and witchcraft. Winter explains to Laura that when she and Miryam realised that the city’s advance could not be stopped, they decided to raise a cone of power over the farm so that they

would still be “visible, but somehow not observable” (Mahy, 1985:90). To achieve such a thing, they needed the power of a third witch. Accordingly Miryam decided to have a baby so that the three generations of the Carlisle family could gain access to the archetypal energies of the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone. But, just as the wizards of Earthsea refuse to recognize or admit the possibility of female power, the Carlisle women dismiss the possibility of male witchcraft. So shocked are they by Sorensen’s sex that they reject him utterly. Miryam explains this by saying,

“... when I thought of my son I felt quite trapped. The thought of watching him grow up, so close and yet so much a necessary stranger ... unable to help me protect my home from the army – from the city that is – marching towards us, swallowing market gardens as it came ... well I could not bear it. I decided to have Sorensen adopted.” (Mahy, 1985:91-92)

Like Tehanu then, Sorensen is rejected and abused but, unlike her, he is unlucky in his foster family. When he tells Laura about them and she asks him what went wrong, he replies bitterly,

“I went wrong ... I could go through the looking-glass and the others couldn’t. It was as if everything around me had an extra piece tacked onto it that I could see and work with, and nobody else knew about. I could make trees blossom, cabbages grow ... I could find anything lost and I could read any book. Actually, that wasn’t witchcraft but it might just as well have been” (Mahy, 1985:113)

The image of the looking glass is one of the novel’s central motifs as Mahy skilfully manipulates witchcraft to allow it to function almost metaphorically as a frame and reflection of developmental processes of growth and change. Sorensen’s gifts are also clearly linked with the natural powers of growth and fertility traditionally seen as feminine; however, by adding reading to the list of things that make his foster family

uncomfortable with him, Mahy broadens the scope of her novel to consider other forms of discrimination, such as the bullying of bookish children, which her young readers are likely to have experienced for themselves. The effect of this and the novelty value of making a boy rather than a girl the victim of sexist assumptions is to short-circuit conventional assumptions and successfully counter any tendency to see Sorensen as Other. Instead the reader is encouraged into a moment of creative hesitation leading to a questioning of both the gendering of witchcraft and his or her own culturally-derived suspicions of anything that cannot be rationally explained.

We also learn that when Sorensen reached adolescence his foster father began to lash out at him physically and, on one occasion, following a terrible beating locked him into a small cupboard. Desperate to escape, the boy accessed his powers and escaped to *Janua Caeli* as, in Miryam's terms, "a spider might retreat along an invisible strand of its web" (Mahy, 1985:93). Like Tenar/Goha then, Sorensen is seen in terms of a spider, an image which reinforces his paradoxical identity as a male witch since spiders are traditional emblems of feminine magic. In Greek mythology, for instance, the spider is associated with the weaver and therefore also with the *moerae* or Fates, Clotho, Atropos and Lachesis, who endlessly weave, measure and cut the threads of our human lives, while Paula Gunn-Allen (1986:11) notes that Native American folklore presents the Crone as 'the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection'.

Like Tehanu, Sorensen has been damaged by those whose duty it was to nurture him. His nickname, Sorry, is thus an ironic comment on both his neglected state and the guilt and regret he evokes in his mother and grandmother. While his external wounds heal, his maimed psyche does not; Winter says: "We struggled to save him ... he was in no danger of dying – but ... his humanity I suppose You see Laura –

you can probably imagine – a witch without humanity is a black witch nine times out of ten” (Mahy, 1985:93).

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that what Winter means by humanity is something like empathy or what Elizabeth Cummins (1993:39) celebrates as Tenar’s ‘journey outward to knowledge of the relationship between self and human community’. Interestingly, Sorensen seems aware of his own emotional stuntedness since he compulsively reads romantic novels in an attempt to maintain a fragile link to his foster mother whom he once loved but who is now forever out of his reach (Mahy, 1985:206). Like witchcraft, romantic novels are seen in terms of current social norms as a purely feminine domain and so references to them force readers to realise that Miryam and Winter are not alone in assuming that there are still areas of contemporary life from which men are almost automatically excluded.

To lack humanity in both *Earthsea* and *The Changeover* is to be imprisoned within one’s own ego, unable to reach out to others or recognise them as equals. In *Earthsea*, this is the condition of Tehanu’s abusers and also of the mage, Alder, who is rumoured to be keeping the lord of Re Albi alive by feeding him on the life force of his own grandson (Le Guin, [1990] 1993b:590). In *The Changeover*, this psychic cannibalism is even more powerfully exemplified in the behaviour of Carmody Braque, who chillingly refers to Jacko as ‘scrumptious’ (Mahy, 1985:21). Sorensen, locked in an extreme version of what Claudia Marquis (1987:196) calls ‘the terrible concentration of the adolescent upon the self’, shows that he too has the potential for achieving such monstrous detachment when Laura asks him if he thinks Jacko is going to die and he replies flippantly: “‘You’re a big, brave girl, Chant, aren’t you ... the fact is I think your little brother has had it” (Mahy, 1985:82).

Laura, on the other hand, determinedly resists such solipsism. Early in the novel we are told that '[s]ometimes it seemed to her that Jacko was not her brother but in some way her own baby, a baby she would have one day, both born and unborn at the same time' (Mahy, 1985:16). Motivated by the strength of her almost maternal love for the child, Laura draws on her potential as a mother to give her the strength to risk her life in an attempt to realise her potential as a witch. As Lissa Paul (1987:198) observes, 'Laura's quest is personal and domestic, she fights for someone she loves'. Significantly, after Sorensen has failed to persuade her to forget her brother and "cut and run" (Mahy, 1985:134), he surprises both Laura and his mother by agreeing to act as Laura's Gatekeeper, a role which requires him to enter Laura's mind and share the risks she is about to take. Thus, as Laura struggles to find the witch sleeping within her, so, in a beautiful double movement, Sorensen opens himself to another's pain and the possibility of reaching out to another human being.

The rite begins pleasantly as Miryam, in her role as Mother, bathes and dresses Laura while stressing the importance of imagination by warning her that a "changeover is never the same twice over. Each person pictures their own" (Mahy, 1985:140). This links with Miryam's earlier statement that women and therefore also witches are imaginary creatures in that their power "flows out of the imagination and that's the faculty that makes magicians out of all of us" (Mahy, 1985:134).

Interestingly, Laura's ritual also echoes both Bruce Lincoln's (1981:101) three-step progression of female initiation and Annis Pratt's (1981:139-143) five-step one in that she initially withdraws from the world in the company of nurturing older women thus separating from family after acquiring green-world tokens and guides, then undergoes metamorphosis (or magnification) while finding a green-world lover and descending into the subconscious before finally emerging empowered to act as a force of strength and healing within the greater community. Her experience should

not therefore be seen primarily as an evocation of supernatural forces but rather as a metaphor for coming of age.

When Miryam leaves her alone in the darkness, Laura begins to dream. In the dream, Sorensen kisses her, gives her a sword and then shows her a little gate opening onto a path of yellow paving stones, presumably suggested by memories of *The Wizard of Oz*. Laura follows the path through a primeval forest. The symbolism of this cannot be ignored since, in Bruno Bettelheim's ([1976] 1991:94) words,

[s]ince ancient times, the near-impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, near impenetrable world of our unconscious. If we have lost the framework which gave structure to our past life and must now find our way to become ourselves, and have entered this wilderness with an as yet undeveloped personality, when we succeed in finding our way out we shall emerge with a much more highly developed humanity.

The link between Laura and the forest is made quite explicit when she has to hack at the branches obstructing her path and the briars thrash about 'in anguish, screaming with a voice Laura dimly recognize[s] as her own' (Mahy, 1985:146). Having succeeded in breaching the self-made barriers repressing her own awareness of power, Laura is greeted by Winter, Miryam and Sorensen, who take her sword away and replace it with a wand, but the ordeal is not yet over as Laura has to crawl back into the world while squeezing through rocky crevices in a symbolic re-enactment of birth:

At one moment she seemed to be climbing a wet, helical path leading upwards, but a sudden switch of perspective made her see she was, in fact, climbing down. It grew so tight she began to despair, for though the wand like a rod divining spaces in solid rock, showed her a path, she was not sure she could follow it It suddenly occurred to her she was being born again and, as this thought formed, the helix took her as if it had come alive. She was held and expelled, moved in a great vice,

believing her intransigent head with its burdens of thoughts, dreams and memory must split open, and she came out somewhere into darkness. (Mahy, 1985:150-151)

When she recovers, she finds herself in Sorensen's arms and hears him telling her that he felt the bones in her head move, so violent and complete was her experience of both bearing and being reborn. Mahy also emphasises Laura's active role in this process of becoming by having her resist the traditional fairy tale memes shaping Sorensen's joking assertion that, like Prince Charming, he has woken her with a kiss. "I woke myself," Laura says (Mahy, 1985:151).

Alison Waller (2004:84) has suggested that Laura's transformation is 'clearly linked to physical and libidinous changes' and that the fact that she wakes with her white dress 'splashed with bright clear crimson' (Mahy, 1985:151) is evocative of the menarche and the beginnings of sexual maturity, but it is important to note that Sorensen stresses that the blood came from her nose and was brought on by psychic pressure. By saying this he links Mahy's witches to ancient shamanic rituals in which, as David Lewis-Williams (1989:40, 2011:52) emphasises, nose bleeds are common indications that the shaman has entered a trance state from which he or she has access to the spirit world and in many cultures, the blood produced in this way is believed to have magical properties. Sorensen seems to recognize this too as he wraps Laura's stamp in a silk handkerchief spotted with her blood to increase its potency (Mahy, 1985:154).

Interestingly, Mircea Eliade ([1964] 1989:107) suggests that shamans can be distinguished from other people not by their 'quest for the sacred – which is normal and universal human behaviour – but by their capacity for ecstatic experience'. Mahy certainly emphasises this in Laura's changeover and consciously chooses to locate

Laura in a space that is not defined only by European conventions of witchcraft. It is significant that Laura's woolly hair, dark eyes and olive skin mark her off from her blonde mother and brother and pay tribute to 'the Polynesian warrior among her eight great-great-grandfathers' (Mahy, 1985:4). In a similar vein, when Winter discusses Braque's attack on Jacko, she compares it to cross-cultural traditions of witchcraft, saying, "In the past, many magicians cast the runes. In Australia, the tribal magician points the bone and his victim withers and dies" (Mahy, 1985:101).

By contrast to Jacko's experience of being drained, Laura's experience of witchcraft is one of being revitalised. Her changeover leaves her feeling as 'if a new sense ha[s] opened up in her overnight' so that when she passes trees, she can 'actually feel the life in them like a green pulse against her skin, a constant natural caress like wind or sunlight, but apart from either' (Mahy, 1985:157). Mahy thus also incorporates in this novel elements of Wicca, a modern incarnation of witchcraft centred on the awareness that the practitioner is one with the natural world and the greater cosmic forces that contain it (Helen Berger, 2009; Lynne Hume, 1997; Ronald Hutton, 1999). Seen in this context, it seems entirely appropriate that Sorensen should be hoping to work for conservation once he finishes his schooling. Waller (2004:82) argues that 'witchcraft is not a unified concept, and Mahy's ordinary witches encounter and embrace a bricolage of mythical and modern versions' all of which lead the reader to see that in 'Mahy's texts, the primary knowledge of witchcraft is the recognition of the spiritual and magical elements in the world, but the deeper knowledge this brings is of identity, status and role, power and its responsibilities – all processes of awareness that signify the developmental stage of adolescence'.

Laura certainly experiences the sexual awakening that is normally linked with adolescence after entering Janua Caeli, but it is noteworthy that even though she indubitably becomes a witch, she becomes neither a hag nor a seductive

enchantress partly because her link to Sorensen restrains her. Thus when she is tempted to prolong Braque's suffering, it is Sorensen's regained humanity that curbs her vengefulness. After Braque has come to the school, Sorensen asks if she is enjoying playing with her mouse and then says:

"It's not him I'm thinking about. It's you. It's easy for me to recognize what you're up to because I've thought about it myself sometimes – being merciless, being cruel, really. But...[t]here are always two people involved in cruelty, aren't there? One to be vicious and someone to suffer! And what's the use of getting rid of – of wickedness, say – in the outside world if you let it creep back into things from inside you?" (Mahy, 1985:185)

Similarly, at an earlier stage, when Sorensen tells her to tempt Braque to hold out his hand by looking alluring, Laura asks anxiously, "Shall I try to look slinky?" and Sorensen replies firmly "No need to make a fool of yourself. You're too young for 'slinky'" (Mahy, 1985:158).

In *The Changeover* then Sorensen and Laura's moves from uncertainty to confidence seem to reflect the ways in which much young adult fiction questions and reshapes conventional expectations of both gender and genre. While re-visioning readers' attitudes to witches and witchcraft, Mahy's adept manipulation of magic also mirrors and illuminates the extraordinary process of growing into oneself that all adolescents undergo, finally leaving one marvelling not at supernatural powers but at the very human powers of love and imagination. In fact, by the end of the novel, magic has been so domesticated that Laura is able to observe that

...outside in the city, traffic lights changed colours, casting quick spells of prohibition and release. Cars hesitated then set off again, roaring with urgency through the maze of the Gardendale subdivision, a labyrinth in which one could, after all, find a firebird's feather, or a glass

slipper or the footprints of the minotaur quite as readily as in fairy tales, or the infinitely dividing paths of Looking-Glass land.’ (Mahy, 1985:214)

If *The Changeover* can be seen as a liminal fantasy, Diana Wynne Jones’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* (1988a) strenuously resists Mendlesohn’s taxonomy by forcing an almost continuous process of reassessment on lazy or complacent readers. It opens in the land of Ingary, a name which is itself an anagram of the last six letters of imaginary (cf. Rudd, 2010:258). For almost a hundred pages, the unwary reader assumes that he or she is reading an immersion fantasy, but then, at almost the mid-point of the novel, the characters move through a portal into what appears to be contemporary Wales. In a sense, the work is then transformed into an intrusion fantasy, in which supernatural elements seep or erupt into the primary world, except that, in this case, the point of view remains that of Ingary so that it is the reader’s world that is defamiliarized. This neatly reverses the polarities of the typical intrusion fantasy and thus supports Mendlesohn’s (2008:246) own assertion that genre, and therefore genre analysis, is sometimes necessarily a dialectic rather than a rubric.

Certainly, in *Howl’s Moving Castle*, Jones uses defamiliarizing techniques to enter into conversation not only with narrative memes but also with familiar objects such as electrical cords, which her narrator describes as ‘long, floppy, white stalks’ rooted in the wall (Jones, 1988a:102), as well as with habitually unquestioned assumptions about figures such as the witch and the wizard. As Charles Butler (2006:238) observes, ‘By seeing the world from an unfamiliar perspective, [Jones’s] characters are not just given a new epistemological tool with which to view themselves and those around them; they are provided with the means to question prescribed norms of knowledge and behavior and to resist those who would impose such norms for their own ends’.

Howl's Moving Castle begins by stating:

In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes.

Sophie Hatter was the eldest of three sisters. (Jones, 1988a:1)

Thus within three sentences Jones seems to endorse all the familiar narrative conventions of fairy tales while also cunningly subverting them by choosing to displace the narrative focus onto an entirely unpromising if not downright unsuitable character who, as she reflects herself, is 'not even the child of a poor woodcutter, which might have given her some chance of success' (Jones, 1988a:1). The resulting tension between the supposed mode of the plot and the complex satirical and even parodic quality of the narrative tone ensures that the naïve reader is unsettled from the start.

Given Jones's foregrounding of fairy tale narrative structures, the sudden death of the girls' father is entirely predictable. Slightly less expectedly in a fairy tale milieu, Sophie and her sisters then find that the cost of their excellent education has left the family hat business in dire straits. Accordingly, Sophie goes to work making hats while Lettie is apprenticed to a pastry cook and Martha, the youngest, to a witch. It soon becomes clear that, even in Ingary, Sophie's lack of agency is not as inevitable as she believes it to be since Lettie and Martha, neither being happy with their allotted trade, quickly find a way to change places. Sophie, who is equally miserable, simply withdraws into herself, becoming more and more nondescript until an apparently unfortunate encounter with the Witch of the Waste sees her turned into a very old woman.

Unexpectedly liberated by this transformation, Sophie leaves the shop and walks out onto the hills where, as night falls, she seeks shelter in the only available building, a moving castle belonging to the enchanter, Howl, who is reputed to feed on the hearts of young girls. Once in the castle, Sophie finds it unexpectedly small, quite filthy and inhabited not only by Howl but by his young apprentice, Michael, and Calcifer, who is supposedly a fire demon. In what seems to be a conscious parody of the domesticated fairy tale heroine, Sophie launches herself into an orgy of cleaning. Yet unlike Snow White's dwarfs, for instance, Howl neither thanks her for this nor accepts it as her pre-ordained function:

“You're a dreadfully nosy, horribly bossy, appallingly clean old woman. Control yourself. You're victimizing us all.”

“But it's a pigsty,” said Sophie. “I can't help what I am!”

“Yes you can,” said Howl. (Jones, 1988a:48)

Sophie soon discovers that Howl is inordinately vain and only feeds on young girls' hearts in the sense that he falls in love with astonishing regularity and then abandons the girl in question as soon as his feelings are reciprocated. She also finds that Howl too allows himself to be defined by others' expectations in that the castle door is topped by a dial with four settings: the green setting opens onto the hills above Sophie's home town of Market Chipping where Horrible Howl has his castle; the blue setting onto Porthaven, a harbour town where Howl is known as Sorcerer Jenkins and makes a living from selling simple healing and protection spells; the red setting onto Kingsbury where Howl is known as the Wizard Pendragon and provides the king with various spells and military contrivances; and the black setting onto a seemingly impenetrable mist. She then discovers that the reason for these multiple incarnations

and escape hatches is that Howl has seduced and abandoned the Witch of the Waste and is anxious to dodge a curse she has subsequently sent after him.

Unfortunately, Sophie's curiosity leads her to open the door on the black setting and, in this way, the Witch's curse enters the castle in the form of a school worksheet dealing with the analysis of the first stanza of a poem by John Donne.³⁸ When Howl sees this, he shows Sophie and Michael that behind the mist of the black portal is a Welsh town where he is known as Howell Jones and despised by his conventional sister and her family. As the various impossibilities listed by Donne including 'getting with child a mandrake root' and 'hearing the mermaids singing' take concrete form, Howl's doom begins to seem inevitable. However, when Sophie meets Mrs Pentstemmon, who once taught Howl magic, she is told that both Howl and the Witch of the Waste are enhancing their powers by using the energies of fallen stars (Jones, 1988a:116-118). Sophie then realises that Calcifer is Howl's star and that he has been kept alive artificially by the gift of Howl's heart.

When the final cataclysmic battle with the Witch occurs, Sophie helps Howl to survive by using her own magical gift to talk independent life into Calcifer and return Howl's heart to its proper place in his chest. By consciously accepting and using her magical abilities just as the Witch's power is extinguished, Sophie frees herself from the Witch's ageing spell and proves herself to be what the second stanza of Donne's

³⁸ The 'curse' is taken from John Donne's 'Song' and reads:

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the Devil's foot.
Teach me to hear the mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind. (ll. 1-9, in Ferguson *et al.*, 2005:294)

'Song' describes as the most impossible of all impossibilities, a woman who is 'both true and fair'. Soon after this, the novel almost reverts to traditional fairy tale norms when Sophie finds herself agreeing with Howl that they 'ought to live happily ever after' even while privately acknowledging 'that living happily ever after with Howl would be a good deal more eventful than any story made it sound' (Jones, 1988a:211).

Howl's use of 'ought to' combined with Sophie's resistance to the tranquil sense of closure implied by this most familiar of concluding phrases is indicative of the way Jones's narrative, like Howl himself, constantly refuses to be pinned down, managing instead to 'slither out' of any restrictions that narrative convention may attempt to impose on it. For instance, whereas one might expect a witch to be presented as a Maiden, a Mother or a Crone, albeit with the potential to move sequentially from one role to the next, Sophie manages to exemplify all three figures simultaneously. As a shy eighteen year old she undoubtedly qualifies as a Maiden and as such is suitably alarmed when she first meets Howl. Amused by her nervousness, he calls her a mouse and offers to buy her a drink, but she refuses him and runs away (Jones, 1988a:9-10). Yet she views her two strong-willed sisters with maternal concern and regularly and with some justification treats Howl as if he were simply a trying toddler. For instance, when Howl screams, rages and covers himself with slime after failing to dye his hair the precise colour he wanted, Sophie cleans him up and reassures Michael that it is just a tantrum, after which we are told:

Martha and Lettie were good at having tantrums too. She knew how to deal with those. On the other hand, it is quite a risk to spank a wizard for getting hysterical about his hair. Anyway, Sophie's experience told her tantrums are seldom about the thing they appear to be about. She made Calcifer move over so that she could balance a pan of milk on the logs. When it was warm, she thrust a mugful into Howl's hands. "Drink it," she said "Now what was all this fuss about?" (Jones, 1988a:60)

Interestingly, Howl's vanity allows Jones to subvert fairy tale expectations yet again since, as Rudd (2010:265) notes, she reverses the conventional direction of 'the gaze...in that it is Howl who feels the need to be continually looked at and appreciated'.

Finally, in being forced to assume the outer guise of a Crone, Sophie also seems to gain access to the latter's strength and subversive wisdom. This is apparent as soon as she hobbles to the mirror to find herself confronted by the 'face of a gaunt old woman, withered and brownish, surrounded by wispy white hair' (Jones, 1988a:18). Instead of retreating from the image in horror, she simply comments reassuringly, "Don't worry, old thing This is much more like you really are" (Jones, 1988a:18). In some ways Sophie's sanguine acceptance of the change in her appearance is simply indicative of her awareness that life in the hat shop has restricted her choices and opportunities, thus forcing her to live the almost invisible life of the post-menopausal woman. Later, however, she also finds that taking on the appearance of the Crone actually empowers her in unexpected ways so that on the morning after arriving at Howl's castle, she confidently announces to a child from Porthaven that she is the "best and cleanest witch in Ingary". When Michael suggests that Howl will be annoyed by this, we are told:

Sophie cackled to herself a little, quite unrepentant It was odd. As a girl, [she] would have shrivelled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief. (Jones, 1988a:41)

By being able to cast aside conventional girlish self-consciousness along with the social expectations imposed on young women, Sophie gradually finds herself able to reject the damaging assumption that as the eldest of three daughters she is doomed

to failure. Thus, when Mrs Pentstemmon tells her that she herself is a witch, Sophie accepts the information without any trouble: 'It was as if Sophie had always known this. But she had thought it was not proper to have a magic gift because she was the eldest of three' (Jones, 1988a:118).

Sophie's acknowledgement of her real power marks her coming of age and it is worth noting that it follows a period of withdrawal from day-to-day life and that her passage to maturity is aided by two older witches: the plump and maternal Mrs Fairfax, who will tolerate no deception and says that it's clear that Lettie must have inherited her powers from Sophie (Jones, 1988a:82) and the terrifying Mrs Pentstemmon, whose hand feels like 'an old, cold claw' and who sees clearly that Sophie's gift is "to bring life to things" (Jones, 1988a:113-117). Although both of these women operate within a supposedly patriarchal society, they are by no means marginalized. In fact, Rudd (2010:259) points out that Mrs Fairfax, Mrs Pentstemmon, Sophie and even the Witch of the Waste are 'all powerful females, repeatedly outwitting the males of the story'.

By acknowledging her agency and learning to control her power in Crone form, Sophie achieves wholeness and then, in turn, helps Howl and Calcifer to end their mutually destructive bargain and similarly regain autonomy. Becoming complete is, in fact, one of the novel's leading concerns as characters are constantly shown as fragmented, self-deceptive or simply unaware of their own capacities. Sophie herself is, as has already been said, so focused on her role as the eldest of three sisters that she initially refuses to accept that she might be a witch; Lettie and Martha spend much of the book disguised to some degree as each other; Howl's multiple incarnations are designed to obscure his true identity; and the Witch of the Waste disguises her age behind a glamorous façade and quite literally deconstructs her male opponents in an attempt to build an acceptable man out of their better qualities

while allowing the discarded remnants of their being to possess dogs or animate scarecrows. Jones emphasises the importance of self-awareness and self-acceptance as indicators of maturity by showing that before Sophie and Howl can even begin to start bargaining about living happily ever after, they need to learn to see and accept fully both themselves and each other in a way that humorously emphasises the resilience and strength of spirit each has gained. Therefore, after Howl's somewhat unorthodox proposal, Sophie is able to state publicly that he will probably exploit her and Howl can respond cheerfully that she will then be able to cut up all his suits to teach him a lesson (Jones, 1988a:211). In this regard it is also worth noting that when Sophie regains her true form, Jones is careful to present her neither as an idealized heroine nor as a deceptively beautiful enchantress like the Witch of the Waste or her glamorous avatar, Miss Agorian. Instead Howl asks meditatively, "Would you call your hair ginger?" and it is Sophie, with all her newfound confidence in the power of her own words to shape her life, who replies, "Red gold" (Jones, 1988a:210).

In *Howl's Moving Castle*, as in *Earthsea* and *The Changeover*, the female protagonists' discoveries and acceptance of their own magical powers are paralleled by the male protagonists' discoveries and acknowledgements of emotional vulnerability and social inadequacy. Like Tenar and Laura, Sophie has to move out of a familiar routine in order to give birth to or bear her new self, but like them too, she learns that her powers are firmly rooted in the mundane details of domestic life. As Mendlesohn (2005:107) points out, 'In *Howl's Moving Castle*, Sophie walks through the portal into the castle, which is actually a small "two up, two down" house of a kind familiar to working-class British families into a much smaller land, where she becomes domestic'. Similarly David Rudd (2010:262) observes that, unlike Cinderella,

Sophie is subversive of fairy tale orthodoxy ... in that she moves *towards* the hearth rather than away from it. However, in doing so, she also moves into the driving-seat of the story That is, she becomes the archetypal Mother Goose, spinner of tales: old and opinionated, yet influential; and life-giving or “germinal” rather than “seminal” (to pick up on the biological inflection of these adjectives).

Howl’s power like Ged’s is vested in arcane knowledge and established practice.

When he tells Michael how to approach a difficult spell, one is irresistibly reminded of a mathematics teacher:

“I know I’m slapdash,” he was saying, “but there’s no need for you to copy me. Always read it right through, carefully, first. The shape of it should tell you a lot, whether it’s self-fulfilling, or self-discovering, or simple incantation, or mixed action and speech. When you’ve decided that, go through again and decide which bits mean what they say and which bits are put as a puzzle.” (Jones, 1988a:52)

In the same way, when Michael confuses the Witch of the Waste’s curse for the spell Howl has asked him to work on, he goes through a systematic process of trial and error in order to try and get it to work. When this fails, he is driven to ask Sophie for help. Her instinctive and correct response to the Donne lyric is that it looks like a list of impossible things to do, but when Michael, with masculine authority, resists this suggestion, she resorts to noting down a list of random queries and associations triggered by what she has read:

Does garlic keep off envy? I could cut a star out of paper and drop it.
Could we tell it to Howl? Howl would like mermaids better than Calcifer.
Do not think Howl’s mind honest. Is Calcifer’s? Where *are* past years
anyway? Does it mean one of those dry roots must bear fruit? Plant it?
Next to dock leaf? In seashell? Cloven hoof, most things but horses.
Shoe a horse with a clove of garlic? Wind? Smell? Wind of seven-
league boots? Is Howl devil? Cloven toes in seven-league boots?
Mermaids in boots? (Jones, 1988a:88)

The formless and chaotic qualities of this list would initially seem to confirm John Stephens's (1992:272) assertion that Sophie's language simply aggregates 'randomly-selected signifiers' that work comically to reverse the 'usual convention that a spell must be exact and precise in its wording'. Yet I would argue that such a reading merely reinforces the primacy of what Lacan terms the Symbolic while ignoring Julia Kristeva's (1980) idea that what may be seen from the perspective of the Symbolic as the problematic fluidity of women's language may actually be the manifestation of what she considers a more feminine and possibly even more powerful form of language which she goes on to define as the semiotic. Thus, in Kristeva's terms, it is also possible to see Sophie as using women's language to perform magic organically and instinctively. Put simply, Sophie talks life and power into everything she encounters. The difference between her witchcraft and Howl's wizardry is perhaps most clearly demonstrated when she whitewashes the interior of the castle and, in the process, overwrites all the carefully-drawn and precisely located symbols the enchanter needs to move his home from place to place.

Farah Mendlesohn (2005:177) suggests that Sophie's magic is neither exact nor precise because it is 'about enlarging and magnifying and generating reality from metaphor' and then goes on to argue that such power to some extent replicates the work of the writer. Certainly, as Deborah Kaplan (2002:55) observes, in Jones's works, '[a]ny character who tells stories has the potential to make that story come true, and any character who listens to stories has the potential to be shaped by the stories he or she hears'. Once the reader recognises that all words have power, there seems no reason why magic should be restricted to arcane formulae. However, like Sophie herself, most readers initially fail to grasp that a hat may be bewitched by the simple phrase, 'You are going to have to marry money' (Jones, 1988a:7) or a walking

stick be converted to a wand by chatter (Jones, 1988a:117). We too are trapped in a web of narrative expectations and so fail to notice Sophie's gift. Thus, when Sophie first encounters the scarecrow, she says: 'Now if I wasn't doomed to failure because of my position in the family, ... you could come to life and offer me help in making my fortune' (Jones, 1988a:20). But even when the scarecrow does precisely this, Sophie refuses to question her initial assumption about her place in the fairy tale world. Yet, so strong is Sophie's magic that it may even be possible to see her as imaginatively endowing Howl's fire with voice and presence, using words to conjure Calcifer into comprehensible and communicative form:

She settled herself more comfortably, putting her knobby feet on the fender and her head into the corner of the chair where she could stare into the coloured flames, and began dreamily considering what she ought to do in the morning. But she was sidetracked a little by imagining a face in the flames." It would be a thin, blue face," she murmured, "very long and thin, with a thin blue nose. But those curly green flames on top are most definitely your hair And those purple flames near the bottom make the mouth – you have savage teeth, my friend. You have two green tufts of flame for eyebrows...." Curiously enough, the only orange flames in the fire were under the green eyebrow flames, just like eyes, and they each had a little purple glint in the middle that Sophie could almost imagine was looking at her, like the pupil of an eye. (Jones, 1988a:28-29).

Sophie's colloquial magic thus regularly blurs the boundaries between poetic language and words of power as when she persuades Calcifer to bow his head simply by saying that if he does not, she will pour water over him (Jones, 1988a:35). Jones therefore constantly affirms that the words we use to shape our perceptions of the world and our own place within it are quite as dangerous as any spell. In these terms, as Mendlesohn (2005:105-106) states, Howl himself can be seen as both actor and actant:

In a land shaped by story, he and Sophie are on convergent trajectories: Sophie learns to reject the story line she has been handed but Howl learns instead to accept the storyability of his life, as expressed through the John Donne poem. This acceptance allows Howl to become more fully immersed in Ingary: once he has accepted that this is a world constructed through story, he can follow the plots to break the Witch of the Waste's curse and Sophie's enchantment and to assist Sophie to break the tie between him and Calcifer.

As Calcifer gives Sophie hints about the true nature of the contract binding him to Howl, so Jones too constantly reminds readers of the way in which forms of language fluidly resist human categorisation of them. The Donne lyric with its metaphysical images and splendidly archaic turns of phrase makes a very acceptable curse indeed while Howl turns his own life into a computer game for his teenage nephew, Neil. Interestingly, it turns out that the curse/poem began as Neil's homework assignment. Like a complex spell, it resists amateur interpretation although, with a sublime masculine confidence matched only by Michael's, one of Neil's friends declares, "It's about submarines" (Jones, 1988a:103). When Michael and Sophie blink at this revelation, Jones's readers are reminded yet again that as Hamlet says, "... there is/ nothing either good or bad but thinking makes/ it so" (II,ii, ll.259-261).

While *The Changeover* and *Howl's Moving Castle* are clearly informed by the ideas that shaped second-wave feminism, they also display an awareness of the phenomenon of third-wave feminism, which grew out of a resistance to the perceived essentialism, prescriptiveness and Western bias of the second wave. Importantly though, as Archer Mann and Huffman (2005:57) emphasise, 'This new discourse [third-wave feminism] did not seek to undermine the feminist movement, but rather to refigure and enhance it so as to make it more diverse and inclusive'. Common to the various strands of late twentieth-century feminism is what Archer Mann and Huffman (2005:57) identify as 'their foci on difference, deconstruction and decentering'. Thus it is significant that Laura has Polynesian ancestry, Sorensen is a male witch, Howl has

crossed into Ingary from the reader's own world and both Sophie and Howl learn to take charge of their own lives and stories rather than hiding behind identities constructed for them by the narrative paradigms shaping the narrative in which they appear.

The new millennium has seen further developments in feminist theory so that younger third-wave feminists often embrace what Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997:8) call a 'lived messiness' involving 'girls who want to be boys, boys who want to be girls, boys and girls who insist they are both, whites who want to be black, blacks who want to or refuse to be white, people who are white and black, gay and straight, masculine and feminine, or who are finding ways to be and name none of the above'. This emphasis on fluidity and individuality has even allowed some young women to see themselves as empowered to reclaim the traditional markers of hetero-normative femininity. Thus Elizabeth Wurtzel (cited by Baumgardner and Richards, 2000:103) proclaims: 'These days putting out one's pretty power, one's pussy power, one's sexual energy for popular consumption no longer makes you a bimbo. It makes you smart' while Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller (1999:7) urge women to view their bodies, 'tits and hips and lips' as 'power tools'. There are obvious dangers to such an approach, which, as Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003:17) suggest, has the potential to create 'a feminist free-for-all' empty of any shared values. Danzy Senna (cited by Walker, 1995:18) goes even further by dismissing this fourth-wave or Subaltern feminism as 'a cloak for conservatism, consumerism, and even sexism'.

All of this has had a disturbing impact on representations of witches and witchcraft to the extent that in her fascinating article, 'Glamorous Witchcraft, Gender and Magic in Teen Film and Television', Rachel Moseley (2002:403) is able to argue that 'the representation of the teen witch is a significant site through which the articulation in popular culture of the shifting relationship between 1970s second-wave feminism,

postfeminism in the 1990s and femininity can be traced' and posit a profound but contradictory link between 'femininity and magic in which femininity is produced as superficial and deceptive charm, mysterious and unknowable essence, *and* as power'. She then proceeds to demonstrate that in films and television shows such as *Charmed* (1998), *The Craft* (1996), *Practical Magic* (1998), *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (1996-) and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (1997), witchcraft features as a career in which 'glamour as the conjunction of ideal femininities and (sexual) power is made audible and visual' (Moseley, 2002:403). While most contemporary women would not wish to restrict girls' choices, the dominance of the visual in media such as film and television can make it extremely difficult for viewers to discern precisely when they are being presented with a powerful role model who elects to conform to traditional physical stereotypes of desirable femininity and when they are viewing a woman whose value is determined entirely by the extent to which she exemplifies culturally-imposed expressions of female attractiveness.

It is this positive equation of glamour and power, previously negatively linked to the figure of the deceptive enchantress, that more recent novels featuring teenage witches have been forced to accept, directly confront or uneasily compromise with, often at the expense of the development of female agency. In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*³⁹ series, for instance, the apparent gender parity between witches and wizards, both of whom come to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry when they turn eleven seems to be gradually undermined as the characters enter puberty. In *The Goblet of Fire*, Hermione Granger, who is initially undeniably plain with bushy hair and prominent front teeth, is made to undergo the 'glamour makeover' which Moseley (2002:406) suggests is 'key to teen witch texts':

³⁹ The series is made up of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007).

It was Hermione.

But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy, but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes of a floaty periwinkle-blue material and she was holding herself differently, somehow She was also smiling – rather nervously it was true – but the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever (Rowling, 2000:360).

Admittedly, while Hermione retains her new teeth, she allows her hair to revert to its natural state, telling Harry that “it’s way too much bother to do every day” (Rowling, 2000:377). However, there is no doubt that her make-over has a permanent influence on the way both Harry and his friend Ron Weasley view her.

It is also true that the apparent gender parity in Rowling's magical world is only made possible by the displacement of domestic duties onto house-elves who Kathryn McDaniel (2007:190-191) provocatively suggests may be read as unliberated housewives. Certainly, rather than affirming the traditional responsibilities of women, Rowling relegates these to a race of devalued and largely invisible beings and then turns Hermione's efforts to raise awareness of these creatures into something of a joke so that her Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare comes to be known by the acronym S.P.E.W. (Rowling, 2000:224). Significantly too, among the magical adults surrounding Harry, none is a working mother and, although Ginny Weasley, Harry's girlfriend, is undoubtedly a powerful witch, she is not allowed to follow Harry into hiding (Rowling, 2005:602-603). Hermione, who does accompany the two boys, partly because she is the only character fully prepared for Harry's enemy Voldemort's attack during a Weasley wedding, also seems to be expected to take full responsibility for feminine duties such as healing (Rowling, 2007:283), preparing food

(Rowling, 2007:240-241) and casting protective spells (Rowling, 2007:224) while the trio are on the run.

When Harry eventually decides to return to Hogwarts prior to the final battle of the series, Hermione protests that they can't go without a plan (Rowling, 2007:445), but her caution is simply dismissed by Harry and thereafter she plays an almost entirely secondary role to the two young men, leaving one unsurprised that her penultimate statement in Rowling's epilogue is to tell Ron that she has 'complete faith in him' (Rowling, 2007:604). In a sense, Hermione's experience seems to reverse that of Tenar, Laura and Sophie, all of whom gain rather than lose agency as they mature into womanhood.

Terry Pratchett's *Tiffany Aching*⁴⁰ series, on the other hand, engages with the relationship between glamour and power in far more complex and, ultimately, more satisfying ways. The series is an offshoot of Pratchett's *Discworld* series for adults in that, like these, it is set on a largely pre-technological flat world which sails through space balanced on the backs of four elephants who in turn are balanced on the shell of an enormous turtle. In this world magic is practised by often dangerously incompetent wizards, who are generally isolated within the confines of the Unseen University in the city of Ankh-Morpork, and powerful witches, each of whom controls a steading or district and who are most commonly found in the Kingdom of Lancre in the Ramtop mountains. While the *Discworld* series began with *The Colour of Magic* (1985), a fairly straightforward picaresque comic fantasy, it has steadily become more complex and now satirically addresses what Janet Brennan Croft (2008:151) refers to as 'deeper issues of justice and mercy, religious belief, personal

⁴⁰ This series is made up of *The Wee Free Men* (2003), *A Hat Full of Sky* (2004), *The Wintersmith* (2006) and *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010).

responsibility, racial tolerance, and response to technological and sociological change’.

The Wee Free Men is a novel dealing with the discovery of power and identity. In it, Pratchett introduces his readers to nine-year-old Tiffany Aching, the daughter of a tenant farmer on the Chalk, an area of rolling turf, innumerable sheep and the occasional stone circle. In the opening chapter of the book, Tiffany and her toddler brother, Wentworth, are threatened by Jenny Green-Teeth, a legendary water monster. They escape only because Tiffany is warned by a Nac Mac Feegle or pictsie, one of the wee free men to whom the title refers. After this fortuitous escape, Tiffany returns to the river, uses her brother as bait to lure the monster out and then dispatches it with a well-aimed blow from an iron frying pan. This activity attracts the attention of Miss Tick, an itinerant witch-finder, who realises that the wandering world of the Fairy Queen, which parasitically feeds off others, is close to the Chalk and that a major magical incursion is imminent. She explains this to Tiffany and leaves to summon help. The Fairy Queen then kidnaps Wentworth, but Tiffany, aided by the Feegles, enters fairy land to rescue him. Once there she is trapped in a series of disorienting dreams, but in what seems like yet another re-vision of the *Tam Lin* memes of feminine power discussed in the previous chapter, eventually escapes by using her power to access memories of her grandmother, a legendary shepherd known as the Hag of the Hills. When she returns to the Chalk, she brings with her not only Wentworth but Roland, the thirteen-year-old son of the local baron, who had disappeared while out riding some months before. Naturally, Roland, as the male nascent hero, is given most of the credit for this adventure, but Tiffany gains an understanding of her own strength and it is agreed by Miss Tick and two senior witches, Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg, that when the girl is older, she will leave home to serve a year’s apprenticeship with a Lancre witch since there are no appropriate role models for her on the Chalk.

The second novel in the series deals with issues of self control and resistance to outside pressures. In the opening chapter of *A Hat Full of Sky*, Tiffany is eleven and about to begin her apprenticeship. She leaves the Chalk to work for Miss Level, who has two bodies controlled by a single mind. As the novel progresses, Tiffany attracts the attention of a hiver, an ancient and immortal life form which moves parasitically from host to host. It is able to enter Tiffany's mind because of her vanity which causes her regularly to leave her body briefly to check on her appearance and also because she is frustrated by the mundane routines of life as a village witch and longs to be able to use her power to impress the other witch apprentices, particularly the condescending Annagramma, who exemplifies all the characteristics of Moseley's glamorous young witches. After having used the hiver's powers to do considerable harm, Tiffany, aided once more by the Feegles and Granny Weatherwax and also by the power of the Chalk itself, is finally able to confront the hiver and help it to die.

In *The Wintersmith*, Pratchett turns his attention to the issues of sexual awakening that are so much a part of adolescence. Tiffany, who is now thirteen and apprenticed to the ancient Miss Treason, goes with the older witch to witness a performance of the Winter Morris dance, a dark inversion of the traditional welcome to Summer. Because Tiffany's powers are so deeply rooted in the land and the cycles of the farming year, she cannot resist joining the dance, thereby attracting the attention of an elemental, the spirit of Winter itself. Drawn deeper into the ancient rhythms of the earth, Tiffany finds herself taking on some of the powers of traditional corn goddesses while the world around her continues to be held in the wintersmith's icy grasp. The novel thus shows the reader Tiffany's sexual awakening, but clearly indicates that she needs to learn to interrogate rather than simply succumb to her own sexual impulses. Thus, unlike the heroine in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, which was first published between 2005 and 2008, for instance, Tiffany resists giving

up her humanity to gain a supernatural and powerful lover. Instead, when the wintersmith kisses her, despite feeling the first stirrings of sexual desire, she asserts her power and draws heat from the sun to melt both him and the ice palace he has built for her, recognising that within its icy walls, she will be forever cut off from life, growth and her own true being.

In the final volume of the series, *I Shall Wear Midnight*, Tiffany learns self-reliance and how to withstand the pressures of narrative itself. Now sixteen and considered old enough for her own steading or district, she has returned to the Chalk as its first publicly-acknowledged witch. She finds the work of caring for those who need her quite exhausting and is also dispirited by Roland's engagement to a local noblewoman. In addition, she finds herself confronting anti-witch prejudices engendered by and embodied in the shape of a supernatural witch-hunter known as the Cunning Man. He too is finally defeated when Tiffany sets light to a field of stubble and then leaps over the approaching wall of flames that incinerates her adversary. By overcoming the Cunning Man, she demonstrates that she has attained full mastery of her craft and, in recognition of this, finally puts on a beautifully-tailored yet clearly practical black dress. The dress is thus not only the traditional emblem of her craft, but also obviously reconciles feminine appeal with feminine power. In this novel, Tiffany also finally relinquishes her childish attachment to Roland when she falls in love with Preston, one of the castle guards. Preston loves reading and has dreams of becoming a doctor and therefore has far more in common with Tiffany than Roland ever did. Yet his lowly status challenges narrative pressures within romantic fiction to locate sexual attractiveness in figures like Ged, Sorensen and Howl who, initially at least, are presented as considerably more powerful than the girls who love them.

Tiffany's experiences nevertheless echo those of Tenar, Laura and Sophie in a number of significant ways. Like them, but unlike Rowling's Hermione, she finds that the discovery and mastery of her powers parallel a process of self-discovery that culminates in her coming of age. Like them too, she is forced to leave the familiar yet stifling bonds of the familiar and undergo a process of rebirth and 'rebearing' in which she is guided by older women, in particular Nanny Ogg, plump, motherly and experienced, of whom the narrator remarks, 'as she says, she's had a lot of husbands, and three of them were her own' (Pratchett, 2000:163), and Granny Weatherwax, an archetypal crone of whom the narrator says she 'was cut out by nature to be a powerfully bad witch and is simply too proud to be one and generates from this internal conflict a sort of creative anger' (Pratchett, 2000:163). It is a similar pride that drives Tiffany and this is indicative of other fundamental differences between her and the other young witches discussed in this chapter.

Unlike Laura and Tenar though, Tiffany never seems to be motivated by a traditionally feminine, self-effacing and quasi-maternal love, but by what some would perceive as a very unfeminine strength of will. As she says when Wentworth is kidnapped:

I don't love him. I know I don't. He's just so ... stickyand he's always screaming for things. I can't talk to him. He just *wants* all the time.

But her Second Thinking said: He's *mine*. My place, my home, my brother! How dare anyone touch what's *mine*!

She'd been brought up not to be selfish. She knew she wasn't, not in the way people meant. She tried to think of other people. She never took the last slice of bread. This was a different feeling.

She wasn't being brave or noble or kind. She was doing this because it had to be done, because there was no way that she could not do it. (Pratchett, 2003:194).

Tiffany's conclusion points toward her second source of strength, her vivid awareness of her responsibility to and for the community within which she lives. Like her shepherding grandmother, she takes as her unwavering creed: '*Them as can do, has to do for them as can't. And someone has to speak up for them as has no voices*' (Pratchett, 2003:196, italics original). Tiffany's clear moral vision and determination initially seem at odds with her name which suggests decorative femininity and even at nine, she is uneasily aware of this disjunction:

There was a small part of Tiffany's brain that wasn't too certain about the name Tiffany. She was nine years old and felt that Tiffany was going to be a hard name to live up to. Besides she'd decided only last week that she wanted to be a witch when she grew up and she was certain Tiffany just wouldn't work. People would laugh. (Pratchett, 2003:11)

However, this apparent conflict is resolved when the Nac Mac Feegle kelda, who as the only female of the clan functions rather like the queen bee of a hive, tells Tiffany that her name is a good one because in Gaelic it sounds like 'Tir-far-thóinn, Land Under Wave" (Pratchett, 2003:138). Since the Chalk was geologically once under the sea, Tiffany's name is only apparently unsuitable as, on a deeper and less superficial level, it powerfully affirms her links to the land and its inhabitants.

Just as the reader must look beneath the obvious to appreciate the power of Tiffany's name, so Tiffany herself has to look beneath physical appearance and outward signs of power to appreciate true witchcraft. The fact that outward appearance may have little correlation with reality is repeatedly stressed in Tiffany's visit to the land of the Fairy Queen, not only by the dreams and deceptions which distract her from her purpose, but also in the figure of the Queen herself. When Tiffany first sees her she notices that the Queen is very beautiful and, rather like the air-brushed and emaciated models on the covers of contemporary fashion magazines, 'much taller

than Tiffany, but just as slim'. After a moment or two in which Tiffany's confidence wavers, she recovers herself by realising that this glamorous illusion is just that:

... it was all, very slightly wrong.

Tiffany's Second Thoughts said: It's because she's perfect. Completely perfect. Like a doll. No one real is as perfect as that. (Pratchett, 2003:234)

Tiffany's shrewd observation thus emphasises that unattainable ideals of feminine perfection can never be empowering since real girls will always fall short of them. The doll simile is particularly effective in that it does not deny the appeal of such beauty, but firmly equates it with the artificial and with powerlessness. The dangers of confusing outer appearance with inner worth are also highlighted in *A Hat Full of Sky*. When another young apprentice, Petulia, comes to invite Tiffany to what she self-consciously refers to as a 'sabbat', the reader is told:

Petulia had jewellery everywhere; later [Tiffany] found it was hard to be around Petulia for any length of time without having to unhook a bangle from a necklace or, once, an earring from an ankle bracelet (nobody ever found out how that one happened). Petulia couldn't resist occult jewellery. (Pratchett, 2004:127)

Far from enhancing Petulia's powers, the jewellery becomes an obstacle to freedom of movement and a symbol of the commodification of spiritual power. Significantly, while under the influence of the hiver, Tiffany reveals that she too is susceptible to clothes and accessories that mark her obviously as both a witch and a woman, but at the end of the book, she returns all her purchases except for the 'Zephyr Billow cloak' which fills 'the air like smoke' (Pratchett, 2004:342) and which Tiffany gives to

Granny Weatherwax, saying, “You need gravitas to carry off a cloak like that” (Pratchett, 2004:342).

By giving the cloak to Granny Weatherwax, Tiffany suggests that a concern with external signs of power is not in itself inappropriate but that such accoutrements cannot be a substitute for inner strength. In the same vein, once Tiffany has defeated the Cunning Man, she accepts the gift of a beautiful black dress from a tailor’s apprentice whom she has helped. However, while she relishes the quality of the fabric and the style of its cut, Pratchett is careful to remind us that beauty and usefulness are not irreconcilable; this is clearly shown when the young tailor proudly explains that a good dress for a true witch “...also has to be washable, for a start, with perhaps a split skirt for the broomstick and leg-of-mutton sleeves, which are all the go this season and with buttons tight at the wrists to keep them out of the way, and pockets on the inside and styled so as to be hardly noticeable” (Pratchett, 2010:338).

Interestingly, Granny Weatherwax associates obvious displays of power with male magic which she tends to despise. She dismisses Annagramma’s mentor, Mrs Earwig, for instance, by saying that what she does is ‘wizard magic with a dress on’ (Pratchett, 2006:122). Certainly, Annagramma locates power within what Kristeva characterises as linear, rigid and masculine approaches to thinking and, as a result, despises all aspects of the organic, circular and feminine thinking that Kristeva associates with the semiotic, saying:

“... if we are to make any progress at all we *must* distinguish the higher MagiK from the everyday sort None of that mumbling in hedgerows for *us*. Proper sacred circles. Spells written down. A proper hierarchy, not everyone running round doing whatever they feel like That’s the only way forward.” (Pratchett, 2004:142)

Fortunately, perhaps, the older witches are not swayed by these arguments and, when Annagramma makes three flying fireballs, which she claims can be used to destroy one's enemies, the narrator foregrounds the power and emotional logic of less linear approaches to enmity by commenting wryly:

They made the others uneasy. It was wizard magic, showy and dangerous. Witches would prefer to cut enemies dead with a look. There was no sense in killing your enemy. How would she know you'd won? (Pratchett, 2006:123)

In a very real sense, the *Tiffany Aching* series powerfully reflects the gains made by feminist writers of teenage fantasy simply because, even though it is written by a male author, it is able to minimise masculine presence: no real wizard ever appears, Roland only rarely takes part in the action and the wee free men are miniature parodies of restless male aggression and touchy pride. Female heroism in these novels, therefore, never measures itself against masculine norms but confidently exists as a formidable force in its own right.

In *Earthsea*, Le Guin can be seen to affirm the value of the domestic and ordinary. Great acts of magecraft are sometimes necessary, but only because they may be required to correct the balance of the everyday life to which Tenar so gratefully returns. Pratchett makes the primacy of apparently mundane acts of kindness even more explicit by allowing Miss Tick to tell Tiffany that the most important lesson about magic is 'not to use it' (Pratchett, 2003:35). Similarly, when Tiffany resentfully asks if they cannot help old Mr Weavall by magic rather than simply seeing to it that he gets a cooked dinner and cutting his toenails, Miss Level replies, "We do what can be done" (Pratchett, 2004:114-115). Even the most obviously powerful of the witches, Granny Weatherwax, says dismissively of magic, "It don't take much intelligence

otherwise wizards wouldn't be able to do it" (Pratchett, 2003:303) and, at the end of *A Hat Full of Sky*, she tells Tiffany that she was apprenticed to Miss Level largely because Miss Level cares for and about people:

Even the stupid, mean, dribbling ones, the mothers with the runny babies and no sense, the feckless and the silly and the fools who treat her as some kind of servant. Now *that's* what I call magic – seein' all that, dealin' with all that, and still goin' on We all do that, in our own way, and she does it better'n me, if I was to put my hand on my heart. That is the root and heart and soul and centre of witchcraft, that is. The soul and centre!" (Pratchett, 2004:250, italics original)

The power of empathy and the knowledge of the relationship between self and human community emphasised by Le Guin, Mahy and Jones are thus also central to Tiffany's experience of coming of age. Interestingly, though, in a discreet acknowledgement of the way in which the conventions of masculinity have succeeded in establishing themselves as overarching norms, Pratchett shows that it is Tiffany herself rather than a male counterpart who has to be taught to value such emotional intelligence.

In a sense then, all the authors discussed in this chapter join Granny Weatherwax in rewriting the story of witches and witchcraft though only Jones and Pratchett openly declare their intentions by making their central characters engage self-consciously with the narrative norms that shape both them and their readers. In the opening chapters of *The Wee Free Men*, for instance, Tiffany tells the story of the violent death of Mrs Snapperly, an old woman accused of witchcraft after the disappearance of the baron's son. Tiffany directly links Mrs Snapperly's death to story by reflecting:

And all the stories had somewhere, the witch. The *wicked old witch*.

And Tiffany had thought: Where's the *evidence*?

The stories never said *why* she was wicked. It was enough to be an old woman, enough to be all alone, enough to look strange because you had no teeth. It was enough to be *called* a witch. (Pratchett, 2003:37)

Similarly, after consulting her book of Faerie Tales about Jenny Green-Teeth, Tiffany rejects the fairy-tale memes it aims to inculcate, saying that she had

...never really liked the book. It seemed to her that it tried to tell her what to do and how to think. Don't stray from the path, don't open that door, but hate the wicked witch because she is *wicked*. Oh, and believe that shoe size is a good way of choosing a wife. (Pratchett, 2003:62-63)

Yet Pratchett is also careful to acknowledge that stories cannot be tossed aside too lightly. Tiffany defeats the Fairy Queen by consciously creating a dream derived from the Jolly Sailor tobacco closely associated with Granny Aching. By using story to evoke her grandmother's power, she finds a way to understand herself and her world and thus shore up reality against the Queen's deceptive illusions. Similarly, it is narrative conventions that show her how to defeat the hiver, which is able to grant its host's wishes. When Tiffany relates her experience of the hiver to stories of other wish-granting beings, she realises that the purpose of the third wish in most of these stories is to undo the damage caused by the first two wishes (Pratchett, 2004:294-303). Once she has grasped this, she comes to understand that the hiver longs for protection from its host, but that its host is always destroyed by the instant gratification of wishes that often spring from the darker reaches of its unconscious. As soon as she appreciates this, Tiffany is able to share responsibility with the hiver for what they have jointly done. In a sense, she recognises the hiver as a primitive part of herself, saying to it, "... when you take people over, you silence the human

part. You listen to the monkey. The monkey doesn't know what it needs, only what it wants" (Pratchett, 2004:305). She then gives the hiver a name, thus conferring self-awareness on it and nudging it towards the achievement of a more sophisticated consciousness which will allow both it and her to break out of the patterns of fear and need that have driven them for so much of the novel.

In *The Wintersmith* too, Tiffany learns to deal with elemental forces by reading books which both tell her more about the wintersmith and more about herself. It is Miss Treason's *Chaffinch's Ancient and Classical Mythology* which tells Tiffany about the relationship between the wintersmith and the summer woman (Pratchett, 2006:72), but it is *Passion's Plaything* by Marjorie J. Boddice which helps her recognise within herself the elemental spirit's yearning for love. When she first opens the romantic novel, she is simply baffled by it:

Meg, the heroine of the book, clearly didn't know a thing about farming. No young man would be interested in a woman who couldn't dose a cow or carry a piglet. What kind of help would she be around the place? Standing around with lips like cherries wouldn't get the cows milked or the sheep sheared! (Pratchett, 2006: 233)

However, the story gradually draws her in though she prudently refuses to succumb to it entirely. For instance, when she considers Meg's uncertainty about whether to accept the advances of a reliable young farmer or a more dashing rake, Tiffany wonders somewhat irritably why she should think she has to marry either of them and continues to consider that Meg spends too much time 'leaning meaningfully against things and pouting'. Yet, when she finally closes the novel, she shows that while as a farm-bred girl she has always understood the mechanics of reproduction, she has now also learned something about the emotional complexities of sexual attraction: 'It was amazing what those men put up with. But it made you think' (Pratchett,

2006:235). In a sense, the wintersmith's hopeless desire for Tiffany parallels her own hitherto unacknowledged and unsuitable attachment to Roland. When Tiffany melts the wintersmith's icy dream of a palace, she also begins to relinquish her own illusions and so is able to realise that she will 'cry, later, for the wintersmith who wanted to be human' (Pratchett, 2006:383).

Importantly then, Pratchett alerts his young readers to the fact that stories are repositories of wisdom but that their meaning should always be negotiated rather than simply endorsed. *I Shall Wear Midnight* makes this quite explicit when Miss Smith, the only female ever to have studied at the Unseen University, tells Tiffany about the history of the Cunning Man and the unfounded stories he uses to whip up anti-witch prejudices:

"I think my favourite one was that witches went to sea in eggshells in order to drown honest sailors." At this point Miss Smith held up a hand. "No, don't say that it would be impossible for even a small witch to get inside an eggshell without crushing it, because that is what we in the craft would call a logical argument and therefore no one who wanted to believe that witches sank ships would pay any attention to it.

It couldn't go on, of course. People can be very stupid and people can be easily frightened, but sometimes you find people who aren't that stupid and aren't that fearful, and so the Cunning Man is thrust out of the world. Thrown out like the rubbish he is." (Pratchett, 2010:162-163)

In the *Tiffany Aching* series, witchcraft is thus finally shown to be neither irrational nor occult but supremely rational and rooted in the power to change the master narratives that shape our lives. Tiffany insists that the stories she is told should face up to rigorous scrutiny. When told that Jenny Green-Teeth's eyes are as big as soup plates, Tiffany takes a tape measure to one of her mother's soup plates (Pratchett, 2003:20). When she is told that Mrs Snapperly must have lured Roland into her

cottage and cooked him in her oven, Tiffany measures the oven and finds that a teenage boy would never have fitted into it (Pratchett, 2003:47). As a result of her rational and clear-sighted evaluation of both stories and her own responses to them, Tiffany learns that “humans change the world by fooling themselves” and that “things have no power that humans don’t put there” (Pratchett, 2006:381). This discovery endorses Mendlesohn’s (2001:161) view that the ethical system of Discworld is based on valuing the individual and the right and responsibility to make independent choices.

Such power is within the reach of any reader sensitive to metanarrative and its value to all young women is made entertainingly apparent when Tiffany first sees the glittering tiara that Roland has bought for his bride. Looking at it, she initially reflects sadly that a woman’s destiny is built into her hair colouring, ‘...if all you had was a rather mousy shade of brown hair you were marked down to be a servant girl’ (Pratchett, 2010:136). However, she then makes a triumphant recovery by celebrating her own independence of destructive fairy tale gender norms and declaring:

Or you could be the witch. Yes! You didn’t have to be stuck in the story. You could change it, not just for yourself, but for other people.’
(Pratchett, 2010:136)

Through Tiffany, Pratchett reminds us that humans have always loved stories because once you turn things into stories you can change them (Pratchett, 2006:216), though he also warns, ‘Change the story, even if you don’t mean to, and the story changes you’ (Pratchett, 2006:217). The *Tiffany Aching* series thus suggests that when the adolescent girl experiences what Annis Pratt (1981:29) calls

the 'collision between the hero's evolving self and society's imposed identity', the way to resolve the dilemma is to find a way to change the story.

All the works discussed in this chapter attempt in various ways to change stories under the aegis of Le Guin's (1993a:12) 'angels of the feminist consciousness' and thus they all assert both the power of fantasy to reinvent the archetypes which have shaped it and the power of the individual reader to create new and liberating meme aggregates from the external representations that surround them. The complex presentations and re-presentations of witchcraft discussed in this chapter thus demonstrate that, as Brian Attebery (1992:87) indicates, when fantasy makes 'its conventional basis explicit, rather than submerging traditional tale types or character functions beneath a surface of apparent reported reality', it may be empowered to interrogate and remake the memes that define it and therefore also those its readers take away from it. To return to Wittgenstein's (1980:74) words previously quoted in the introduction to this thesis, 'Nothing is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than constructing fictitious ones'.

By presenting witches as powerful and autonomous agents of change, the novels discussed in this chapter may individually be seen to be imposing their own ideals of femininity on young readers or, as Rose ([1984] 1994:1) argues, building 'an image of the child inside the book ... in order to secure the child outside the book'.

However, when they are seen in relation to a whole complex of works ranging from traditional fairy tales to contemporary television shows, it becomes clear that each of them serves to complicate and make less distinct a crucial meme defining feminine identity within traditional fantasy. In this way they encourage young adults to consciously re-evaluate inherited or even newly-minted memes defining witches as either hags or glamorous but ultimately passive objects of the male gaze. In this way, far from imposing a monolithic 'truth', they may be seen as helping to bring about

what John Carey (2005:214) suggests is the 'imaginative accommodation' needed to take meaning from texts. By overtly engaging with conventional witch archetypes, each of the works discussed here expands the range of role models available to young women while also providing alternatives to the hero tales that often serve as literary analogues for traditional rites of passage designed specifically to ease male transitions into adulthood.

In addition, they also function as models of dialectic engagement because each conveys not only an alternative view of witchcraft but also a template for critical engagement with literary memes, since the tools they use to dissect the witch memes they reject may equally easily be used by the reader to deconstruct the alternatives they themselves present. To alter slightly Terry Pratchett's (2010:349) endnote to *I Shall Wear Midnight*, these works demonstrate to young readers that they need to know where both they and their memes come from 'because if you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong'.

Chapter 3

Unsettling Encounters:

Re-visioning Colonised Minds⁴¹

In 1974 Ursula K. Le Guin began an article entitled 'Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?' by recounting the experience of an unnamed friend who had visited the children's room of a large public library in search of *The Hobbit*. To her horror, a librarian, who was clearly of the Rosemary Jackson ([1981] 1988) school of fantasy criticism, told her firmly that the book could only be found in the adult section as the staff 'didn't feel that escapism was good for children' (Le Guin, [1974] 1976:31). Le Guin ([1974] 1976:31) then went on to suggest that this response was indicative of 'something that goes very deep in the American character: a moral disapproval of fantasy, a disapproval so intense, and often so aggressive, that I cannot help but see it as arising, fundamentally, from fear'.

Nearly forty years later, any curious reader visiting the metaphorical children's room of the library of South African literature⁴² and noting the conspicuous lack of fantasy novels on the shelves for older children and adolescents might be forgiven for

⁴¹ Material contained in this chapter has previously been published in the following journal articles: Molly Brown. 2008a. Towards Reclaiming the Colonised Mind: The Liberating Fantasies of Duiker and Ihimaera. *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 18(2):35-40; Molly Brown. 2008b. Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Hidden Stories and *The Hidden Star*. *Mousaion*, 26(2):162-173; and Molly Brown. 2008c. Why Are South Africans Afraid of Tokoloshes? *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 32(3):260-270.

⁴² South Africa is a country with many official languages and almost as many literatures. In this chapter, I discuss only selected fantasies for older readers written in English and therefore do not analyse works by Afrikaans writers such as Martie Preller, Leon de Villiers and De Waal Venter or, although they are written in English, the science fiction and almost uncategorisable liminal fantasies of Jenny Robson. However, since I believe many of my general points are equally applicable to South African children's literature as a whole, I often refer simply to South African literature. Nevertheless, this should not be taken to suggest that my chapter offers a comprehensive overview of young adult fantasy in all languages in this country.

wondering if moral disapproval of fantasy is not even more characteristic of the South African psyche today than it ever was of the American one. Dragons are available to older South African children in imported novels, but tokoloshes, small, hairy beings known in Zulu mythology for their insatiable sexual appetites and ability to abduct human children, are not.

This chapter will attempt to consider why so little fantasy for older children let alone young adults makes use of South Africa's rich mythological heritage and consider whether the situation may be about to change. Of course, when probing an absence, that lacuna itself may sometimes force one to speculate rather than analyze. The material that follows is therefore, at times, unashamedly personal and reflective rather than empirically verifiable, but I believe it raises questions that need to be asked if the underlying assumptions of the South African children's book world are ever to be examined properly.

Two factors make the current dearth of South African fantasy for young readers over the age of eight or nine perhaps more surprising than even the views expressed by Le Guin's librarian. The first is the explosion of international interest in fantasy literature since the fantasy renaissance of the nineties saw the enormous financial and popular success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series; more than sixty million copies of the first six books in the series had been sold even prior to the record-breaking release of the final volume, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in July 2007 (Rehana Rossouw, 2007:9). The second is the substantial number of collections of African and pseudo-African folktales available for children under the age of seven or eight in the average South African bookshop.

Of course, the publication of African folktales in translation has a long and, by local standards, profitable history in South Africa, dating back to W. H. I. Bleek's *Reynard*

the Fox in South Africa or, Hottentot Fables and Tales first published in 1864. Indeed, as Elwyn Jenkins (1993:9) points out, 'so intrinsic a part of South African children's literature have translated folktales become that writers are now producing new, original stories in the style of San and African models'. Traditional folktales and their derivatives are thus readily available and apparently eagerly purchased by both middle-class white parents anxious to expose their children, who are growing up in a post-apartheid context, to African culture or at least the sanitized versions of it presented by publications of this nature and by newly prosperous black parents wishing to find relatively undemanding ways to affirm traditional cultural values that are becoming increasingly alien to their children's predominately urban lifestyles. For these reasons too, works purporting to contain or be based on indigenous folklore are regularly prescribed for use in local schools and approved for purchase by both school and municipal libraries, all factors vitally important in a country where it is estimated that only some two to five per cent of the population is able or willing to buy books for the home (Jenkins, 1993:3).

Given the relative ease with which the Zulu trickster, Hlakanyana, is allowed to rub dust jackets with the big bad wolf and Matong and his wish-granting ox to compete in the open market with their European cousins, Cinderella and her fairy godmother, one might expect to find a significant number of novels for both children older than nine and South African teenagers revisiting and creatively renewing local cultural memes in the manner not only of J.K. Rowling but also of writers like Diana Wynne Jones, Carolyn Fisher, or Margaret Mahy. However, this is far from being the case. South Africans, it seems, are neither writing fantasy novels for their young nor expressing as much interest as might be expected in works of fantasy by international authors. On the weekend when *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was released, the editorial of *The Weekender* was firmly headed 'Harry Potter and the not that interested South Africans'. In it, the editor, Rehana Rossouw (2007:9),

stated that the estimated total South African sales for all the books in the series stood at only about 150 000. While this figure is high in South African terms, it is astonishingly low in comparison with other countries. As the same editorial indicated, in Australia, which has approximately half the population of South Africa, about 4.5 million copies of books in the series had already been sold. The writer of the editorial was at a loss to explain this disparity and at last resorted to suggesting that perhaps the extrapolated references that 'first-world kids would recognize instantly are outside of the average South African child's experience' (Rossouw, 2007:9).

There is obviously some truth in this assertion, but it is challenged by the startling local success of *Spud* (2001) by John van der Ruit. This realist novel tells of the adventures of thirteen-year-old Spud, whose nickname is an allusion to his as yet undescended testicles, in his first year at an elite private school in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. The work clearly has strong autobiographical elements, so much so that the headmaster of Michaelhouse is reported to have said that all new boys eagerly ask to see the dormitory where the eponymous hero slept. *Spud*, which is set in a privileged boarding school world surely no less alien to the lives of most South African children than the dormitories and owlery of Hogwarts, has nevertheless been prescribed for high schools in several provinces and had within less than two years of its first publication gone into its fourteenth imprint and sold more than 105 000 copies (Anonymous, <http://penguin.bookslive.co.za/blog/2007/10/30/newsflash-giant-spud-keeps-on-growing>: s.p.) Cultural unfamiliarity alone, it seems, cannot be used to explain why fantasy novels are not more widely read by South African schoolchildren nor promoted by those who supervise their reading development.⁴³

⁴³ In the expanded second edition of his classic work, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes ([2006] 2012:188) foregrounds the importance of new and liberating fairy tales and fantasies, but also warns that their potential benefits to the young are limited by adult resistance to them, saying, 'The major difficulty facing the emancipatory fairy tales, it seems to me, lies in the system of distribution and circulation The more regressive tales of Perrault, the Brothers Grimm,

In trying to account for what she sees as a deep-seated American mistrust of fantasy, Ursula le Guin identifies three possible explanatory factors: a capitalist economy, a Puritan ethos and a culture that has a clear bias in favour of the scientific and the rational ([1974] 1976:32-35). All of these features obviously also characterize South African society and may therefore be having a similar impact on South African writers, readers and reviewers.

Despite the fact that South Africa is governed by an alliance between the ANC, a historically left-leaning liberation party, and the South African Communist Party, its economy is being managed in accordance with IMF guidelines and the rapid development of a new black moneyed class, currently referred to by marketers as black diamonds, has helped to stimulate an overtly materialistic climate in which children are encouraged to dream of financial success rather than of imaginative growth. Perhaps even more troubling for those who believe in the uses of the imagination is the fact that contemporary South African society continues, despite the country's famously liberal constitution, to subscribe (at least publicly) to a deeply conservative and almost puritanical value system. Early settlers in South Africa were often, like their counterparts in America, religious refugees and the fundamentalism that is so deeply imbued in many of South Africa's Protestant churches is reinforced by traditional tribal structures that validate conformity and authoritarianism. The result is a culture deeply mistrustful of the free-ranging spirit. African folktales are acceptable in such a society because, as Bleek's equation of his Hottentot tales with Reynard the fox clearly shows, such stories can be presented as fostering traditional

Andersen, and other conservative writers are used in schools, libraries, and homes without a blink of an eye, but the unusual, forward-looking fantastic projections ... have not found general approval among the publishers and adults who circulate the tales. Instead many religious groups seek to ban fairy tales of all kinds from schools because of their putative pagan and blasphemous contents'.

moral values rather as Biblical parables or European animal fables do. In his dissertation on North Sotho folktales, for instance, P.M. Makgamatha (1987:17) states that these tales may be said to 'inculcate in the young people general attitudes and principles such as diligence and filial piety, as well as to ridicule laziness and rebelliousness'. He later takes this even further by arguing that folktales 'can also be used to exercise social control and apply social pressure on those individuals who do not conform to the accepted patterns of behaviour' (Makgamatha, 1987:19).

Unfortunately, my own experience with African teachers has shown that such views are still widely prevalent. Furthermore, a young child learning to read can clearly be seen to be engaged in profitable self-improvement. However, once the requisite levels of literacy are considered to have been achieved then reading fiction and especially fantasy is often perceived as an act of mere self-indulgence and, as Le Guin ([1974] 1976:32) reminds us, 'pleasure is not a value to the Puritan; on the contrary, it is a sin'.

Even more troubling to the Puritan conscience is the uneasy conviction that the creation of secondary worlds may, in itself, be an act of near-blasphemous arrogance and that what a young person's mind may encounter in such imagined domains will therefore be likely to challenge or undermine received opinions or, more pertinently, since religious belief itself requires an act of the imagination, the structures of faith itself. The strength of the fear that fantasy evokes among fundamentalists of all persuasions is difficult to underestimate as can clearly be seen in the near-hysteria Harry Potter has occasionally evoked in communities from Nebraska to Naboomspruit, resulting in papal pronouncements, condemnatory websites and even the occasional public book burning.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For a detailed analysis of negative responses to the *Harry Potter* series, see Amanda Cockrell's 2006 article, 'Harry Potter and the Witch Hunters', published in *The Journal of American Culture* 29(1), March:24-30.

Unfortunately for fantasy, it is not only viewed with suspicion by religious conservatives but also by those espousing the values of scientific rationality. In their eagerness to foster social development and encourage the growth of science and technology, those in charge of South African educational policy tend to believe that 'because science and technology are integral to modern developing economies, such economies will automatically develop if only sufficient emphasis is placed on mathematics and science in the education system' (Wright, 2007:106). Such a policy has profound repercussions for both the promotion of literacy in general and for the reading of fantasy in particular since the latter often seems peculiarly reactionary to the didactic eye eager to promote contemporary scientific and technological values. Yet, although fantasy undeniably privileges magic and intuition over empirical logic, good fantasy can never truly be in conflict with reason for as Tolkien ([1964] 1977:50), the great and, ironically, South-African-born fantasy writer, avers:

It [fantasy] certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary, the keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy it will make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured....For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it.

While contemporary South Africans thus probably share some of the attitudes that Le Guin ([1974] 1976) identifies as having driven American attitudes to fantasy in the sixties and seventies, they also confront issues unique to their own temporal and social milieu. In South Africa as a country with eleven national languages that proudly refers to itself as 'the rainbow nation', mythology, which forms the bedrock of so

much recent fantasy for younger readers, is often, at least in its particulars, a divisive rather than a unifying force.

Generations of educational inequity have ensured that most of those South Africans who write commission and publish works for younger readers are white, which means that their own childhood experiences of fantasy are generally deeply rooted in European rather than African folklore. This in turn increases the chances that they will use such imported memes rather than more local ones, within their own writing. Apart from the obvious ethical issues raised by works that seek to overlay the mythology of Europe on the African child and landscape, such practices often result in aesthetic problems too. For instance, the imposition of the European mythical tropes most familiar to many South African English speakers on South African characters and locales often results in curiously flat and unconvincing narratives or forces writers into unfortunate stylistic contortions as they attempt to overlay the cadences and rhythms of South African vernaculars with vocabulary derived from medieval romance. In *The Battle of the Mountain* (1984) by Judy Chalmers, for instance, the young heroine, Pippa, confronts the forces of evil in the form of a dragon-like monster, Igwain, whose name more readily evokes the Gawains and Igraynes of Arthurian romance than the heroes of Nguni legend.

Yet the heightened racial sensibilities characterizing South Africa also complicate any attempt by white writers to make creative use of indigenous folklore since, by so doing, they may become vulnerable to charges of literary colonialism, the forcible appropriation of tropes and figures belonging by right to others. In *Witch Woman on the Hogsback* (1987) by Carolyn Parker, for instance, the witch woman of the title tries to gain control of the People of the River and the People of the Sea, both of whom figure prominently in Xhosa folktales. In her greed for power, she enslaves humans, animals and a range of mythical creatures including tokoloshes. In this

context, the choice of Kate, a white thirteen-year-old girl, as the instrument of the witch woman's destruction and the saviour of the Hogsback ecosystem is, to say the least, unfortunate. The fact that Kate's Xhosa friend is afforded an entirely secondary role in the adventure or 'quest' as romance norms require Kate to call it (cf. Jenkins, 1993:74) may make the alert reader wonder uneasily if Parker herself is so very different from her dangerous witch woman, who so easily uses the local creatures, whether mythical or real, for her own purposes.

One solution to this cultural impasse is to write fantasy divorced from both European and indigenous tropes. In *The Slayer of Shadows* (1996), a novel usually shelved with young adult books in stores though some adults have found it too disturbing to be suitable for this age group, Elana Bregin tries to do just this. Her heroine, a young girl whose name 'means Sorrow' (Bregin, 1996:3), is saved from a wretched existence in an unidentified shanty town known only as the Jungle by Zach, a compassionate teacher and the slayer of shadows to whom the title refers. Zach stands in continual opposition to both the hopeless poverty and despair of the Jungle and the ruthless 'Jakkals', gangsters who prey relentlessly on its suffering inhabitants. In the course of the novel, Zach's wife and unborn baby are savagely slaughtered and 'Sorrow', whom he has renamed Marinda, is raped and impregnated by two unknown men whom she suspects of operating on orders from the 'Jakkals'. Marinda, who sees ghosts and can talk to cockroaches, uses her feminine powers to make an amulet for Zach and draw a circle of protection about his home. At first, she seems to do this successfully, but the menstrual blood with which she anoints Zach's door is soon overlaid by the blood of his slaughtered infant, metaphorically emphasizing that nurture and regeneration can never be possible in this imagined world. Torn apart by their separate and all-consuming experiences of trauma, Zach and Marinda withdraw into their own grief. Finally, however, Marinda goes in search of Zach and the pair are reunited on the clean shores where the river flows into the

sea. Here Marinda comes to believe that the child born of her rape is, in some spiritual sense, also Zach's child: "He has your spirit in him too," I continued softly. "Don't ask me to explain it. He is the child that should have been conceived between us that night at the school" (Bregin, 1996:149). The final paragraph of the novel presents this child as a possible vessel of salvation:

I look across the future sometimes. And I see my son there, striding tall and dark and invincible through the shadows of this world. I think – I know – that the Jungle has not seen the last of him. When he returns there it will be with the avenging might of angels on his side. And the Jakkals shall have cause to rue his sting. (Bregin, 1996:152)

But, of course, as the almost biblical language of this passage indicates, it is not easy to leave one's internalized memes behind. The secondary worlds of fantasy rarely offer the escapism of which Le Guin's librarian so bitterly disapproved. Instead, good fantasy employs distancing mechanisms to allow readers 'the exploration of enhanced imaginative experience of the primary world itself' (Swinfen, 1984:10). In this case, Bregin's *Slayer of Shadows* clearly reflects the white fears that swept her community in the immediate aftermath of the first South African democratic election in 1994. The Jungle may not be overtly identified with South Africa, but it is clear that the novel is set after a successful freedom struggle:

That war was the great Freedom Struggle, against our racist oppressors. It started as a just campaign. But soon the power-greedy hijacked the Cause for their own ends. Few in the Jungle feel any sense of liberation now. The Struggle has been over for a long time. Yet we are less free than we ever were. (Bregin, 1996:9)

Given this context, the bright fair hair which distinguishes Zach so oddly from the rest of the characters seems to express an unspoken belief in the merits of fair-haired

colonizers who, again like Zach, once brought brick schoolrooms to the jungles of darkest Africa. In this light Marinda too takes on aspects of Shakespeare's Miranda, who in *The Tempest* ([1623]1999) needs to be protected from the savage indigene, Caliban, by the wise and paternal exile, Prospero.

Peter Slingsby's *The Joining* ([1996] 2009) makes for equally unsettling reading. The novel was awarded the Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature in the year of its original publication and has been reissued by Biblionef South Africa, which has also had it translated into four local indigenous languages. The work initially seems to celebrate South Africa's newly-achieved racial harmony in that it deals with a multi-cultural group of young teenagers who are taken into the Cedarberg mountains on an educational camping excursion. The four central characters are quickly established as Jeremy, who has red hair and fair skin, Christina, who is a racial mixture and slightly older than the others, and Xhosa twins, Phumzile and his sister, Sitheli. None of the children is particularly happy: Jeremy's parents are divorced and he rarely sees his father, who has moved to Johannesburg; Phumzile and Sitheli live with their father, who is a taxi driver, and miss their mother, who has abandoned them to live overseas; and Christina, an orphan, seems to have been abused by an uncle as Sitheli lashes out at Jeremy when he criticizes the older girl, saying:

"You don't know anything about Christina, do you? You thought that she was just a silly girl, always being 'girlie-girlie', who was scared of everything, who didn't like to get dirty. You never knew *why* she was scared, did you?" She clenched her fists. "Christina used to live with an uncle who ... *hurt* her," she said. "You can work that out for yourself, Jeremy Paulson." (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:103)

Soon after their arrival at the remote campsite, Jeremy begins to experience odd sensations such as 'a cold tingle down his neck' and a 'white *slantiness*' to the light

(Slingsby, [1996] 2009:3). The sensations gradually intensify until he feels what he describes as ‘a strange twitch’ (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:8) that transports the group into the distant, pre-colonial past. The young people only gradually realize what has happened, first noticing that they are surrounded by game animals and then that there are no satellites in the night sky (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:27-28). Fortunately, they are soon taken in by a group of */Xam* Hunters, who slowly teach them the survival skills they need.

When a respected shaman, Gau, visits the group, he tells Jeremy that he does not know how many years separate their times, but thinks it must be ‘as many summers as there are stars to be seen between the horns of an eland’ or ‘as many winters as there are grains of sand on the wet foot of a child when it has crossed the stream to the sandy bank beyond’ (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:57). Gau’s prescience is then clearly shown by what he says to each child: Christina is told that ‘part of her has come from a far place, beyond the blue sea’ but another part of her ‘has come from the earth of the */Xam*’ (Slingsby, [1996] 2009::39); Phumzile and his sister are told they have come from a far place where their people ‘grow grains and herd the fat beasts’ and that a time will come when the */Xam* will regret their contact with these people (Slingsby, [1996] 2009::39); and Jeremy is told:

“It is a hard thing that I must say to you, for you are only a child. There are those that believe that a child may be held responsible for the actions of his forefathers. Such people would wish to kill you. Such people would be foolish. A man may step upon an ant, but after he has passed by another ant will come out of her hole. Should that man pass that place more times than there are stars in the sky, and each time step upon an ant, when he has passed by there will always be more ants to come out of that hole. These words,” he turned to Phumzile and Sitheli, “should also be heard by your friends.” (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:40)

Gau's speech seems to acknowledge the harm done to South Africa by European settlement, but the recognition of colonial culpability is carefully limited. The shaman clearly suggests that he does not share the views of those who think that children can be blamed for the sins of their ancestors and his final cryptic words to the Xhosa twins may be read either as a warning against trying to kill their historical oppressors or as a troubling endorsement of the conservative white belief that black South Africans are equally guilty of racial bias because, like whites, they also migrated to the country from elsewhere and were at least partially responsible for the destruction of the San or Bushmen, whom the book positions as the only true South African indigenes.

Significantly, too, Jeremy, the only white child in the novel, is clearly privileged by its narrator. His is the controlling consciousness through which the events of the novel are filtered and his special status is also reinforced by the slow realization that he, like Gau, is a shaman with access to numinous powers. As Wali, one of the /Xam, says, "You have the *n/um*. You are the son of Gau. Your name is Gau-aib. You are *shaman*" (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:101).

At various points, the novel also becomes quite narrowly and overtly didactic in that it explicitly compares a modern lifestyle unfavourably with the rhythms of a hunter-gatherer one. For example, when Jeremy first revisits the present in a dream vision, he says:

What had they done? They had wiped out the animals, made the quagga extinct. They had wiped out the /Xam too, and the way they lived. *Harmony*. He remembered the word again. Below him the starlight glinted on the wet roof of the bus. That's the worst thing we've wiped out, he thought. *Harmony*. We rush around the place in buses, polluting the air. We fight and murder each other, getting divorced,

arguing over this and that, and we destroy everything that gets in the way of our plans. (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:44).

Similarly, in the author's note at the end of the book, Slingsby explicitly reminds his readers that unless they can achieve harmony, their future will be blighted, saying, 'We are all people. We are all /Xam. We need to make a joining, if the next hundred thousand years are to be ours' (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:139).

Ironically, however, this direct endorsement of human brotherhood is subtly undermined, not just by the prominence given to Jeremy or the fact that Gau seems to see each of the children primarily as representatives of their particular races, but ultimately and more fundamentally, by the fact that when the adolescents are given the choice of returning to their own time or remaining in the past with the /Xam, they all choose to turn their back on contemporary South Africa.

The significance of this decision is highlighted by the fact that, as Maria Nikolajeva (1996:153) suggests, 'literature and art are created in a continuous conversation ... between creators, in which each new piece of art and literature is a new line in the conversation'. Certainly, it is clear that many of the generic tropes and conventions identifiable in children's literature have been shaped within the context of precisely such conversations. Thus when literary children travel in time, the reader is entitled to expect primary time to stand still and the travellers to be able to communicate relatively easily with those whom they meet. In addition, the travellers can never influence the events they witness, are often seen as ghostly by those they encounter and, at the end of the novel or story in question, must return, even if in some cases reluctantly, to their own time and place. Alison Waller (2009:39) endorses Nikolajeva's observations and explains why such restrictions are necessary:

Almost without exception it is the case that protagonists never remain in the past in time-slip novels. There is a clear analogy to be made with developmental theory, which demands normal progression and describes any backwards movement as regression Here, the importance lies in the way that the past functions to provide a base or a constructive educational tool to allow teenage characters to progress to the next developmental stage in their own era.

The fact that Jeremy and his fellows finally reject their own time and contemporaries is a sad indication that Slingsby feels little hope that harmony can be recreated in the present. Tellingly, in his author's note, he asks his readers: 'If you had been Jeremy or Sitheli or Christina or Phumzile, would you have gone home to your noisy, violent city on the bus? Or would you have crept quietly back through the starlit night to Gau?' (Slingsby, [1996] 2009:139). His emotive choice of adjectives clearly indicates not only his preferred answer but ultimately perhaps also his own inability to envisage a viable future for young adults within an embryonic democracy, struggling to emerge from centuries of colonial oppression.

Both Bregin's *Slayer of Shadows* (1996) and Slingsby's *The Joining* ([1996] 2009) were published during the uncertain years immediately following the end of apartheid. One might have hoped to find work of a different kind being published fifteen years later, but Sam Roth's *Time Twisters: Cape of Slaves* (2012) shows little evidence that white writing for teenagers has begun to be any less pessimistic about contemporary South Africa. In this novel, Sarah, a white twelve-year-old, Jake, a slightly older boy with tattoos on his 'caramel skin' (Roth, 2012:23), and Bonisile Tau or Bones, whom Sarah describes as the 'world's geekiest boy' (Roth, 2012:22), discover that contact with mysterious green dust has given them the ability to use pictures as portals into the past. The three youngsters travel back to early nineteenth-century Cape Town in an attempt to track down and rescue Miriam Scheepers, a mixed-race girl whom Jake knows and whom he suspects of having got

stranded in the past. Although the novel allows both Sarah and Jake to take turns at being the focus of the first person narrative structure and Bones's wealthy background allows him to be a more complex representation of black South Africans than Phumzile, for instance, the reader nevertheless feels that the young characters remain, in essence, racial stereotypes. More troublingly, the slave-owning port in which the youngsters find themselves is a far cry from the idealised pre-colonial world of the */Xam*, yet at the end of the book, Miriam, who seems to have been sexually abused like Christina, elects to remain in Dr James Barry's⁴⁵ servants' quarters, saying:

"I know you think I'm mad I know this seems a crazy place. But I just hate home It suits me here. I feel safer than I ever have My sister, at home, she's a prostitute. I don't want that life. I don't want to see my family again. They hurt me really badly I know that I am meant to be here. Something was wrong before. This is my place."
(Roth, 2012:131)

The unspoken implication is that the achievement of political freedom and the recognition of gender equality in the present have not necessarily offered previously disadvantaged South Africans a better life than that available to disempowered servants in a racially segregated society. To make matters worse, the appearance of James Barry as a character in the novel highlights the gender prejudices of the past which required her to masquerade as a man in order to practise medicine.

Lily Herne's *Deadlands* (2011) and *Death of a Saint* (2012), on the other hand, focus less on the past and more on an alternative near-future in which South Africa has

⁴⁵ James Barry was an outspoken humanitarian, a pioneering doctor and a flamboyant dandy who practised medicine in various parts of the British Empire during the first half of the nineteenth century. While in Cape Town, he befriended the controversial governor, Lord Charles Somerset, and also performed the first successful Caesarean Section. Only after his death in 1865, was it revealed that he was actually a woman (see Rachel Holmes, [2002]2007). Given the average South African reader's familiarity with Barry's story, Miriam's eventual decision to choose to stay in a period that required women to go to such lengths in order to achieve professional status seems particularly shocking.

been struck by a zombie plague. The survivors huddle in walled enclaves and are subject to mysterious Guardians, who are able to control the zombies and provide the remaining humans with basic necessities. In return, they exact an annual tribute of teenagers. Seventeen-year-old Lele de la Fontein is chosen as one of these tributes, but manages to escape from the wagon taking her out of her enclave and join a group of teenagers calling themselves the Mall Rats. Mysteriously, the members of the group do not attract the attention of any but the newest zombies or 'Rotters'. Because of this, they are able to leave the enclave and bring back black-market goods from the Ratanga Junction mall. The novels seem less bound by previous racial divisions in that Lele's race is never discussed and neither is that of Ash, the boy to whom she is strongly attracted. The remaining Mall Rats are Saint, a lesbian from Botswana, whose lover, Ripley, has been taken by the Guardians, and Ginger, a red-headed British boy, who was visiting South Africa for the Football World Cup when the plague struck. The protagonists are thus far more complex and rounded than those in either of the time-slip novels previously discussed. However, the world which surrounds them is a hostile one and there are clear parallels between life in the besieged enclaves and life in the privileged security villages that have become such an essential part of the South African urban landscape. This is made very clear when the Mall Rats leave Cape Town in the second novel and spend some time in an enclave located on a golf estate near Knysna. Ginger and Megan, whose father is in charge of the enclave, have the following suggestive conversation:

"How did what's-his-name – Father – have time to build these walls if you didn't have any Guardians protecting you?" Ginger asks.

"He didn't," Megan says. "It was already here. He just took it over."

"So what was this place?"

"A golf estate. The whole thing was fenced already."

"Oh, that was lucky, innit."

“Father’s always saying that South Africa must be one of the best countries in the world for surviving a zombie apocalypse,” Megan says seriously, “It’s full of security estates and high fences.” (Herne, 2012:173)

Similarly, a well-armed Afrikaans-speaking farming couple from the Free State first shoot at the teenagers and then offer them a meal and a bed in a self-sufficient farmhouse, which seems almost a parody of right-wing survivalist ideals. Outside the little house with its well-stocked larder a group of Rotters are staked out like macabre scarecrows to act as an organic burglar alarm or early-warning system. As Ash says to Lele, after accepting a food parcel from Mariska and Wiseman: “It’s a good job we judge people on how they treat the living, and not on how they treat the dead” (Herne, 2012:291). Yet one cannot help feeling, that on some disturbing and unacknowledged level, the shambling and horrifying Rotters in their ragged clothes may be operating as nightmarish analogues for the threatening, poverty-stricken crowds that wealthy South Africans of all races so determinedly Other and marginalize. Certainly the so-called Resurrectionists, who laud the Guardians, look back on life before the zombie plague with little regret. A pamphlet thrust at Lele reads:

Do you remember the terrible days of hijackings. Murder? Domestic Violence? Robbery? Et cetera? Yes? Then join us in celebrating our Saviours Who Have Set Us Free. Become ReBorn with a view to a glorious ReAnimation. (Herne, 2011:17, italics original)

Furthermore, her school history text book claims that ‘[b]efore the War, South Africa was a mess of violence, extreme poverty, HIV infection, incest, child abuse, terrorism and murder’ (Herne, 2011:41) and the anti-zombie resistance movement, which regularly bombs civilian targets, is also known as the ANZ, which Lele herself confuses with the ANC (Herne, 2011:64). Thus, whether the perspective is that of the

past or that of the future, young adult fiction by white South African authors seems reluctant to view the present with any favour.

The impact that such novels may have on their readers is, of course, impossible to quantify, but what appears to be their incipient pessimism about the country is particularly worrying in the light of John Stephens's (2000:56) argument that 'there is a central preoccupation in children's literature with the nature of selfhood and its relationship to place'. As Clare Bradford points out, in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial readings of Children's Literature* (2007), the colonial child's complex negotiations with colonised spaces is absolutely crucial to his or her formation of identity. In a similar vein, Ruth Feingold (2009:2) even argues that 'the mastery of (or adaptation to) new places may be a key to a less conventional coming of age for migrants'. Sadly, if books may operate in Brian Attebery's (1992:104) terms as a 'vicarious induction into a new identity', then it is clear that little recent South African teenage fiction has yet found a way to articulate either a postcolonial relationship with place or new models of identity linked to a positive view of a changed and changing society .

Given the problems outlined above, perhaps it is not surprising that the only truly powerful English fantasy for older children to have come out of South Africa so far has been produced by a writer who straddles two worlds. K. Sello Duiker, a black South African, spent his formative years in Britain before studying journalism at Rhodes University, a traditionally white South African tertiary institution. His first book for younger readers, *The Hidden Star*, was published in 2006, some months after its author's tragic suicide. Duiker had previously won the Commonwealth Prize for a first novel in the Africa region for *Thirteen Cents* (2000), a brutally realistic depiction of the lives of Cape Town street children, and the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for

English Literature for his second novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), which explores the life of a traumatized and drug-addicted young man trying to come to terms both with his homosexuality and, in Duiker's own words, with 'what it means to be black and educated' (cited by Dunton, 2001:3). *The Hidden Star* seems, initially at least, to be entirely different from the novels which preceded it in being both a work written for younger readers and a fantasy that forsakes gritty realism for a world in which ancestral spirits breathe messages of hope to a girl in possession of a magic stone.

Eleven-year-old Nolitye, whose name means Keeper of the Stone (Duiker, 2006:5), appropriately enough collects pebbles and keeps them in an enamel bucket under her bed. One lunch break she finds a stone that seems to shine with a purplish light and which unexpectedly and inexplicably fills her with mysterious joy. She later learns that her stone is a fragment of a greater whole created at the dawn of time by Nkulukulu of the heavens as a way of channelling wisdom to the tribes. Nomakhosi, the spirit of the stone, also tells Nolitye that she has been chosen to find and reunite the remaining pieces of the stone so that Ncitiwane, the unmaker, an elemental force of division and destruction, will lose his power and harmony and prosperity will be restored to the land (Duiker, 2006:83-84).

On the face of it, Duiker's novel reads like a fairy tale and, indeed, the book is full of references to the familiar motifs of both European fairy tales and southern African *ntsomi*. Yet Nolitye does not live 'once upon a time in a country far away' but here and now in Phola, an informal settlement on the fringes of Johannesburg, and Duiker's vivid descriptions make this abundantly clear as when Nolitye and her friend Bheki walk through the township passing a group of elderly men drinking commercially brewed *umqombothi* or sorghum beer from cartons, a seller of roasted

mealies, a travelling barber plying his trade on the pavement and three minibus taxis being 'vigorously washed from their wheel caps to their rooftops' (Duiker, 2006:63).

Despite these vibrant surroundings, Nolitye remains, both socially and economically, a marginalized child. Her urban environment has separated her from her cultural heritage so that when, at one stage, she is told to follow the Healer of the Road, who will lead her to where she needs to go, she is completely baffled:

"The healer of the Road?"

Noka, looking incredulous, says, "My, my, you didn't know? It is Nqonqothwane, of course. Dung beetle is the Healer of the Road."

Thembi apologetically pulls up her shoulders and explains: "She grew up in a township."

"I can't believe there are places where children grow up without knowledge of the Healer of the Road," Noka says. "But never mind. All the better that you have learned something new, child. The road holds many lessons" (Duiker, 2006:212).

Similarly, the abject poverty in which Nolitye and her mother live prevents her from full assimilation into the rationalist contemporary world represented by the mathematics homework she so much enjoys, but is regularly forced to leave incomplete when her precious stub of candle burns out (Duiker, 2006:12).

As the story unfolds, Nolitye learns that she is descended from a long line of *sangomas*⁴⁶ or healers. Gradually as she encounters and overcomes magical enemies as divergent as a *Zim*, a cannibal with a scythe-like nail on the little finger of his right hand, a red-tongued *Imvuvu*, a threatening chimera, and various terrifying

⁴⁶ The correct isiZulu term for these powerful figures is *izangoma*, but Duiker chooses to anglicise it as *sangoma* (sing.) and *sangomas* (pl.) and I therefore follow his lead.

umthakathi or witches, she comes to understand Ntate Matthews's explanation for why her father turned his back on family tradition by refusing to become a *sangoma*:

“What I do know is that your father had the makings of a healer. He definitely had the calling; he just refused to become a *sangoma*. I suspect that he knew that he was blessed with immense powers, and maybe he feared using them.”

Nolitye moved closer to Ntate Matthews. “But what was there to fear?”

“Answering the calling to be a healer is not that simple my child. There are a lot of evil forces – witches and wizards – out there that try to harm those who want to help people.” (Duiker, 2006:39)

The novel clearly affirms the principle of free choice while also suggesting that choices do have to be made, since those who try to work with both the forces of the light and those of darkness inevitably become disempowered Renegades who ‘walk the thin line between light and dark, good and evil’ (Duiker, 2006:102). Everything a Renegade does has to be carefully judged so that the opposing forces governing human life remain in balance. Such neutrality is not only almost impossible to achieve but leaves the Renegade powerless to effect any real change in the world.

Interestingly, throughout the first half of the novel, Nolitye assumes that her father has died in a mining accident but later learns that witches have imprisoned him below ground. At some level, his refusal to develop his hereditary powers seems to have led to his entombment within the earth and thus to a state of spiritual paralysis equitable with death. To some extent, it thus seems feasible to argue that Nolitye's father stands for a lost generation subjected to a form of cultural amputation resulting from a comprehensive process of colonial subjugation.

Certainly, Duiker never glosses over the social and economic legacies of apartheid. Nolitye sometimes only has hot sugar water for breakfast, shares 'five mobile toilets with two hundred other people in her area' (Duiker, 2006:22) and knows just what to do, with the resignation born of long experience, when one of the tightly-packed shanties 'catches fire because a Primus stove tips over by accident, or a burning candle sets a tablecloth or curtain alight' (Duiker, 2006:133). Interestingly though, white South Africans are entirely absent from Nolitye's world. This omission subtly emphasizes the way in which, even twelve years after South Africa's first democratic elections, the lives of the inhabitants of Phola continue to be firmly distanced from those of apartheid's prime beneficiaries, but by this telling lacuna, Duiker also manages to suggest that the responsibility for redeeming the future lies unequivocally in the hands of apartheid's most obvious victims.

More radically, Duiker seems to imply that spiritual wholeness must precede and will always outweigh material well-being. Unlike the Hansels and Gretels (Opie and Opie, [1974] 1992:319) or Matongs (Savory, 1982:37) of fairy tales, Nolitye returns home at the end of the book bearing neither a witch's treasure nor a magical hide capable of generating material wealth. Instead, she finds a spiritual guide in Nomakhosi, who appears variously dressed in 'the black-braided white skirt and wrap of a Xhosa woman' (Duiker, 2006:82), 'a fiery Xhosa skirt with thin bands of black binding round the bottom' (Duiker, 2006:100), the sparkling beads and bright cotton of the Swazis (Duiker, 2006:98) and the traditional blue-and-red-striped skirt of the Shangaans (Duiker, 2006:185). Led by this multicultural icon, Nolitye revisits South Africa's lost sea of *ntsomi* and grows spiritually by learning that she should not be fooled by what she thinks she sees (Duiker, 2006:185) because, as her father reminds her, dreams are not merely the products of randomly firing synapses but 'doors to the future' and sometimes 'more real than life' (Duiker, 2006:16). Significantly, it is only when Nolitye has managed to outgrow Vundla the hare's contemptuous dismissal of her as a 'city

slicker' cut off from her ancestral roots (Duiker, 2006:191) that she is able to reclaim her marginalized and rejected cultural heritage, redeem her imprisoned parents and replace the fear and despair that stalk the alleys of Phola with the hope and optimism its inhabitants so desperately need.

In the light of Duiker's use of *The Hidden Star* to affirm the power of indigenous myth, which is too often, as Cicely van Straten's (1996:44) research has shown, treated with impatient indifference or dismissively labelled as 'childish or primitive' by urban Africans, it is noteworthy that he also uses Nolitye's quest to reaffirm the value of feminine principles. Duiker's decision to centre his novel on a girl child is particularly significant in a context in which, as Malvern Van Wyk Smith (1990:55) reminds us, the colonial discourse of domination ensures that 'land, indigene and woman are so often transformations of one another'. In this context then Nolitye's name gains yet another layer of significance since it evokes memories of the great women's march against the extension of the pass laws in 1956. As the women marched together to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, they sang a traditional song, *Wathint' abafazi; wathint' imbokodo* (You strike the women; you strike the rock [translation mine.]). This powerful image of resistance is quite deliberately invoked in the opening chapter of *The Hidden Star* when Nolitye's annoyed mother wonders why the child's grandmother gave her such a stupid name and Nolitye defiantly replies: 'My name is not stupid. Gogo said: you mess with a woman, you mess with a stone' (Duiker, 2006:5-6).

Rocks are traditional emblems of strength but also of self-regarding ambition as Blake reminds us when, in 'The Clod and the Pebble', he has his pebble sing (ll.9-12):

“Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another’s loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven’s despite.” (in Ferguson *et al.*, 2005:742)

By contrast Nolitye affirms the credo of Blake’s self-effacing clod and gives up her ease for the good of others with an unflinching resolution that firmly asserts that self-abnegation and nurturing, so often associated with the weaker sex, have, in fact, absolutely nothing to do with weakness.

In an inversion of patterns visible in works as otherwise disparate as Enid Blyton’s adventure books and J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, Nolitye’s strength constantly buoys the spirits of her two male companions: Bheki, who is plump and unashamedly greedy, and Four Eyes, whose nickname is derived from his grimy spectacles. Indeed, at the start of the novel, Four Eyes is utterly subordinate to Nolitye’s chief tormentor, the school bully, Rotten Nellie. The way in which Four Eyes subsequently transfers his allegiance seems to bear out Nomakhosi’s weary observation that ‘boys and men are like water. They go everywhere and anywhere because that is their spirit’ (Duiker, 2006:55).

In some ways the struggle between Nolitye and Rotten Nellie may be said to evoke a struggle between two diametrically opposed definitions of female power. Nellie is ‘the only girl in the school who refuses to wear a gym dress like the other girls. She insists on wearing a shirt and shorts like the boys. Even her school shoes are meant for boys’ (Duiker, 2006:24). Bheki is afraid of her because he once saw her punch a grade-seven boy in the face and when the boy’s nose started bleeding Rotten Nellie ‘bellowed with laughter’ (Duiker, 2006:24) as if it were the funniest thing she had ever seen. Rotten Nellie has thus achieved her dominant position within the school hierarchy by denying her own femininity and modelling her actions on those more

usually associated with the successful male. For instance, when Nolitye suggests at one point that ladies should go first, Rotten Nellie responds with characteristic vigour, saying, “Oh, shut up with the lady stuff!” and asking angrily, “Do I in any case look like a lady?” (Duiker, 2006:67).

Nellie also regularly refers to Nolitye, who wears her hair in dreadlocks, as Mop. This slur not only implies that Nolitye’s distinctively African hair is seen as dirty or untidy but that Nolitye herself is considered a devalued object linked to female domestic subjugation. Importantly, Nolitye never retaliates in kind but instead persistently appeals to Nellie’s better nature. Her calm patience is finally rewarded when Nellie unexpectedly gives her the last piece of the stone rather than allow it to fall into the hands of MaMtonga, Ncitjana’s agent. Nellie makes it clear that she is doing this out of altruism and a desire to protect the children of Phola, but, sadly, even at this crucial juncture, she remains embarrassed about rather than proud of her own nurturing impulse, saying, ‘If you tell anyone about this it’s off. This is our secret. Okay?’ (Duiker, 2006:180)

Nolitye, by contrast, is always willing to show love and care to those who need it. The first use to which she puts the stone is to refill the bucket of *vetkoek* [fat cakes] that her mother has asked her to sell at the bus station. The implied analogy with the Christian miracle of the loaves and the fishes may not have been intentional but Duiker’s education at a Catholic school (Doradio, 2006:s.p.) means that he would have been familiar with Christian tropes and the links to the Christian paradigm of redemptive love certainly seem to continue when Nolitye goes on to use the stone to bring Rex, the leader of a pack of stray dogs, back from the verge of death:

Before their very eyes the wound starts closing up. A small trail of smoke floats up into the air. Bheki clutches at Nolitye’s arm. The

wound keeps shrinking until there is only a scar left. But even the scar soon disappears as the fur grows back. Rex shakes his head and slowly gets up. He wags his tail, wobbly on his feet at first, but he stretches and soon regains his balance. Then he gives a hearty sneeze. Nolitye and Bheki laugh nervously.

“Rex you’re back!” Bheki shouts.

Rex answers with a loud bark. “Thanks guys. I thought I was a goner.”
(Duiker, 2006:66)

The Phola animals, whose speech Nolitye is able to understand, seem to form a subordinate group within the township and are regularly beaten and abused by the humans around them. By treating them with care and respect, Nolitye presents readers with an alternative model of power relations whereby love and concern displace exploitation and coercive violence. It is no accident that Nolitye gains the penultimate piece of the stone from a German shepherd, Mister, who may be chained into physical submission but who, nevertheless, refuses to adopt a subservient role in his interaction with the children, who are initially annoyed by the fact that, despite his subordinate position, ‘he behaves as if he is a big chief’ (Duiker, 2006: 167). Mister’s insistence on maintaining some dignity is also made very clear when he refers to himself with conscious irony as a ‘so-called dog’ (Duiker, 2006:171) thus wittily undermining the preoccupation with hierarchy still firmly embedded in the South African consciousness.

In order to get the precious fragment that he guards so ferociously, Nolitye has to overcome her fear and, in a gentle homage to the fable of Androcles and the lion, draw the thorn from his inflamed paw. Towards the end of the novel, Aesop is also invoked when Nolitye challenges Vundla, the hare, to a race. Nolitye wins the race by trickery but in this, as in all her interactions with animals, she alerts the reader to the fact that, as Swinfen (1984:43) observes, ‘the animal fantasy helps to remind us that

we are, after all, only dressed animals, shielded by a few flimsy mechanical devices from the often harsh, but more natural life of our cousins’.

Brian Attebery argues that both a strength and a weakness of fantasy is its reliance on traditional storytelling forms and motifs. Attebery (1992:87) also suggests that by making its conventional basis explicit and primary, rather than submerging tale types or character functions beneath a surface of apparent reported reality, fantasy is ‘empowered to reimagine both character and story’. However, he also goes on to warn that such ‘a willingness to return to the narrative structures of the past can entail as well an unquestioning acceptance of its social structures’ (Attebery, 1992:87). This danger is particularly evident when the work of fantasy is about a process of coming of age and thus, of necessity, should look to the future rather than the past.

Coming of age is, of course, a motif central to many fantasies since the tale of a young hero’s ‘displacement, transformation and return’ is, as Attebery (1992:87) also points out, ‘the fundamental pattern of both the hero monomyth, as described by Joseph Campbell, and of the fairy tale as analyzed by Vladimir Propp’. The pattern identified above is thus reproduced in almost all modern fantasies as characters move from childhood and a state of fluid potential towards the achievement of individuation and relatively stable adult identity. Nolitye in *The Hidden Star* undergoes just such a process, but Duiker is careful to endorse past norms only when these are empowering for his heroine as is, perhaps, most clearly seen in his treatment of gender issues.

A problem that is particularly acute for those writers conscious of gender stereotyping is that traditional rites of passage are often focused on the achievement of manhood rather than the arguably subtler and certainly less clearly defined processes

attendant on the achievement of womanhood. In considering this issue, Attebery (1992:100) proposes that the story of female coming of age may revolve around the search for an acceptable maternal model since, if women are not simply to reproduce the lives of their mothers, they need to add to their inherent knowledge of continuity, duty and the submersion of the self the knowledge of individuality and rebellion.

Eleven-year-old Nolitye is on the cusp of puberty as the novel begins but her relative immaturity is evidenced by the extent to which her mother, Thembi, still governs her life. So, at the end of each day Nolitye snuggles in to Thembi in their shared single bed in a scene that conjures up an archetypal image of the mother/child dyad (Duiker, 2006:13). However, when Nolitye finds the heart of the stone, she also finds Nomakhosi, who challenges her to step away from her mother's protection by providing her for the first time with an affirming adult role model, who is, as she herself affirms, 'the Spirit of Women's Strength' (Duiker, 2006: 82). Nomakhosi is not worn down by poverty like Thembi, consumed by ambition and malevolence like the sorceress MaMtonga or cut off from her own name and heritage by her collusion with an imposed education system like Nolitye's teacher, the aptly named 'Moeder' [Mother]. As Nolitye draws away from Thembi, she recovers contact with her father, who tells her that the woman whom she has believed to be her mother is, in reality, an *umthakathi* or witch who has simply taken on Thembi's outer form. This impostor is shown to be in collusion with MaMtonga, who desires Nolitye's stone for herself. MaMtonga's menace is heightened by both her association with snakes and the hints that she may be a cannibal. When Nolitye follows her down to the river of black water one night, for instance, she is horrified when MaMtonga claims to be able to smell young flesh and licks her lips as if she would like to eat it (Duiker, 2006:151). One is reminded of the greedy witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' who, as Bettelheim ([1976] 1991:163) has observed, represents total surrender to untamed id impulses and self-

preoccupied greed. MaMtonga thus stands in opposition to the values of love and *ubuntu*, both of which Nolitye consistently affirms.

In her encounters with a range of deceptive maternal role models, Duiker thus allows Nolitye to use the traditional distancing methods of fairy tale whereby negative and positive maternal attributes are displaced and given to either a magical godmother or a threatening hag (whether witch, wicked stepmother or both). By being told that Thembi is not her real mother, Nolitye is able to assert her independence without taking on a crippling burden of guilt. The increasingly tenuous links between Nolitye and the undesirable mother whom Thembi has come to represent are finally severed when the girl learns the interloper's true name, Sylvia. In this context, it seems entirely appropriate that the deceiving *umthakathi's* real name should not be an indigenous one since the novel repeatedly confirms the value of cultural as well as personal integrity.

Before she can regain contact with her true mother, Nolitye has to descend into Ncitzane's underworld. Significantly, Nomakhosi cannot accompany her on this part of her journey so that Nolitye is forced to rely on her own resources and learn to trust in her own capacity for independent action. This descent also clearly leads Nolitye into a variant of what Northrop Frye (1976:111) calls the 'night world, often a dark and labyrinthine world of caves and shadows where the forest has turned subterranean, and where we are surrounded by the shapes of animals'. If the meandering and descent patterns of Paleolithic caves, along with the paintings on their walls, have anything like the same kind of significance, Frye (1976:111-112) argues, 'we are here retracing what are, so far as we know, the oldest imaginative steps of humanity'.

In this terrifying domain given over to all the archetypes of southern African folklore, Nolitye is encouraged by Mvu, the hippo, to dive to the very bottom of a river. Here she meets an old and horribly disfigured woman.

“I know I am ugly and old, my child,” she says. “You may laugh. I will not blame you.”

“Dumela, Mama,” Nolitye answers. “How can I laugh when my heart goes out to you?”

“If the sight of me doesn’t put you off, my child, then let the balm of your kind healing tongue heal me by licking my wounds,” the old woman says. (Duiker, 2006:207)

Nolitye does not hesitate to do what the hideous crone asks. The old woman starts shivering and shaking and Nolitye watches as she grows an arm and then a leg while her face takes on a youthful beauty and an elaborately patterned woollen Basotho blanket covers her body.

This episode seems to allude to a traditional Zulu tale, ‘*Umamba Kamaquba*’, in which a young girl sets out on a journey to marry Mamba of Maquba. On the way she meets an old woman with crusted eyes. The hag asks the girl to lick the pus from her eyes and, after the girl has compassionately done so, the old woman tells her that the girl’s husband-to-be has taken the form of a snake and advises her about how to restore him to himself again (Msimang, 1986:259).

In another sense, however, Nolitye reverses the age-old process whereby mammal mothers clean the afterbirth from their offspring thereby ‘licking them into shape’. Nolitye thus uses her tongue to cleanse and reveal and by so doing regains not only her real mother but also her own true self. Her new independence and maturity are then highlighted by the way in which, as she begins her return to the upper world, an

ascent which Frye (1976:157) would assert mirrors 'the creative power in man that is returning to its original awareness', she stretches out her hand to Thembi, who 'approaches nervously, following her daughter's lead' (Duiker, 2006:212).

After emerging from the river, Nolitye is forced to journey to the elephants' graveyard in search of her father, who is imprisoned in a giant baobab. In this place of death where nothing grows and the smell of rotting carcasses 'hangs in the air' (Duiker, 2006:225), Nolitye affirms life by mixing water and clay, the biblical first components of life as well as the traditional building material of the Nguni people, and smearing them onto the baobab's trunk from which her father gradually emerges 'coming to life before their eyes' (Duiker, 2006:229).

The Hidden Star is clearly a work which, to use Attebery's (1992:129) terminology, is a fully-realized indigenous fantasy, that is 'a fantasy that is, like an indigenous species, adapted to and reflective of its native environment'. As such it is a relatively unusual phenomenon in the world of contemporary South African children's books where, as indicated earlier, African and pseudo-African folktales crowd the shelves for younger readers but fantasy for older readers is relatively thin on the ground. The public response to the novel hints at yet another hidden story as uncomfortable adult readers unused to perceiving folklore as suitable for any but the very young have clearly struggled to adjust to the new possibilities inherent in Duiker's novel. Albe Grobbelaar (2006:6), for instance, clearly reveals his unease in a review for an Afrikaans newspaper *Die Volksblad*, 28 August 2006, in which he states:

My oorweldigende gevoel met die lees hiervan was dat dit 'n veel dunner kinderboekie moes gewees het met groot letters en pragtige

volkleur-illustrasies van wrede hekse, blink toorklippies en boelies wat op hulle plek gesit word.⁴⁷

Fred Khumalo (2006:16), on the other hand, expresses what is probably a very similar uncertainty rather differently in a review for *The Sunday Times*, 5 March 2006, in which he wonders if the novel's message may not be beyond its intended readers since, while it has a young protagonist, *The Hidden Star*, 'like *Thirteen Cents* before it, is so disturbingly adult in its message that I got goosebumps reading it'.

Interestingly, in another work for children which similarly combines traditional folklore with a very adult message, Salman Rushdie's fantasy *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the young protagonist visits the Ocean of the Streams of Story and sees that it is made up of 'a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another, like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity' (Rushdie, 1990:72). Iff, his water genie guide, then explains that, because the stories are held there in fluid form, they retain the ability 'to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories' (Rushdie, 1990:72). Rushdie is, of course, using his ocean as a metaphor for the sources that feed the creative imagination, but his description might, just as validly, be applied to the process of reading a single story, since narrative itself, far from being fixed or monolithic, is both created and interpreted by the shifting currents and perspectives of complex human experience. Every book thus contains within its covers not only the master narrative that it overtly communicates but also a

⁴⁷ My overwhelming feeling while reading this was that it should have been a much slimmer little children's book written in big letters and using attractive full-colour illustrations of cruel witches, shining magic stones and bullies being put in their place. (Translation mine.)

host of hidden narratives, which may shape and illuminate the reader's experience in subtle and even ambivalent ways.

The Hidden Star was not the first book in which Duiker set out to explore the minds of children, but it was his first book to be clearly aimed at younger readers and he admitted to finding this a challenge, saying in an interview with Luvoya Kakaza: 'You must make it interesting and not preach down to them because they're not idiots. You're also competing with T.V., cell phones and Sony play stations. I welcome the challenges of making it relevant' (cited by Mzamane, 2005:24). It is significant that Duiker, known for his mastery of gritty realism, should have come to value the power of fantasy, realizing that, as Le Guin (1989a:33) puts it, it is primarily 'by such statements as, "once upon a time there was a dragon", or "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit" – it is by such beautiful non-facts that we fantastic human beings may arrive, in our own peculiar fashion, at the truth'.

Interestingly, Nolitye is not only guided by her encounters with traditional spirits and a range of living beings but also by her experiences with the printed word. In the school's small library, she finds an old grey book without a classification number on its spine. When she opens it, she finds a small inscription in faded ink:

The journey starts with a single step. But you have to be curious to read on. Yes, you reader, standing there looking lost. But it is no surprise that you are reading these words.... You are wondering about something, which is why you are reading this book.... This is the book of questions and answers. But you already know what you want to ask, which is why you are reading. In fact, the truth is that you already know the answer to your question – you just have to listen to yourself.

(Duiker, 2006:129)

Nolitye's brief encounter with the book thus encourages her to believe that she is not alone in a meaningless universe but that all questions can be answered by simply becoming aware of one's own individual moral imperatives. The incident is wonderfully self-reflexive as Nolitye decodes the printed message of hope and then transmits it again through the medium of print to the long line of readers who peer anxiously over her fictional shoulder.

I have touched on only a few of the hidden stories twining incessantly behind the golden dust jacket of *The Hidden Star*. They converge and diverge, jostle for attention or retreat before a critical eye. Yet in all their diversity it seems to me that they are united by a common feature: they all deal with people in liminal conditions facing perilous moments of formative stress. Nolitye, poised between childhood and adulthood, traditional beliefs and mathematical proofs, self-assertion and self-abnegation, reflects a society poised between past and future, assimilation and disintegration. Like her creator, she finds herself caught between a rock, albeit a magical one, and a hard though beloved place.

Unlike Duiker himself, however, who, as mentioned earlier, tragically took his own life, she suggests to us the possibility that by active engagement with the forces of darkness, which in Kwena the crocodile's riddle are everywhere, hiding in every corner, 'even in places as big as a pea' (Duiker, 2006:209), one may find that the bars of one's cage are self-wrought. This possibility is amusingly demonstrated towards the end of the novel when Vundla, the tricky hare, first meets the children in Ncitiwane's kingdom and leads them into a low-hanging cave. Here he suddenly leaps forward and 'pushing hard with both front paws against the roof he pretends to hold it up. "Quick! Quick! The cave is falling in," he shouts, straining every muscle' (Duiker, 2006:193). The children rush to help him and he then asks them to continue supporting the overhang while he rescues his wife from the depths of the cavern.

Finally, when the children's arms are weak with fatigue, they are forced to lower them only to find that the threatening weight of stone above them is, in fact, perfectly secure.

Ursula Le Guin has observed that 'the story – from *Rumpelstiltskin* to *War and Peace* – is one of the basic tools invented by the human mind, for the purpose of gaining understanding' and that while 'there have been great societies that did not use the wheel... there have been no societies that did not tell stories' (Le Guin, 1989a:27). By suggesting that the story might be even more important and central to human development than the wheel, she gently reminds the technology-obsessed reader that verbal structures have as much, if not more, to offer our world than mechanical ones and that while one tells or listens to stories one is not merely taking part in an idle entertainment but performing an action with vital and potentially transformative functions.

Within the range of stories available to children, fantasy has, of course, a unique position in that, to quote Bruno Bettelheim ([1976] 1991:24),

[t]hrough most of man's history, a child's intellectual life, apart from immediate experiences within the family, depended on mythical and religious stories and on fairy tales. This traditional literature fed the child's imagination and stimulated his fantasizing. Simultaneously, since these stories answered the child's most important questions, they were a major agent of his socialization.

We live now in an increasingly secular world in which the dominant myths of many societies can no longer answer the questions of the young with the untroubled authority imagined by Bettelheim. This is perhaps especially true in countries in which a process of colonization has marginalized and devalued indigenous mythologies. The rapid cultural change forced on such societies

militates against the preservation of cultural identity and may lead both parents and therefore children to see their own language and stories as unnecessary encumbrances, embarrassing relics of a way of life at odds with global criteria for success.

Deprived of their narrative birthright, children in colonial and post-colonial societies are then forced to look for the answers they need in stories uneasily transplanted from very distant and different environments, but such attempts are rarely fully satisfying since, as Richard Dorson, the American folklorist, wryly observes, mythical beings do not usually take kindly to being uprooted and tend to become faded or distorted versions of themselves when forced to migrate with their worshippers to new and spiritually uncongenial surroundings. In 'A Theory for American Folklore' he observes:

One question that has always intrigued me is what happens to demonic beings when immigrants move from their homelands. Irish-Americans remember the fairies, Norwegian-Americans the nisser, Greek Americans the vrykolas, but only in relation to events remembered in the Old Country. When I once asked why such demons are not seen in America, my informants giggled confusedly and said, 'They're scared to pass the ocean, it's too far.' (cited by Neil Gaiman 2004:i)

Cultural dissonances of this kind are perhaps less problematic in works of fantasy aimed at younger readers. Lutz Rohrich (1988:12) claims that 'the fact that folk narratives appear among so many peoples in such similar forms and ways shows that they have a common meaning which transcends language barriers' and this view seems to be supported by both Vladimir Propp's syntagmatic readings of Russian folklore which led him to claim that 'the number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited' (Propp, 1979:21) and Max Lüthi's theory that the defining characteristic of folk tales is their abstract style.

In contrast to myths, legends and sagas, Lüthi argues, the folk tale does not attempt to create settings reflective of the real world. Instead, he suggests that such a tale 'transforms the world; it puts a spell on its elements and gives them a different form, and thus it creates a world with a distinct character of its own' (Lüthi, 1986:24).

Fantasy for older children, however, is rarely quite as self-sufficient. Since the end of the nineteenth century it has tended rather to weave magic into the tapestry of everyday experience so that a Psammead may be found in an abandoned gravel pit (Nesbit, [1902] 1979:20) and subtle knives be used to cut doorways from contemporary Oxford into a dazzling variety of alternative universes (Pullman, 1998b). Tweens and teens are vigorously engaged with their environment and, even though they may not be consciously aware of it, it seems possible that they may look to fantasy not for simple escapism but for creative reworkings of inherited folklore, ways to make connections between the cultural archetypes transmitted by myth and folk tale and the daily anxieties and choices of adolescence. Francis Spufford (2002:85) expresses this need beautifully in his memoir *The Child that Books Built*.

The books that I loved best were... the ones that started in this world and then took you to another. Earthsea and Middle Earth were separate. You traveled in them in imagination as you read Le Guin and Tolkien, but they had no location in relation to this world. Their richness did not call to you at home in any way. It did not lie just beyond a threshold in this world that you might find if you were particularly lucky, or particularly blessed. I wanted there to be doors.

In fact, Brian Attebery (1992:126) claims that of all the subgenres to emerge within fantasy in recent years it is such door-opening fantasies, which he also claims have yet to be adequately named, that promise to 'reshape the genre most significantly'. However, as Attebery (1992:132) also observes, some element of recognition is

needed to evoke a response to fictional worlds and thus fantasists, including Rowling, often allude to European fairy tale and romance conventions, creating a 'simplified version of the middle ages' so as to 'rehistoricize fantastic assertions'. When this populist medievalism is alien to the culture of the child reading the fantasy, as it is to the majority of children from colonized cultures, it becomes unsurprising that such a child should be unable to find a point of entry into the genre.

It seems obvious then that most children from developing countries might find it easier to gain access to fantasy were it, like *The Hidden Star*, to use more familiar cultural tropes and that such novels could perhaps even be used to reclaim rather than further subjugate colonized minds. Homi Bhabha (1994:218) suggests that the 'non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences' and that the boundary may thus become 'the place from which something begins its presencing' (Bhabha, 1994:5). Interestingly, there are remarkable parallels between *The Hidden Star* and *The Whale Rider*, a young adult novel by Witi Ihimaera, a Maori writer, who, like Duiker, inhabits precisely the kind of liminal creative space Bhabha seems to envisage.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ While the remainder of this chapter will compare the young adult fantasies of Duiker and Ihimaera, the restrictions of this thesis do not permit a more comprehensive study of the parallels between South African and New Zealand children's books. However, such a study might be very suggestive. In both countries, relatively small groups of white settler descendants need to negotiate ways of living peaceably with large indigenous populations and, in both countries, the established writers for the young are almost invariably white. In Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* (1985), the protagonist admits to having a small amount of Polynesian blood, but this seems to be a rare occurrence in such fiction. As Sarah Fiona Winters (2008:424) observes:

Mahy's Pakeha characters cannot re-tread ancestral ground, but neither do they reach outwards and westwards in a linear journey, because as chronotopes they are both the ground *and* the journey. They love and fear their landscapes; they love and fear their bodies; they dig down into both to find them haunted by history, and they turn to the tropes of fantasy to redefine themselves not as Maori space or as European time, not as child or as adult, but as Pakeha and as adolescent: aliens in the family and aliens in the landscape.

In Elizabeth Knox's *Dreamhunter* (2005) and *Dreamquake* (2007), for instance, the action takes place in Southland, a region '1 500 miles from its nearest neighbour and 5 000 miles from the

Witi Ihimaera was born to Maori parents in 1944 in a period when, as Richard Corbalis and Simon Garnett (1984:8) observe:

On the one hand, the community of which he was part was predominantly a Maori one, and many traditional customs were still a day-to-day part of Maori life. On the other hand, the “official” view of Maoritanga in the schools, and to a certain extent among the Maori people themselves, was that such traditional customs, and especially the use of the Maori language, were to be discouraged because they were no longer appropriate or useful in the modern world.

Distanced by ethnicity from New Zealand’s dominant literary culture, Ihimaera also began to be distanced from his Maori roots first by his education, repressed homosexuality and marriage to a *pakeha* or white woman, Jane Cleghorn, and then by a period spent living in London, where he says he was able to write more easily because he was ‘far enough removed from reality and Maori life...to be able to sit and look at it objectively’ (cited by Corbalis and Garnett, 1984:12). During his time in London, he wrote a short story collection and the first drafts of two novels. Their publication made him the first Maori writer to publish both a book of short stories and a novel. After publishing these and another more overtly political collection of short stories, he decided to stop writing since what he saw as his fiction’s initial purpose ‘to establish and

Northern Hemisphere’s great centers of civilisation’ (Knox, 2005:85). The map at the beginning of the book is decorated with engravings of kiwi and tuatara, distinctive New Zealand birds, and shows a landscape very like the northern regions of the South Island apart from the fact that no Maori seem to live there and enclosed within it, is ‘The Place’, an area which can be entered only by a few gifted individuals. These people, who are known as dream hunters, have the ability to absorb almost cinematic dreams in The Place and then relay these to others on their return. Ruth Feingold (2009) reads the novels as positive representations of coming to terms with the land, but, in an unpublished paper delivered at the IRSCS conference in 2011, Geoff Miles reads the series as one in which an attempt is made to erase the Maori presence in New Zealand. The attempt, he argues, reveals troubling ambivalences in the New Zealand psyche, which are reflected in both the fictional Minister of the Interior’s attempts to drug the population with dreams and the dreadful nightmare generated by a prisoner buried alive and brought out of The Place by the fifteen-year-old dream hunter, Laura Hame.

describe the emotional landscape of the Maori people' (cited by Corbalis and Garnett, 1987:255) suddenly seemed to him less important than describing 'the political and social reality' (Corbalis and Garnett, 1987:255).

Nearly ten years later, he returned to print with a book which has been very popular with younger readers, *The Whale Rider* ([1987] 2002), a mythical work about a young Maori girl, Kahu, who, although initially rejected by her traditional grandfather, eventually demonstrates that she alone can reconnect the tribe to its ancestral life force embodied totemically in the beached whale or *tipua* which she rescues.

Both Duiker and Ihimaera consciously foreground the evocative details of life in the communities from which their young heroines come. Rawiri, Ihimaera's narrator and Kahu's uncle, takes his mother on the back of his motorbike to fetch Kahu's *pita* or umbilical cord. Dressed in her formal black clothes and his Headhunter's jacket, the old lady races down Peel Street shocking her contemporaries, who, when they see her through the blue smoke, 'almost swallow their false teeth' (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:26). These vibrant details of contemporary life are equally vivid in Duiker's novel where Nolitye moves through busy streets:

Mamani is back, selling roasted mealies.⁴⁹ The travelling barber is still cutting hair. He is trimming a young man's hair. On a small clearing nearby some boys are playing marbles and some elderly men are sitting on the stoep drinking umqombothi, which they've bought from the take-away shop next door. But they're not drinking the real stuff, traditionally brewed sorghum beer. The umqombothi they are drinking is brewed in a factory and sold in cartons. The older neighbourhood boys say that anyone who drinks it and isn't used to it will be drunk for

⁴⁹ Mealies is a term derived from 'mielies', the Afrikaans name for maize, *Zea mays*, called 'corn' in the USA and in many other English-speaking countries and used as a staple food in much of Africa where it is eaten whole or in the form of a porridge of various consistencies made with maize flour.

days. The men don't seem drunk, Bheki thinks, just very pleased with themselves. (Duiker, 2006:63)

By setting their novels so unequivocally in the present, both Duiker and Ihimaera generate the delighted and unexpected thrill of recognition which comes from evoking the African or Maori child's marginalized reality within the pages of a novel, the literary property of a very different culture. Their detailed realism also powerfully evokes the sense of community, which Umelo Ojinmah (1993) suggests, in his comparison of the writings of Ihimaera and Achebe, is so much part of both African and Maori awareness.

By lovingly creating fictional worlds which are continuous with their readers' experience, these two writers also ensure that, when figures of African or Maori myth emerge into their narratives, they are less likely to be dismissed as old-fashioned remnants of a dated tribal consciousness. Readers who have empathized with Kahu's pain when her beloved grandfather misses the break-up ceremony at which she delivers a speech (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:85) or with Nolitye's rushed attempt to finish her mathematics homework before the candle burns out (Duiker, 2006:12) will be more willing to suspend disbelief when a whale with a sacred sign on its head beaches itself and begins to speak to Kahu (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:127) or Nomakhosi, the spirit of the stone, materializes in Nolitye's shack (Duiker, 2006:82).

Within the contemporary contexts of these girls' lives, both Koro Apirana, Kahu's grandfather, and Nomakhosi become defenders of a neglected past. Each acknowledges the problems besetting the girls' communities and each evokes an image of a golden age destroyed by human arrogance and greed. Thus Nomakhosi tells Nolitye of a lost world in which the tribes fulfilled the intentions of Nkulunkulu, the maker, until Ncityana, the unmaker, driven by ambition, sowed discord by first

stealing and then shattering the stone which held the world in harmonious balance (Duiker, 2006:83). The result is a world in which the tribes have been dispossessed of their spiritual link to the land and its creatures. Ihimaera too evokes a similar lost age of innocence while also cleverly allowing Koro Apirana to anticipate potential reader scepticism when he reminds the boys of his family that man has driven a wedge through the original oneness of the world:

In the passing of Time he divided the world into that half he could believe in and that half he could not believe in. The real and the unreal. The natural and the supernatural. The present and the past. The scientific and the fantastic. He put a barrier between both worlds and everything on his side was called rational and everything on the other side was called irrational. "Belief in our Maori Gods," he emphasized, "has often been considered irrational." (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:115)

Of course, for a contemporary reader, Koro Apirana's language with its determined stress on the masculine pronoun subtly undermines his utopian vision. The liminal status of Duiker and Ihimaera means that neither is capable of unthinkingly endorsing every aspect of their marginalized culture. Their rejection of traditional gender roles is nowhere more apparent than in the fact that each chooses to put a pre-pubescent girl at the centre of his novel.

Ironically, Kahu and Nolitye challenge both the sexist assumptions of Maori and African tradition and the equally male-dominated narrative patterns of western fantasy itself. As they move from childhood towards individuation, the girls learn that they need both to value and challenge the norms of their traditional cultures in order to refashion them for a new millennium.

Before such acts of spiritual redemption can be attempted, each child must learn to step away from the nurturing figures who have dominated her childhood. Finding the

heart of the stone leads Nolitye to Nomakhosi, ‘the Spirit of Women’s Strength’ (Duiker, 2006:82). By giving Nolitye an affirming adult role model, Nomakhosi helps the young girl to take the first crucial steps away from her mother and towards adult autonomy. Similarly, Kahu, while always valuing her grandmother, realizes that she can never be content to model herself on the older woman, yearning instead to be accepted as an equal by her rigidly conservative grandfather, who states categorically that, as a girl, she is ‘of no use to me’ (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:82).

By descending into watery and womb-like underworlds, Kahu riding on a whale and Nolitye following the call of Noka, the Queen of the River Spirits, the two girls make possible a symbolic rebirth for both themselves and the peoples they represent. Empowered by this magical descent into the spirit world, Nolitye is able to draw her father from his imprisonment within the rigid trunk of a baobab (Duiker, 2006:229) while Kahu enables her grandfather to escape from his imprisonment within a world of equally constricting gender norms and awake to the realization that ‘Boy or girl, it doesn’t matter’ (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:147).

Ultimately then, both children show young readers how to reassess not only the material values which dominate their societies but also the cultural norms of the past. By refusing either to abandon the mythologies they have inherited or to preserve them artificially by writing pre-colonial pastoral, Duiker and Ihimaera ensure that their liberating fantasies point the way to new visions of the future in which Kahu ‘may claim the place for her people in the world’ (Ihimaera, [1987] 2002:145) and Nolitye comes to realize that she has ‘missed the township because it is home’ (Duiker, 2006:233).

Both writers thus bring something new to contemporary children’s fantasy. Each opens multiple doors not only between reality and fantasy but between past and

present, tradition and innovation, colonizer and colonized, thus conjuring up a 'third space' in which young readers can find alternative ways to understand who they are, where they are and, perhaps most important of all, where they want to be.

In this way, these two novels affirm Feingold's (2009:1) assertion that, '[f]antasy lands in postcolonial fiction may exist as escape hatches from the everyday, or as reflections of it; either way, they often lead us to a more complicated understanding of real-world places and the rules that govern their existence'. Similarly, Darko Suvin (1979:7-8) has described speculative fiction including fantasy as a genre 'whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment'. The worlds of fantasy may thus offer writers an opportunity to bypass or circumvent the barriers of convention people tend to erect protectively about themselves and the self-created narratives by which they make their lives more bearable. This would seem to indicate that those growing up in postcolonial worlds may be especially empowered by dynamic negotiation with narratives like Duiker's or Ihimaera's that promote the moment of hesitation that allows the encounter with the narrative Other to challenge rather than simply reinforce the reader's pre-existing notions of truth.

Dudley Young (1993:xv), in a persuasive discussion of the origins of what he calls the psychic malaise of the Western world, suggests that 'the voice of authority in our culture is unquestionably the voice of science and yet that voice is still unable (and often unwilling) to master those parts of speech....without which no utterance can be fully human'. He then goes on to argue that these 'parts of speech' can perhaps be found in the mythical truths abandoned by our culture and that only by tracing emotion back to the very roots of experience will humankind regain the capacity for joyous even ecstatic connection with the world. 'If the young are not given proper

images to dream upon,' he warns, 'they will dream the improper and civilization will suffer' (Young, 1993:11). Young's message is equally pertinent for South Africa and other post-colonial cultures. Many such societies have been violently fractured like Nolutye's stone. It is writers like Duiker and Ihimaera who have the capacity to help marginalized children recover their own displaced mythical truths and so dream the dreams proper and necessary for damaged societies, which only they and their readers can hope to return again to wholeness.

Chapter 4

The Once and Future Story: Rewriting Romance

In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye ([1957] 1971:186) writes that ‘there is a genuinely “proletarian” element in romance...which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on’. Similarly Helen Cooper (2009:3), when commenting on the extraordinary longevity of romance tropes, draws on the work of Richard Dawkins ([1976] 1989) and Susan Blackmore (1999) to refer to these conventions as memes, ideas that behave like genes in their ‘ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures’.

Given the persistence that Frye and Cooper both identify as characteristic of romance as a genre, it is perhaps hardly surprising that one of the genres in which its memes clearly continue to thrive is contemporary fantasy for both adults and younger readers since, as Brian Attebery (1980:15) has observed, the traditional materials of this genre have always been ‘partly individual invention and partly communal property’. In this way, traditional fantasy presents readers precisely with what Zahi Zalloua (2009:5) suggests is ‘a “double-bind”, a hermeneutic hesitation between two conflicting injunctions’. The first of these injunctions is to make sense of the work’s otherness by applying to it established rules of literary discourse including theories of genre and thus arrive at meaning by assimilating the text to what is already familiar while the second is to recognise the work’s originality or what she terms ‘its seductive

refractoriness' and thus affirm its singularity and irreducible otherness. In this chapter, I hope to explore how reading fantasy which foregrounds romance norms can encourage young adults to understand that, as Derek Attridge (2004:136) puts it, every work of art is 'a performance in which the authored signature, alterity and inventiveness of the work as an exploitation of the multiple powers of language are experienced and affirmed in the present, in a creative and responsible reading'. Thus, I would suggest that by entering into dialogue with the literary memes that structure not only romance but the fairy tales which constitute some of our earliest encounters with art, contemporary fantasies can simultaneously reassure and challenge their readers. In particular, I would argue that the distancing techniques by which fantasy allows its readers to think analogously about their own situations and lives are also ideally suited to encouraging what Perry Nodelman (1997:12) calls a divided response to literature, a response that allows young adult readers to question the power and patterns of narrative itself by learning to be 'involved as both implied readers of texts and critical observers of what texts demand of them in that process'.

Before going on to consider how fantasy can foreground romance conventions, it is probably necessary to come to some agreement about what these are since Cooper (2009:8) argues that they are so flexible that it is extraordinarily difficult to list them comprehensively. For this reason, she suggests that romance itself is perhaps best thought of as 'a lineage or a family of texts rather than as a series of incarnations or clones of a single Platonic Idea'. By playfully extending her genetic metaphor, Cooper (2009:8-10) then suggests that the resemblance between any two romances or romance-affiliated texts should probably be seen in the same terms as that between any two members of the same family so that, while a significant number of shared features will generally be considered enough to indicate a family resemblance, no single characteristic is ever considered essential for the recognition of an inherited likeness.

Although recent fantasy is considerably less likely than medieval romance to deal overtly with questions of chivalry or to insist on the aristocratic pedigree of its protagonists, other romance features have proved more tenacious. Perhaps the most significant shared characteristic contributing to the very evident family resemblance between contemporary fantasy and medieval romance is what Cooper (2009:10) calls the 'shaking loose of the narrative from precise time and space', a feature that often leads to the creation or depiction of strange worlds or settings where magic and supernatural elements flourish. Importantly though, even within such exotic locales, the hero of romance is always human and, as Frye ([1957] 1971:187) stresses, the conflict experienced or adventure undergone 'primarily concerns *our* world'. According to Tolkien ([1964] 1977:57), this is also true of fantasy, which he views primarily as a means of restoring wonder to a world in which human perceptions have been dulled and tarnished by familiarity. For him, the value of fantasy lies not in the creation of the new but in the 'recovery' of the known. Similarly, Attebery (1992:67) suggests that fantasy invites us to recreate what it has denied:

As soon as it is announced that the world we are reading about bears no relation to our world, we begin to make connections. If physical rules have been altered beyond recognition, we look for moral rules. If we are confronted by a being whose appearance and powers deny its humanity, we begin to look for human motivations. If time is fragmented, reversed, or looped upon itself, then we are encouraged to exercise our own storytelling powers to draw a connection from beginning to end. By forcing a recognition of the arbitrariness of all such narrative inventions, fantasy reminds us of how useful they are...in formulating our own imaginative understanding of our existence in time, which can only be comprehended through narrative.

Attebery's final sentence thus points to a more complex understanding of the value of romance tropes to the adolescent struggling with issues of meaning and identity. It is

possible, in fact, to argue that it is romance's very freedom from the conventions of mimetic realism that makes it not a location of what Rosemary Jackson ([1981] 1988) might consider deplorable escapism but rather a liminal space of becoming in which the reader may confront his or her fears and desires and mould the encounter in such a way as to arrive at an imaginative understanding that may then, in turn, be transferred to the battleground of an 'existence in time'.

Frye's ([1957] 1971:187) mention of 'conflict experienced and adventure undergone' also raises two more important romance memes. In romance, as in fantasy, both adventure and conflict are almost invariably located within a quest structure traditionally centred on a single hero. This tendency is so apparent that Frye is even able to state quite categorically that 'the complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest' (Frye, [1957] 1971:187). Helen Cooper (2009), while accepting the centrality of this meme to both romance and fantasy, is more concerned with the ideals underlying quests than their triumphant conclusions, pointing out that, even when perfection is not achievable and the hero falters or fails in some way, the ideals governing his or, in more modern contexts, her quest are never either abandoned or seriously questioned. Because she sees romances as focusing habitually on trials rather than triumphs, Helen Cooper (2009:10) is then able to make the intriguing suggestion that romances are 'concerned less with the communal good than with the individual hero's inward thoughts, feelings, and aspirations', a factor which also makes the genre particularly well-suited to addressing the psychic struggles of the young. A similar view is clearly reflected in Charles Butler's (2006:104) discussion of young adult fantasy in which he cites and endorses Susan Cooper's view that quests are simply powerful 'metaphor[s] for growing up'.

This quality of interiority in the romance is also recognised by Gillian Beer (1970), who argues that the greatest romances are always primarily about psychic responsibilities. She claims, furthermore, that

[b]ecause romance shows us the ideal it is implicitly instructive as well as escapist. By removing the restraints of rationalism it can reach straight to those levels of our experience which are also re-created in myth and fairy-tale. By simplifying character the romance removes the idiosyncrasies which set other people apart from us; this allows us to act out through stylised figures the radical impulses of human experience. The rhythms of the interwoven stories in the typical romance construction correspond to the way we interpret our own experience as multiple, endlessly interpenetrating stories, rather than simply as a procession of banal happenings. (Beer, 1970:9)

In this extract, Beer identifies three aspects of romance that link it not only to fantasy in general but especially closely to fantasy written for younger readers. In the first place, she, like Helen Cooper, highlights the inherent didacticism of the romance's characteristic focus on ideals. Significantly, both also agree that these ideals are more likely to be secular rather than overtly religious. As a result of this, Cooper (2009:10) suggests that the romance is often preoccupied with human perfectibility within a social rather than a sacred context. In the same way, the central premise of Frye's *The Secular Scripture* (1976) is that it is within the structures of romance, which he calls 'the structural core of all fiction', that the fables of secular literature may come together and form a single integrated vision of the world, 'the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest' (Frye, 1976:15).

Secondly, by drawing attention to the romance habit of simplifying character, Beer echoes Frye's assertion that 'the central form of romance is dialectical' and that

...the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy. The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor and youth. (1976:187-188)

Frye's dichotomy thus clearly indicates that, to some extent, romance is always about the struggle between the entrenched authority of the old and the creative energy of the young. Interestingly, this is the same struggle that Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) places so firmly at the heart of all adolescent literature.

Frye then goes on to argue that in romances secondary characters are rarely either subtle or complex. Instead they are positioned either as supporters of the quest or as its opponents. This stripping down of character links romance to other forms of children's literature such as the fairy or folk tale, which Max Lüthi (1986:22) has claimed

...abjures deep spatial, temporal, spiritual and psychological relationships. It metamorphoses interlayered reality and sequential reality into juxtaposed reality. With admirable consistency it projects the materials of the most varied spheres into one and the same plane.

Like Beer and Lüthi, Bruno Bettelheim ([1976] 1991:17) suggests that the stripping down to essentials that is typical of both fairy tale and romance characterisation has a vital psychological function in that the removal of distracting particularity encourages 'changes in identification' thus not only 'isolating and separating the disparate and confusing aspects of the child's experience into opposites, but projecting these onto different figures' (Bettelheim, [1976] 1991:75) and therefore speaking directly to the young reader's 'budding ego and encourag[ing] its development while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures' (Bettelheim, [1976] 1991:6).

While the paring down of character may be less overt in fantasies written for adolescents than in fairy tales for the very young, the use of multiple or grouped central characters in children's literature is common and generally seen as a device for promoting identification by providing identification objects of different ages and genders.⁵⁰ Such a view is, however, rarely expressed in relation to adult reading since, as Nikolajeva (2010:185) so rightly observes: 'How could we possibly read Dostoyevsky if we were supposed to identify with Raskolnikov?' In view of this difference in attitudes to children's and adult fiction, it seems significant that many contemporary fantasies for older readers appear to use versions of the displacement techniques identified by Bettelheim to promote the postmodern concept of intersubjectivity.⁵¹

Because of the shared psychological functions identified above, the normative happy ending of romance is also traditionally found in both fantasy and traditional children's literature. To some extent this is determined by the reliance of all three on quest structures since, as Frye ([1957] 1971:187) notes, quests can be divided into three main stages which he defines as, 'the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero'. Cooper (2009:10) too affirms that the happy ending so crucial to romance often incorporates 'a return from

⁵⁰ For further discussion of this see Maria Nikolajeva's chapter 'Othering the Reader: Identification Fallacy', in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (Nikolajeva, 2010:185-202).

⁵¹ The term 'intersubjectivity' is used of texts in which the subject position is not consistently linked to either a single character or an intrusive or prescriptive narrative voice. By allowing the subject position to shift, the writers of such novels encourage the implied reader to develop a perspective on the narrative that is not wholly dependent on the viewpoint of either a single protagonist or the narrator. Nikolajeva (2010:185-187) sees the ability to achieve such detachment as a crucial attribute of sophisticated or mature readers. She argues that it is only by creating an independent perspective on works of fiction that the reader can hope to achieve either an objective evaluation of a work or an empathetic response to it that is in any way distinct from mere solipsism.

an encounter with death – a symbolic resurrection’ and thus echoes Tolkien’s claim that at the heart of the related forms of romance and fantasy lies the *eucaastrophe*:

The sudden joyous “turn”.... A sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (Tolkien, [1964] 1977:60)

This leads to Beer’s third point, which is reminiscent of Attebery’s (1992:67) claim that narrative may be a tool for understanding life. Beer too suggests that the structure of romance encourages the seemingly inherent human tendency to interpret life as a meaningful story rather than as a random and chaotic sequence of events. Her apparently instinctive awareness of this is supported by the work of bibliotherapists such as Hugh Crago (1999:184-185), who points out that ‘story-telling, or at least arranging the raw material of experience into some sort of pattern, is a process almost as fundamental to human life as breathing’. The importance of this recurrent yearning to structure experience may, at least in part, be explained by Bettelheim’s ([1976] 1991:1) observation that ‘if we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives’. Given that such meaning can only be constructed rather than simply conferred, the search for it is an on-going process and this life-defining quest that is so obviously symbolically paralleled by that of every romance hero may go a long way towards explaining both the curious longevity of romance memes and the current overwhelming popularity of fantasy among children and young adults alike.

Looked at in this way then, it becomes possible to consider romance not as a self-contained genre but as a prevalent ethos whose elusive power charges an enormous range of literary works that include but are by no means limited to the field of fantasy. Any comprehensive examination of these memes is clearly beyond the scope of the present study but even a more limited consideration of fantasies for younger readers that not only use such tropes but also situate them within traditional romance materials and narratives reveals the complexity and richness of contemporary adaptations and mutations of this portion of our literary inheritance.

The term romance itself derives from 'romanz', a term initially used to define any work written in a European vernacular rather than in Latin. The popular origin of the form is reflected too in its exploitation and exploration of the folktales and other narrative traditions of the countries in which it first flourished. For this reason, English romances often circle ceaselessly about what medieval scholars called the matter of Britain: tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This rich narrative seam shows no sign of being exhausted but is still being regularly revisited and almost as frequently renewed in fantasies for both adults and younger readers.⁵² As Ann Swinfen (1984:26) notes:

Whether or not there was a historical Arthur, the legendary Arthur has drawn to him elements of folklore and magic, primitive ritual and Christian allegory, strange adventures and courtly chivalry. The character of the king himself – idealistic, tragic and betrayed – has caught the imagination more than any other single character in Western literature.

⁵² In my own teaching of multi-cultural first year university English classes, for instance, I have found that it is unwise to assume any knowledge of Greek mythology, but that almost all of my students appear to have at least heard of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Despite its popularity, however, or perhaps even because of it, the Arthurian theme in children's literature has not received as much scholarly attention as one might expect. John Stephens (1992:122ff), for instance, proposes a little dismissively that children's literature using Arthurian and romance memes can simply be intertextually related to what he terms medievalism or medieval discourse. Too often such a glib association can encourage a simple comparative analysis in which the link between recent uses of Arthurian materials and earlier ones is treated only as a question of literary influence. Contemporary Arthurian texts are thus set in causal relationships to each other and to medieval source texts such as Malory. While this is obviously appropriate when examining works like Rosemary Sutcliff's *The King Arthur Trilogy* (2007) in which she carefully lists her sources and admits quite directly that, in the first volume at least, she has 'followed Malory in the main' (Sutcliff, 2007:8), it is far less useful when dealing with works like Catherine Fisher's *Corbenic* (2002) or Diana Wynne Jones's *Hexwood* ([1993] 2000) where the links with canonical Arthurian material are oblique and fractured, pointing to a more dynamic and dialogic relationship between writer, reader, text and context.

The potential complexity of such interchanges is explored by Julia Kristeva, who first used the word 'intertextuality' in 1969 to stress that all texts only have meaning in relation to other texts and what she describes as the 'intersubjective' knowledge of their readers (cited by Wilkie-Stibbs, 1999:170). Drawing on Kristeva's work, Jonathan Culler (1975:139) defines the human need to integrate different discourses as a process of '*vraisemblance*' by which readers become sensitised to genre to the point at which they can begin to use this awareness to build expectations about new texts. Thus, young adults who actively seek out fantasy, for instance, have usually engaged in '*vraisemblance*' to the point at which they demonstrate considerable, if sometimes unconscious, awareness of romance or fantasy memes and have

established that these answer their current reading needs better than those characteristic of other genres.

Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (1999:170), in further ‘considering the relevance of Culler’s theories for books written for younger readers, suggests that through “*vraisemblance*” the child reader has unconsciously to learn that the fictional worlds in literature are representations and constructions which refer to other texts that have been normalised: that is, those texts that have been absorbed into the culture and are now regarded as “natural”’. She then goes on to suggest that it is possible to identify three main ways in which intertextuality operates in children’s literature: *genre texts* in which literary conventions, such as those discussed earlier in relation to romance, form patterns that can be recognised and even looked for in other texts; *imitative texts* which use techniques like paraphrase or occasionally parody and which may either attempt to ‘liberate their readers from an over-invested admiration’ (1999:170) for canonical texts or, more simply, function as the pre-text of the original for those who read it later; and *texts of quotation* which allude to other works in both direct and subtle ways. The first of these categories clearly applies to the broad category of fantasy works incorporating romance memes while the second and third are more applicable to the numerous retellings and reworkings of Arthurian legend for younger readers operating at widely-varying levels of sophistication.

Some works belonging to the second category of *imitative texts*, like Sutcliff’s *King Arthur Trilogy* (2007), draw on clearly-defined sources and attempt to maintain a quasi-medieval linguistic tone while considerably simplifying the complex language and plots characteristic of their originals. Thus Sutcliff’s description of Arthur’s departure for Avalon deliberately echoes Malory’s phrasing while standardising his spelling and softening the sad finality of the older work by replacing Arthur’s bleak assertion that he is no longer someone in whom to trust with a statement drawing on

popular legend to promise a messianic return. Similarly, Bedivere's grief is downplayed by the suggestion that he is behaving like a child left alone in the dark and the ghastly lamentations of Arthur's women are entirely omitted from the modern retelling, which simply allows the barge to disappear into a numinous mist never mentioned in the altogether starker source text as is shown in the parallel passages quoted below.

And Sir Bedivere cried out like a child left in the dark, "Oh, my Lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now that you go hence and leave me here alone?"

And the king opened his eyes and looked at him for the last time. "Comfort yourself and do the best that you may, for I must be gone into the Vale of Avalon, for the healing of my grievous wound. One day I will return, in time of Britain's sorest need, but even I know not when that day may be, save that it is afar off...But if you hear no more of me in the world of men, pray for my soul."

And the barge drifted on, into the white mist between the water and the moon. And the mist received it, and it was gone. (Sutcliff, 2007:635)

.....

Than Sir Bedwere cryed and seyde, "A, my lorde Arthur, what shall becom of me, now ye go frome me and leve me here alone amonge myne enemyes?"

"Comforte thyself," seyde the kynge, "and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in. For I muste into the vale of Avylyon to hele me of my grievous wounde. And if thou here nevermore of me, pray for my soule!"

But ever the queen and ladyes wepte and shryked, that it was pité to hyre. And as sone as sir Bedwere had loste the sight of the barge he wepte and wayled, and so toke the foreste and wente all that nyghte. (Malory, [1485] 1971:716)

Other imitative texts such as Sutcliff's *Sword at Sunset* (1987), Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* (1970) or Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1984) attempt

to blur the borders between history and fiction by removing the Arthurian story from its traditional medieval setting and recasting it in a much earlier and less chivalric time. Alarming, this endeavour is occasionally presented as an attempt to reclaim the 'truth' of Arthurian myth:

Sutcliff was the first author to take the story of Arthur and strip it down to create a novel as rooted as possible in the history of the time. The resulting novel is gripping and vibrant, a powerful and fresh interpretation of the Arthurian story. From the characters to the small historical details, Sutcliff uses a talent for accurate portrayal to produce a novel that leaves you convinced ... this *must* be the way events really occurred. (Eller, 2005:s.p.)

Such an assertion denies both the fact that any historical material underlying this mass of narrative is no more than a seed crystal hidden in and no longer distinguishable from subsequent layers of imaginative accretion and the understanding that, as Keith Jenkins (1995:51) reminds us, history itself is a 'narrative form in which historians construct and communicate their knowledge of the past as actually being the past's own...the only stories the past has are those conferred on it by historians' interpretative emplotments'.

Sometimes such imitative texts may incorporate a frame narrative whereby a child or a group of children travels through time to meet characters or observe events from Arthurian legend. So, in Michael Morpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain* (2010), a novel for younger children, a drowning boy finds himself pulled into a cave where Arthur waits to be summoned at the hour of need and there the aged but ageless king distracts himself from boredom by telling his young listener the story of his life. While the novel is otherwise unremarkable, it is worth noting that the boy's first response to seeing his rescuer is to ask if Arthur is God (Morpurgo, 2010:11). He does so because he assumes he has died, but the words also remind the reader of

Arthur's godlike status within the secular scripture of the Arthurian romance cycle. In Felicity Pulman's young adult novels, *Shalott* (2001) and *Return to Shalott* (2002), on the other hand, Callie uses her father's prototype virtual reality machine to travel back in time to Camelot. Pulman blithely disregards any quibbles about the historicity of legend while also suggesting that there are few if any real differences between present day teenagers and medieval figures; thus, when the youngsters return to the present, they discuss what they have learned and speak about a character, Magrit, whom they have had to leave behind. They remark that she is just like their contemporary, Meg. Meg then sings a song composed by Magrit and Callie observes to herself, 'the voice was Magrit's, singing Magrit's song. She was here with them in the workroom. And so was Meg' (Pulman, 2002:251). The novel's conclusion thus affirms that, as John Stephens (1992:203) points out, underlying many supposedly historical works for child readers is the idea that 'human desires are reasonably constant, and what differs are the social mechanisms evolved to express or contain them; individual experiences thus reflect constant, unchanging truths; history imparts "lessons" because events, in a substantial sense, are repeated and repeated'.

A very much more complex work, which nevertheless belongs to the same intertextual category of *imitative texts* is T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958) and its postmortem coda *The Book of Merlyn* (1977). In the four novels that make up *The Once and Future King*, White revisits Malory and creatively draws on his understanding of how Malory himself used and reshaped even earlier sources to produce a work which echoes not only Malory's plot but, by brilliant use of twentieth-century analogies, the latter's ahistorical tone and colloquial style as well. It is a world in which Guinever waits for Lancelot while brushing her grey hair and looking 'not like a film star, but like a woman who had grown a soul' (White, 1958:596), a world where carpets are 'a desperate and reprehensible luxury' (White, 1958:596) that the ever-humble Arthur always walks around and where Lancelot is able to abandon any

pretence of linguistic consistency by, in a single paragraph, calling his lover both ‘my sweet old Jenny’ and, in homage to Malory, my ‘most noble Christian Queen’ (White, 1958:602). These apparent anachronisms are thus not, in any real way, anachronisms at all in that White deliberately uses them as mechanisms of alienation to remind his readers constantly that his characters do not belong to chronological time but to an imaginative world that both floats free of and yet is inextricably bound to the reader’s lived reality.

This subtle understanding allows White a postmodern freedom to abandon linear narrative and blur distinctions between writer and text so that on the eve of his great battle against Mordred, Arthur finds a young boy, Tom of Newbold Revell (Malory’s own home), and orders him to leave the battlefield and live so that he can communicate to generations as yet unborn the ideals that have informed Arthur’s attempt to ‘set the world to rights’ (White, 1958:673). Similarly, at both the beginning and the end of White’s work, he abandons Malory entirely in order to allow Merlin to immerse Arthur in the natural world, a device through which White then explores various contemporary political ideals including the totalitarianism of an ants’ nest (White, 1977:76-98). Rather than simply retelling Malory’s story, White thus uses parody and fable to reshape his material into a moving denunciation of war itself. At the end of *The Book of Merlyn*, White, echoing Malory’s habit of writing *explicitis* at the end of each of *Le Morte Darthur*’s eight books, also writes himself into his text, saying:

Here ends the book of the Onetime King, written with much toil and effort between the years 1936 and 1942, when the nations were striving in fearful warfare. Here also begins – if perchance a man may in future time survive the pestilence and continue the task he has begun – the hope of the Future King. Pray for Thomas Malory, Knight, and his humble disciple, who now voluntarily lays aside his books to fight for his kind. (White, 1977:176)

Kevin Crossley-Holland's acclaimed *Arthur* trilogy shows a similar awareness of the role played by medieval writers in shaping contemporary awareness of a much earlier mythical corpus. However, by introducing a frame narrative that is quite as significant as the tale of King Arthur that is embedded within it, Crossley-Holland clearly shows that his trilogy, unlike White's, is at heart not an *imitative text* in Wilkie-Stibbs's phraseology but rather a *text of quotation* in which the source tale illumines another which carries as much or even more weight than the original.

The first volume of Crossley-Holland's *Arthur* trilogy, *Arthur: The Seeing Stone* (2001), won the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Award and the *Tir Na Nog* Award as well as being short-listed for the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year. In it we are introduced to thirteen-year-old Arthur de Caldicot, a boy growing up in a small manor on the Welsh Marches at the close of the twelfth century. Early in the novel, Merlin, a mysterious figure who lives on manor land, gives Arthur a flat, black piece of obsidian, claiming that from that moment until the day of his death, the boy 'will never own anything as precious as this' (Crossley-Holland, 2001:54). Arthur soon finds that at times the darkness of the stone clears, allowing him to watch and hear key scenes from Arthurian legend. From that moment until the end of the trilogy almost a thousand pages later, the twin narratives of Arthur and his royal namesake are intertwined in such a way that they interpenetrate and illuminate each other. Thus at the end of *The Seeing Stone*, Arthur learns that Sir John de Caldicot and his wife are not his real parents but have only fostered him. Like King Arthur, he then leaves his childhood behind and assumes his place in the world. In the second volume, *Arthur: At the Crossing Places* (2002), Arthur is taken on as a squire to the local overlord, Sir Stephen de Holt. While serving Sir Stephen, he learns that his mother, who was one of his father's tenants, still lives and that his father, Sir William de Gortenore, like

Uther Pendragon before him, took the woman he desired by force from her legal husband whom he then had killed. During this time Arthur also meets and is attracted to the flame-haired Winefred de Verdon just as King Arthur falls helplessly in love with Guinevere. At the end of *The Crossing Places*, Arthur and Sir Stephen travel to France to join the ill-fated fourth crusade just as King Arthur's Knights begin the quest for the Holy Grail. The third volume, *Arthur: King of the Middle March* (2003), follows Arthur, now formally betrothed to Winnie, to Venice and then across the Adriatic to Zara. As the crusaders succumb to violence and internal dissent so the Round Table too begins to disintegrate. Arthur, who is knighted in Venice, inadvertently kills his own father while attempting to rescue Sir Stephen from a violent attack. Sir Stephen's injuries then force them to abandon the crusade and return home. Here Arthur finds that Winnie is now in love with his best friend and half brother, Tom. Sadly he relinquishes her and returns the stone to Merlin but is cheered by the prospect of learning to manage Catmole, the manor he has inherited from his biological father:

Catmole. I'll remake it. My pillar. My cloud of dust and, within it, a grail of sunlight. After Venice, after the crusade: my own March Camelot.
(Crossley-Holland, 2002:362)

In some ways, the visions contained in the seeing stone become, in a book-starved twelfth-century context, an obvious metaphor for a far more contemporary reading experience. When Merlin first gives the stone to Arthur, the boy asks what it is for and Merlin replies "That depends on you The stone is not what I say it is. It's what you see in it" (Crossley-Holland, 2001:53). Meaning is thus not conferred by either authorial or wizardly intention but by a process of intertextual interaction in which, as Arthur observes:

What happens in my life and what happens inside the stone are often connected like sounds and echoes, or like my left and right eye which overlap but can each see more than the other. What I see in the stone sometimes seems like a promise, sometimes like a warning. (Crossley-Holland, 2002:219)

Interestingly, King Arthur's round table is presented in the trilogy as a giant lump of crystal. When twelfth-century Arthur looks closely at it he observes that its surface is a mass of tiny silver threads and this makes him think 'how everything in the world turns out to be connected, even if we don't realise it is at first' (Crossley-Holland, 2003:22). Similarly, the web of gossamer-fine connections between Arthur and his namesake shifts and remakes itself perpetually so that, while some correspondences are easily grasped and internalised, others are more difficult to unravel. For instance, Arthur clearly identifies with his royal namesake, thinking, 'I'm not Arthur-in-the-stone, but I know I'm seeing part of my own story' (Crossley-Holland, 2002:130), yet, in the dark days of the final volume, there seems to be a suggestion that his involvement in his own father's death shadows Mordred's betrayal of the King. Similarly, Tom and Winnie's love is perceived by Arthur as a betrayal but, movingly, also as an inevitable result of the gulf of experience which now separates them from him so that they become emblems of unfallen innocence rather than of corrupted loyalties. Arthur's observation of them in the manor orchard thus incorporates a biblical reference that becomes an oblique gloss also on the behaviour of Malory's King Arthur, who is often a shadowy onlooker seemingly aware of his wife's betrayal but also unwilling to act against either her or her lover:

They were so free. So...at ease. They don't know how people tear each other to pieces. They haven't smelled death. They don't have nightmares that ride you when you sleep.

Winnie and Tom: they looked so young!

I wished I could be like them.

I wished I could just go away.

Tom was Adam and Winnie was Eve and I was the apple of the knowledge of good and evil, and I thought if only I could go away, and not trouble them with love and pain and guilt, they could stay in the orchard blind and innocent and delighted, and live forever. (Crossley-Holland, 2003:335-336)

Crucially, Arthur is given the stone when, at thirteen, he himself is about to throw off the innocence of childhood and will need to quest for what, as has been indicated earlier, Bettelheim ([1976] 1991:1) calls the greatest human 'need and most difficult achievement', the finding of meaning in life. As the Merlin-in-the-stone observes, "Each of us needs a quest And a person without one is lost to himself" (Crossley-Holland, 2001:155).

Throughout the trilogy, the transitional and liminal qualities of adolescence are emphasised by the recurrent image of crossing places. Merlin asks Arthur if he has ever thought of crossing places such as fords and the foreshore and draws his attention to the horizon where

"... England ends and Wales begins."

"It's trembling," I said.

"Exactly," said Merlin. "Between-places are never quite certain of themselves. Think of dusk, between day and night. It's blue and unsure." (Crossley-Holland, 2001:52)

Later, Arthur comes to understand that he is also in a liminal space, saying:

“I’m between my child-self and my man-self. My squire-self and knight-self. Between Caldicot and Gortanore...Between my life here and the world of the stone I’m at the crossing places,” I said.

“On a quest,” Merlin replied, “is there anywhere else to be?”
(Crossley-Holland, 2002:191)

In some ways, Arthur mirrors the obsidian which he comes to appreciate is also ‘a kind of between-place: between me and everything I can see in it’ (Crossley-Holland, 2001:131). Similarly, Arthur’s story becomes for the twenty-first century adolescent reader a between-place in various ways. Like the piece of obsidian, the book as an object stands between the reader and what unfolds on its pages, but Arthur and his minutely-detailed twelfth-century life also become a crossing-place into Arthurian myth with all its archaic mysteries and alien symbols. As Arthur learns more about the world in the stone, he finds his new knowledge provokes difficult questions about knightly obligations, social organisation, the relationships between the sexes and the extent of filial obligations while also suggesting sometimes uncomfortable answers to them. Just so, a contemporary reader may find himself or herself responding not only to the world of Arthur-in-the-stone but also to that of Arthur-in-the book, seeing in both figures part of his or her own story.

The metanarrative awareness infusing the *Arthur* trilogy may initially appear too sophisticated for younger readers to grasp but Crossley-Holland subtly develops the responses he needs by constantly foregrounding the nature and functions of the words he uses. He is aided in this by the fact that Arthur is himself a writer who secretly records the details of his life while supposedly copying out the scriptures to improve his handwriting. He also has a talent for poetry and produces brief lyrics on everything from his foster-sister’s wildness (Crossley-Holland, 2001:136) to Winnie’s beauty (Crossley-Holland, 2003:40), all the time foregrounding the power of language as well as its ability to convey otherwise unparaphrasable emotions. The link

between art and life is also wordlessly captured by the tapestry Lord Stephen's wife continually works on, showing all the events of her husband's life. Looking at it one day, Arthur finds himself represented in it and is then pointedly told by Lady Judith that he is 'part of the story already' (Crossley-Holland, 2002:65).

The trilogy continually resounds with other intertextual references too as fragments of charms, incantations, festival songs and medieval lyrics infuse its events with layers of associations which Crossley-Holland appears to suggest may, like Arthurian myth itself, carry profound meaning even when their full import is not rationally grasped.

Thus every year at Easter, Lord Stephen both attends a sunrise mass and dedicates the Easter hare to the pagan goddess of spring, saying, "Eostre, Eostre, this is your hare,/ Keep us all in your green care" (Crossley-Holland, 2002:164). When questioned he admits that he does not know who Eostre is, but that the lines have always been said before eating the traditional hare-pie and that continuing to repeat them is important in that it links him not only to his grandfather but to all the generations that have preceded him. Towards the end of *At the Crossing Places*, Arthur is taken to the scriptorium at Wenlock where he sees monastic copyists at work on ancient texts. However, he subsequently also meets there Lady Marie de Meulan, a French writer, who points out that old stories are not only for preserving but can and should also be given new significance by being creatively remade:

"I've never met anyone who makes her own stories," I said.

"I build them from old Breton ones," Lady Marie replied. "I reshape them like clay. So that they say what I want them to say." (Crossley-Holland, 2002:292)

By both living and creatively shaping his own story in relation to that of King Arthur, the medieval Arthur gradually grows to adulthood. By the time King Arthur is borne

away to Avalon, his young auditor can respond appropriately to Crossley-Holland's version of the dying king's parting words to Bedivere, "I can no longer help you You must trust in yourself" (Crossley-Holland, 2003:374). He can do this because the stone has encouraged him to find the meaning for which we all search and therefore to emerge strong and clearly-defined from the shimmering uncertainties of the crossing-place that is adolescence:

Sister Cika told me Saracens and Jews believe a person who saves the life of another saves the whole world. I believe that too.

I believe that each of us can make a difference.

It's people like Wido and Godard and Giff, following each other like cattle, never questioning, never thinking for themselves, becoming numb to bloodshed and other people's pain, who turn our world into a wasteland.

Sir John's right. Each person does have his own position, her own duties – in a family, a manor, a kingdom. But what I want at Catmole is one fellowship. One ring of trust. I want everyone in the manor to know we all need each other and each one of us makes a difference

My stone! My seeing stone!

I've seen in it my own thoughts and feelings. All I hope to be; all I must never be. (Crossley-Holland, 2003:381-382)

Whether the contemporary reader will have had a similar experience, one cannot know. As Merlin observes, at the beginning of *The Seeing Stone*:

"It's right to hear the old stories," said Merlin, "and to learn from ancient books. But what use is knowledge? It's dry as dead leaves; it's no use at all unless you're ready for it." (Crossley-Holland, 2001:94)

However, the possibility that contemporary Arthurs may indeed be ready for Crossley-Holland's version of this enduring story is clearly hinted at when Merlin

takes back the stone at the end of *King of the Middle March*, saying to Arthur as he does so,

“[The stone] is yours ... Its story will never end in you, will it?
But there’s always someone else just ready for this stone.” (Crossley-
Holland, 2003:386)

In many ways, White and Crossley-Holland have both written crossing-place texts, works which, to some extent, bridge the division between what Wilkie-Stibbs (1999:170) calls *imitative texts* and those she defines as *texts of quotation*, which, in this case, are novels that do not simply paraphrase earlier source texts but instead use contemporary stories to allude to such precursor texts in order subtly to enrich the reader’s consciousness and understanding of both.

Some of these texts, like Lloyd Alexander’s *Chronicles of Prydain*, published from 1964 to 1968, create fully realised secondary worlds which allude to Arthurian myth but are not intended to evoke our own world except tangentially. Thus Alexander’s Prydain is presented as a country existing only in the imagination, yet within it we find the figure of Taran, a foundling raised by a wizard, who becomes first a pig-keeper and finally High King not by the right of birth but simply by his own heroism so that, as Ann Swinfen (1984:84) has observed, he becomes a kind ‘of Arthur in reverse’. More interesting for the purposes of this chapter, though, is the kind of intertextual reading demanded by narratives in which recognisably modern characters find themselves re-enacting Arthurian stories albeit in very different contexts. For example, in *Avalon High* (2006), Meg Cabot places her heroine, Ellie, in a school outside Washington DC where she soon meets the charismatic A. William Wagner, his cute cheerleader girlfriend, Jennifer Gold, and his best friend, a hunky footballer

unsurprisingly named Lance. The Arthurian cast list is completed by Mr Morton, the World Lit. teacher, who plays the part of Merlin, and Will's psychopathic stepbrother, Marco, who does duty as Mordred. Mr Morton explains to Ellie that the Arthurian tragedy plays itself out over and over again and cannot be changed:

The battle for Arthur between the Light and the Dark has gone on for centuries. Evil won't stand for any interference from the Light. It will throw insurmountable obstacles in our path – deadly obstacles. Mordred with the help of the dark side will find a way to kill his brother. (Cabot, 2006:203)

Fortunately for all concerned, the generic norms of the high school love story are as insistent as those of romance itself on the importance of a happy ending. Ellie, who is passionately in love with Will, finds out just in time that she is not the reincarnation of Elaine of Astolat, but rather the embodiment of the Lady of the Lake, as her long sessions in the swimming pool should presumably have indicated to readers alert to Cabot's Arthurian subtext. Ellie then gives Will a sword with which he successfully defends himself and, in the last pages of the novel, falls into his arms and persuades him that the apparent links between his story and Arthur's have all been entirely coincidental:

"I'm not saying I believe it. What Morton said. Not all of it, anyway. But some of it – like how I knew you. That very first day ... when you smiled at me. I'd never met you before but I still ... I knew you."

"You just wanted to know me," I said, giving him a squeeze. "Because I'm so cute and everything." (Cabot, 2006:279)

Other teenage novels use this trope of re-enactment considerably more subtly and creatively, often focusing on secondary Arthurian characters rather than the king

himself. For instance Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* ([1967] 2002), which won both the *Guardian Award* and the Carnegie medal, uses British teenagers to express the myth of Blodeuwedd, whose story is recorded with other early Arthurian material in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion*. The hero of this particular myth is Lleu Llaw Gyffes, whose divine mother has cast a spell on him to prevent him ever taking a human wife. Lleu's father Gwydion and another magician, Math, take pity on him and conjure him a wife from flowers, naming her Blodeuwedd or flower face. She then betrays her husband with Gronw Pebr, the lord of Penllyn. The lovers conspire to kill Lleu but he escapes and the enraged Gwydion turns Blodeuwedd into an owl, a creature hated by all other birds. Gronw begs for mercy but is told that he must accept a blow from Lleu's spear. He agrees, provided that he can shelter behind a large boulder. However, the enraged Lleu throws the spear with such strength that it pierces the stone and kills his rival (Gantz, 1977:110-117).

In Garner's novel, Alison and her stepbrother, Roger, are holidaying in Wales in a house inherited from Alison's biological father. The property is staffed by Huw, a handyman and gardener, and Nancy, the housekeeper. Nancy's teenage son, Gwyn, finds a curious dinner service in the attic after Alison has complained of hearing scratching noises there. Alison immediately begins obsessively tracing the patterns on the plates to use as templates for paper owls. Frighteningly, the pattern vanishes from each plate as soon as she has traced it and the family also uncover a disturbing mural showing a woman made of flowers behind the pebble-dash in the billiard room. Tensions between the two boys increase as Alison begins to spend more time with Gwyn, whom Roger then taunts with his working class origins. Gwyn also learns that Alison's mother is not happy with the friendship and has threatened to deprive Alison of her tennis club subscription if she has anything more to do with him. Sickened by Alison's unwillingness to oppose her mother, Gwyn tries to escape from the valley only to be stopped by Huw, who explains that the three teenagers are trapped in a

re-enactment of the myth of Blodeuwedd just as he himself once was. He then confesses that he is Gwyn's biological father and that, a generation before, he caused the death of Bertram, a cousin of Alison's father, because he feared losing Gwyn's mother to him. When they return to the house, Alison collapses and Huw begs Gwyn to comfort her, but he is too full of resentment and hurt to do so even after Roger has abased himself and also pleaded with Gwyn to save her:

The back of his head and all his spine were hollow. There was bile in his throat. He could do nothing to answer the words. He could only shore his mind against them, because if he did not he would be spilled by the bitter dark. (Garner, [1967] 2002:223)

In a startling reversal, it is Roger, who has, until this point, appeared utterly prejudiced and unlikeable, who is now able to reach beyond his own hurt and feel pity for Huw and Gwyn, whom he describes as 'poor devils' (Garner, [1967] 2002:223). Turning to Alison he murmurs gently, "You've got it back to front ... She's not owls. She's flowers. Flowers. Flowers, Ali" (Garner, [1967] 2002:223)). In response to this act of love and compassion, Alison's breathing eases and the room is miraculously filled with falling wildflowers.

In *The Owl Service*, Garner reveals what John Rowe Townsend (1990:222) calls 'his gift for absorbing old tales and retransmitting them with increased power, a new grasp of the inward, emotional content of an incident or situation'. Because of this, he does not simply use the re-enactment of the myth to shape his plot but, unlike Cabot, also carefully explores the psychological impact of both possession and betrayal on his young protagonists. In a moving incident, Alison, whose fragile personality is beginning to disintegrate, looks out of her window and sees her reflection in the stone fish tank:

The brightness destroyed the image of the house so all she saw was her own face. I'm up here and down there, thought Alison. Which is me? Am I the reflection in the window of me down there? (Garner, [1967] 2002:119)

Later when Gwyn tries to prove to her that she could not have seen her own reflection at that distance but must have been looking at the face of Blodeuwedd, she panics, crying out desperately, “It must have been me reflected in the glass – in the window. Help me, Gwyn” (Garner, [1967] 2002:135). In her terror, she returns to the idea that her reflection in the window was in some way created not by her physical body in the room but by what she perceives as her real presence in the water, showing that she is gradually losing the little sense of self she possesses.

In some ways, the idea that the three protagonists are being possessed by others becomes a symbol of their adolescent struggle to break free of their controlling parents who constrain their actions quite as much as do their literary doppelgängers. Allison's desire to be flowers rather than owls effectively mirrors her more contemporary dilemma about whether to conform to her mother's social expectations or break free of them to forge an identity of her own. Like her, Gwyn is also attempting to resist his mother's predictions that he will end up working in the Co-op and is therefore trying to teach himself to speak better in an attempt to shake off his social origins. Roger learns about this from Alison and taunts Gwyn by asking if “he is using the complete Improve-a-Prole set, or the shorter course of Oik's Exercises for getting by in the Shop” (Garner, [1967] 2002:172). Ironically, Roger himself is tormented by his own mother's infidelity and lower class origins. He is also a talented photographer but resists Alison's suggestion that he might make a profession of it, claiming first that he might not be good enough and then that he would not earn

enough from it before finally admitting that he is afraid of challenging his father's plans for him (Garner, [1967] 2002:162-163).

Garner attempts to explain the fact that young people in the Welsh valley play out the tale of Blodeuwedd in every generation by suggesting that the neutral power harnessed by the magicians who created the flower-wife in the first place was itself warped by contact with humans:

"It got out of hand because it wasn't neutral any more. There was a brain behind it. Do you follow? Neutral like a battery, I mean. You can use it to explode a bomb or fry an egg: it depends on you." (Garner, [1967] 2002:141)

By suggesting that it is human will rather than supernatural agency that is responsible for their predicament, Gwyn suggests that human will is also all that is required to break free of it. This is also implied when, at one stage in the novel, Alison describes the valley to Gwyn as 'sick', saying,

"Tumbledown buildings: rough land. I saw two dead sheep on the way up the track. Even poor old Clive can't catch a tiddler." (Garner, [1967] 2002:143)

Butler (2006:155) sees in this description a shadowy evocation of the Waste Land with Clive 'playing the emasculated part of Fisher King'. If one accepts this, then when Gwyn takes a token from the tree shown to him by Huw, in which each vessel of Llew has left something for his successors, he effectively subordinates his will to tradition and convention, linking himself also to a long line of unsuccessful Grail quests and therefore remaining trapped in an antagonistic and destructive relationship with the present. He returns to the house to insist, like Llew, on his right

to revenge but, unlike Gronw, Roger bears the verbal attack without any attempt to protect himself and by this act of willed submission rejects the forces of both social convention and heroic narrative so that both he and Alison can be redeemed and set free by love. Butler (2006:74-75) argues that the novel can be read as

...a hermeneutic contest between two different interpretations of the patterns on the plates.... In order to help [Alison] see the pattern as flowers and thus avert tragedy, Roger needs to do more than make a rational choice. He must change *himself* through sacrifice and pity, into a person who is able to see flowers and, by seeing, make them real for his step-sister.

In some ways, the conclusion of this novel therefore anticipates the end of Garner's subsequent novel *Red Shift* (1973) in which, as has been discussed, Jan also resists social and narrative pressures to break free from her destructive relationship with Tom (cf. pp.101-102). In order to read the story properly one is thus forced to acknowledge both the power of its shaping myth and the contemporary desires and dilemmas of the young protagonists who may choose to conform to or resist the narrative surges threatening to engulf them. It is in the tension between these two forces that myth can be remade. As Butler (2006:86) observes,

[i]n Garner's conception of myth our two ways of describing what happens in *The Owl Service* are not alternatives so much as different aspects of the same complex of facts, and are irreducibly interdependent. When myth works, it works through concrete images, not abstract concepts – that is, through *story*. For its part, however, the story can achieve universal rather than particular significance only insofar as it partakes of the myth.

Catherine Fisher's *Corbenic* (2002) is yet another work that falls into Wilkie-Stibbs's third category, *texts of quotation*, in that, while, like *The Owl Service*, it employs a number of romance conventions including simplified supporting characters, a strong quest motif involving psychological development and complex manipulations of both time and space, it also does not simply retell an Arthurian story or stories, but instead takes the form of a very contemporary novel that nevertheless consciously alludes to Arthurian myth in both direct and subtle ways.

The reader is quickly alerted to the work's dialogic relationship with the story of the Holy Grail by the way in which Arthurian links are foregrounded even in the book's cover design, which shows a grey and white image of a blasted tree and a ruined castle outlined against a stormy sky. The novel's title and the name of the author appear below the image while the prominent position at the top of the page is taken by a black ribbon reading 'DEFINITIONS: CORBENIC (k rb3n k) n. the castle of the Grail Kings'. An initial acknowledgements page also states that the epigraphs at the head of each chapter are taken from a number of Arthurian texts including *Perceval: The Story of the Grail* and *The Mabinogion*. Furthermore, the opening line of the novel, 'Who drinks from the Grail?' (Fisher, 2002:1), alludes quite directly to the Grail story though the question is quickly dismissed as a dream fragment evoked by the drowsy central character's subliminal awareness of the arrival of a refreshment trolley beside his train seat. An utterly mundane conversation follows as the central character, Cal, orders a cup of tea and a small packet of biscuits. This quickly and even a little unsettlingly changes the mood by unequivocally establishing the modernity of the setting thus countering the generic expectations promoted by the novel's cover.

In fact, Arthurian allusions aside, the novel can be read as a fairly standard coming of age tale focused on the experiences of Cal, who has just completed his schooling.

He is the only child of an alcoholic and unstable mother and has always dreamed of making an ordered and materially comfortable life for himself. In the opening chapter, he is travelling from Bangor, where he has grown up, to Chepstow to live with his uncle, Trevor, who has offered him accommodation and a job in his accounting firm. While he is in Chepstow, Cal is mugged and then rescued from his attackers by Shadow and Hawk, both of whom belong to a group that specialises in re-enacting medieval battles. Despite his uncle's disapproval of what his girlfriend Thérèse describes as Cal's 'New Age friends' (Fisher, 2002:124), Cal, who is beginning to realise that accountancy bores him, finds himself spending more and more time with Hawk's company, which is led by the suggestively named Arthur and his sophisticated seneschal, Kai. When Cal realises that Shadow is actually Sophie Lewis, a schoolgirl who has run away from a wealthy family in Bath, he is unable to accept her rejection of the kind of life for which he has always yearned and notifies the police of her whereabouts. Throughout this period, Cal is regularly contacted by his mother, who is undergoing therapy and begs him to return home for Christmas. At the last moment, Cal lets her down and she dies after taking a possibly deliberate overdose of pills. After her funeral, Cal wanders the countryside driven almost mad by grief and guilt. Following an unexpected encounter with a mysterious homeless man, Merlin, whom he has previously met among Arthur's company, Cal seeks out Shadow and apologises. However, he then runs away again when he hears her speaking on the phone to his uncle. In the final pages of the novel, Cal reaches Glastonbury where he almost drowns. Hawk and Kai revive him and the book ends with a final brief chapter in which Fisher suggests that Cal has been healed of his psychic wounds thus evoking the resurrection meme so typical of romance happy endings.

Stripped to its essentials, then, Cal's story is an utterly modern one set largely in the grimy and graffiti-bedaubed streets of twenty-first-century Wales. Cal's most

treasured possessions are his Walkman and a pale grey silk tie, both of which conjure up the only alternative world he is able to envisage, a world summed up by his uncle's sterile home:

This was it. This was what he'd dreamed of. There were a few magazines at home, glossy, *Homes and Gardens*. His mother had kept them; sometimes, on her good days, she'd get them out and sit there, among all the mess, flicking the pages, smoking non-stop. "One day, Cal" she'd say, over the exquisitely tasteful rooms. "One day this'll be us." Maybe when he was a kid he had believed her. But not now. Not for years.

Yet here it was. Sofas of the softest cream leather, paintings, delicate curtains, big arty-looking vases. A huge, open-plan room, nothing out of place. Warm. Clean. His uncle's computer on an ebony desk. Television. State-of-the-art sound system. Leatherbound books, all matching. He even felt classier as he looked at it. (Fisher, 2002:38)

Yet behind the contemporary veneer, Fisher gradually establishes a romance world of dream and shadow and it is the resonances of this mysterious complex which gradually transform Cal's story into an intricate reworking of the Grail legend.

One evening, Cal asks Trevor who Percival was and his uncle's succinct reply neatly encapsulates the similarities between the medieval knight and the contemporary youth: "He left his mother behind and went off to be a knight" (Fisher, 2002:105).

The parallels between the two stories are also implicit in the activities and names of the members of the company and made rather more explicit in a number of elusive sequences which may or may not reflect dream visions. The first of these occurs when Cal jerks awake on his train, convinced that he has reached his destination.

Disembarking in haste, he finds himself stranded at a small rural halt named Corbenic, the name of the traditional castle of the Grail kings. Despairing of catching another train that night, he leaves the station to search for shelter and meets two

fishermen who direct him up a hill to what they call “the Castle” (Fisher, 2002:8). Seeing a sign for The Castle Hotel, Corbenic, he goes through a gate into a garden which makes him ‘remember a picture in a book he’d seen when he was small’ (Fisher, 2002:11). This phrase subtly evokes an awareness of intertextuality that readers will need as they follow Cal into an overtly literary and mythical world.

On entering the building through a door wittily decorated with stained glass panels showing knights and horses (Fisher, 2002:12), Cal is given a room which combines the amenities of a luxury hotel including a huge bath and a little iron (Fisher, 2002:17) with discordant details such as a porter wearing a robe trimmed with fur and a hot sweetish drink made with lemons in lieu of a mini-bar (Fisher, 2002:16-18). When he goes down for dinner he finds himself joining a crowd of men and women in evening dress and is then seated beside Bron, one of the men whom he saw fishing earlier (Fisher, 2002:23). At the end of the feast, the music stops and a boy enters carrying a bleeding spear. He is followed by two boys holding candles and then by a girl holding a battered cup that burns and quivers in her hands (Fisher, 2002:26-27). As she passes through the room, Cal is almost overwhelmed by feelings of transcendent joy. When music and festivity are restored, Bron turns eagerly to Cal and begs the boy to ask him about what they have just seen but Cal, terrified that he has just experienced a psychotic episode like those his mother endures, denies the vision and replies flatly, “*I didn’t see a thing*” (Fisher, 2002:27, italics original). When he wakes the next morning he finds himself lying on a grey mattress in an abandoned building. The only concrete evidence that the experiences of the previous evening may have been real is a narrow and wickedly sharp sword thrust through his pillow (Fisher, 2002:29-31).

The episode described above haunts Cal throughout the book. Hawk never questions that it was real but Shadow is more cautious about it, saying only:

“I think you stayed the night at some hotel. That you saw ... some people carrying things. It must have been a bit odd.”

“A bit odd!” Aghast he stood up and stared down at her. “I thought you at least would understand.”

Shadow bit a nail. “It’s like Hawk. He thought he was someone from the past. They all had this game, that they were immortals. I never knew if they were winding me up. Then I thought, they believe this. So I believed it. If you believe something hard enough, it comes true. In a way. What he said to you about the Grail is just another old story.”

He came and sat down. “You think I’m going the way my mother did.”

“I think you’re looking for something that’s not here.” (Fisher, 2002:193-194)

Shadow’s final comment points to the thematic core of Fisher’s novel. Cal is living in an emotional Waste Land and is looking for a redemptive grace that is certainly not to be found in the materialistic desert he inhabits.

Apart from his initial fully-realised vision of Corbenic, Cal is granted only fleeting glimpses of the Grail world and characters until the book’s conclusion and this means that the narrative mode shifts restlessly between mimetic realism and its fantastic alternative. The precarious balance between these mirrors all the divisions between action and reflection, dream and reality, order and chaos that polarise the human condition. Cal painfully learns that it is not possible to deny either mode or that, if one does, the result is pain and sterility. As even Shadow finally observes:

“There are two sorts of life aren’t there? The one that seems ordinary, like this and then the reflection from it. Curved, shiny. All mixed up.” (Fisher, 2002:195)

One of the ways by which the dream vision is maintained is through a recording of *Parsifal* that Cal is forced to buy to avoid being charged with shoplifting. The scene in which he acquires this disc blends his two worlds in a way which fails to offer reconciliation but instead distorts both. Cal is in a department store when he thinks he sees the Grail Maiden. Chasing after her, he stumbles into the kitchenware department where he stares at

... her face, twisted in the shiny handle of a kettle. In milk jugs and sugar basins she watched him, seeming young and then old, warping and changing, her hair fair, like his mother's. "Have you any idea what you've done?" her lips breathed, clouding metal. (Fisher, 2002:50)

The link between the Grail Maiden and Cal's mother is a significant one. In the story of Percival the emphasis falls on the youth's knightly adventures rather than on his abandonment of his mother. Fisher changes the focus so that in Cal's tale it becomes clear that, until he accepts responsibility for and learns to forgive himself for his act of filial betrayal, he will never accomplish his quest. For this reason too, Fisher equates Cal's mother with the Grail. When Cal is allowed to see the Grail procession for the second time, he recognises its bearer:

She was younger, his age. Before the nightmare, the drink, before everything had gone wrong with her. She was young and calm and strong, and she carried the vessel without fear. (Fisher, 2002:216)

Cups and bowls are traditional emblems of the feminine and if one reads the Grail as being archetypally associated with rebirth then it seems apt that Cal's mother should carry it, thus allowing it to become a symbol not only of what she is lacking but of what is missing in her son's world too. Interestingly, Fisher uses this transfiguration of Cal's mother to blur the romance dichotomy set up by Frye ([1957] 1971) between the hero and his enemy. Both Cal and his mother are initially associated 'with winter,

darkness, confusion, sterility, [and] moribund life' yet finally both become emblematic of spring, dawn order, fertility, vigor and youth' (1976:187-188). In a sense, the redemptive blood of Christ, which was contained by the original Grail, is replaced by more biological forces of regeneration since Cal himself was once contained and borne in the miraculous cup of his mother's womb. The bond between Cal and his mother is also emphasised when Cal meets Merlin in the Chapel Perilous and is told that his mother follows him like a shadow:

" She is your shadow. She's a dog at your heels, I know ... You wish it to be too late, but it is not. It never is."

"I hate her."

Merlin laughed, tossing the stick down. "Not so. You have forgotten how to love. That's a different sorrow." (Fisher, 2002:175)

Merlin then helps Cal to descend into a fevered dream world, the dark and womb-like cauldron of his own unconscious,⁵³ to face the rage and hurt binding him to the past and preventing him from finding any path out of the emotional Waste Land that traps him.

Both Percival and Cal thus first betray their mothers and then the Fisher King of Corbenic since both initially fail to ask the questions needed to heal the Waste Land. Other parallels between the two would be readily apparent to any teenager willing to Google the Grail legend. For instance, when Percival arrives at Arthur's court, he begs to be knighted but is told by Arthur that he first has much to learn. He then

⁵³ Curiously, Cal therefore undergoes a coming-of-age ritual that echoes the feminine pattern defined by Annis Pratt (1982:139-143) rather than the more conventional male pattern of displacement, transformation and return analysed by Propp (1979:87). Fisher may be suggesting that standard heroic patterns, which require the repression of traditionally feminine qualities such as intuition and self-awareness, are no longer entirely appropriate within a contemporary environment.

gains his armour by defeating and killing the famous Red Knight. Similarly, when Cal asks to become a fully-fledged member of the company and fight in the Christmas display, he is told that he can only do so after challenging one of the other knights to a real fight with real weapons (Fisher, 2002:112). Cal challenges Kai, whose Armani jacket and suave manners represent all he desires. Though he does not defeat the older knight, he acquits himself well. Like Percival, Cal is given a sword before leaving Corbenic. Percival's sword breaks the first time he uses it, but is later made whole. In the same way, Cal's sword shatters when Arthur asks him to swear on it that he has no dishonour in his heart (Fisher, 2002:137), but is later restored to wholeness by his mother. When Percival returns safely to Arthur's court, a three-day feast is declared in his honour. However, at this feast, a hideous woman appears who publicly attacks him and lists his failings, chief of which is the failure to ask the healing questions required by the Fisher King. Similarly, after Cal's sword snaps, a grotesquely aged version of the Grail Maiden appears and attacks him, claiming that he cannot make a new life on the ruins of the old and that until he returns to his mother and heals himself, he will never be able to return to Corbenic. Both Percival and Cal then commit themselves to finding the castle again. Percival searches for twenty painful years. In chronological time, Cal wanders the wilderness for three months but we feel that subjectively the time has been much longer. Certainly, when he tells Merlin that he has walked for three days in the Waste Land, the wizard replies, "If you say so. Maybe much longer. Maybe years" (Fisher, 2002:175). This Easter encounter with Merlin similarly parallels Percival's Easter visit to the forest hermit, who, after hearing his confession, reveals the way to the Grail castle. Significantly, it is Merlin in hermit guise who tells Cal to go to Glastonbury where he tumbles down the tor and throws himself into the dark lake around the Abbey only to be pulled from it, whether in reality or dream, by Leo, Bron's giant fisherman. Leo takes Cal back to the ruins of Corbenic where he finds only decay and the ghostly figure of his mother. By an act of will he recreates the ruined staircase that separates

them and knows, as he does so, that he has let go of his anger, 'that he had made the world be as he wanted it to be, because the world was inside him' (Fisher, 2002:213-214). Together he and his mother fit the pieces of his broken sword together and he then moves into the restored banqueting hall where he, again like Percival, can then ask the question which needs no reply since the willingness to embrace the Grail mystery is itself all that is needed to heal the land, its king and, in the case of Fisher's novel, the questioner himself.

The links between Percival and Cal are thus multiple and complex. It is even hinted that Percival may be Cal's real name. After their battle, Kai tells Cal that as a member of the company he will now have to choose a new name from the old stories before commenting wryly, "Though Merlin says you've already got one" (Fisher, 2002:120).

More intriguingly, Cal, unlike Percival, is also identified with the Fisher King. After his mother's neighbour, Sal, calls him to tell him how much his mother is depending on his return at Christmas, he dreams that he is sitting in a golden chair in the wreckage of the banqueting hall at Corbenic and has been there so long that he is covered in ivy. As he pulls the ivy suckers from his body, he tries to rise but cannot:

Pain shot through him. It seared him, like a spear thrust. Like a heart attack. Tears blinded his eyes; he felt sick, and then the intensity of it ebbed and it was a dull, endless ache down every channel of his body, every vein. And looking down he saw that the chair had wheels.

There was a mirror. Dim, green-smeared, it showed him the room and the place where the door had been, the door the Grail had passed through, the door that didn't exist, and it showed him a man and that man was him.

"*Bron?*" he whispered. And the lips of the man in the mirror whispered it too. (Fisher, 2002:109-110)

Cal thus shows the reader that the achievement of meaning is an internal process, a psychic rather than an external quest. By shaking the narrative loose from precise time and space, Fisher allows the reader to join Cal in achieving Tolkien's recovery of the familiar. Her identification of Cal with both a redeeming knight and a redeemed king, thus elegantly re-visions the Grail myth, stripping it of overt Christian symbolism and using it instead to emphasise the importance of the Arthurian story to the contemporary world. As Kai says when Cal asks him why Arthur and his men are not sleeping in a cave until they are needed:

“Ah, the dear old cave. Trouble with that was people always need us. They need someone to fight their nightmares for them, the dragons, the black knights. They need dreams to dream, quests to follow. Or they get trapped in the world like you.” (Fisher, 2002:120)

Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence ([1965-1977] 1984) also seems, at least initially, to use the Grail legend and the greater Arthurian cycle to show that the contemporary world is in desperate need of traditional romance heroes who can offer it both physical and spiritual deliverance. Like Garner and Fisher, she too places adolescents at the heart of her allusive texts, recognising perhaps that, as she herself has said, 'fantasy is a metaphor through which we discover ourselves' (Cooper, 1984:282). The series begins unpromisingly with *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965) which Swinfen (1984:142) has described as 'a light-weight novel with many flaws'. In it, the three Drew siblings, Simon, Jane and Barney, holiday in Cornwall with their parents and honorary great-uncle, the mysterious Merriman Lyon. During the holiday they find themselves confronting the forces of the Dark in a race to recover an ancient chalice which although it is not the Grail of legend has a numinous significance. Nikolajeva (1996:157), for instance, links it to the grail as it is

found in 'Welsh mythology in the form of the Horn of Plenty together with a sword, a lance and a jewel of wisdom'. It is, of course, these treasures that feature so prominently in Alan Garner's *Elidor* ([1965] 1980).

Interestingly, even Cooper's apparently straightforward children's adventure, complete with a clever dog, a treasure map and plenty of splendid picnics, anticipates some of the complexity of its successors by deliberately manipulating the generic expectations of its readers. On the second page of the novel, Great-uncle Merry welcomes the children to Cornwall with the words:

"Now you're in Cornwall. The real Cornwall. Logres is before you."....

"What's he mean, Logres?" demanded Jane....

"He means the land of the West," Barney said unexpectedly..."It's the old name for Cornwall. King Arthur's name."

Simon groaned. "I might have known."

Ever since he had learned to read, Barney's greatest heroes had been King Arthur and his knights. In his dreams he fought imaginary battles as a member of the Round Table, rescuing fair ladies and slaying false knights. He had been longing to come to the West Country; it gave him a strange feeling that he would in some way be coming home. (Cooper, [1965] 1984:12)

Barney's devotion to Arthurian myth serves a double function by both foregrounding the Arthurian story underlying the detective story mode of the novel's opening chapters and functioning as a conduit of information for readers unfamiliar with this intertextual influence. Simon's outspoken amusement at his younger brother's obsession also cleverly allows Cooper to evade the psychological barriers which older children sometimes erect against material they believe they have outgrown. Thus, by the end of the book, even those readers who might have developed a

negative generic awareness of romance, may well find that their confident initial expectations that the novel will treat romance memes only satirically have not been realised and that, instead, it is they who are beginning to share Barney's interest in 'the Pendragon' and the ongoing struggle against the forces of the Dark.

After almost eight years, Cooper returned to her sequence with *The Dark is Rising* (1973), which Swinfen (1984:142) describes as 'a remarkable advance over the first book'. In this volume, Will Stanton turns eleven and discovers that he is not an ordinary human but the last to be born of the Old Ones, magical guardians and servants of the Light of whom Merriman Lyon/ Mer Lyon/ Merlin is the first. Will's quest is to recover the six elemental signs of the Light: mandala shapes made of iron, bronze, wood, stone, fire and water. The action takes place over the time of the winter solstice stretching from Midwinter's eve until twelfth night and Cooper, rather like Crossley-Holland, combines the festival of Christmas with various pagan Midwinter rites and elements of British folklore to bring added significance to Will's struggle, which is presented to some extent as simply a more complex version of that faced by all adolescents needing to come to terms with their newly-revealed adult selves. After reading the Book of Gramarye, for instance, Will sits for a while simply staring at it: 'To know so much, now, to be able to do so many things; it should have excited him, but he felt weighed down, melancholy at the thought of all that had been and all that was to come' (Cooper, [1973] 1984:257).

Greenwitch (1974), which soon followed *The Dark is Rising*, unites Will and the Drew children of *Over Sea, Under Stone* in an attempt to recover the manuscript holding the key to the inscriptions on the Grail found in the opening volume. The parchment, encased in a protective lead container, was lost under the sea in the climactic confrontation between the Light and the Dark at the end of *Over Sea, Under Stone*. Merriman and the children soon learn that it has now been claimed by the

Greenwitch of the title, an ancient fertility totem woven every year by the women of Trewissick and afterwards thrown into the sea to guarantee good fishing. *Greenwitch* thus positions the forces of the Light and the Dark against an ancient and apparently feminine Wild Magic which is beyond the control of either. Eventually, the Greenwitch surrenders her secret neither to the Light nor the Dark but to Jane because she is the only creature who has ever shown the Greenwitch compassion.

The Arthurian subtext that informs the first three books of the sequence rises to prominence in the two concluding volumes: *The Grey King* (1975) and *Silver on the Tree* (1977). In the first of these, Will visits Wales where he meets Bran, an albino boy and his silver-eyed collie named Cafall after Arthur's favourite hound. The two boys face and overcome the power of the Grey King, the Brenin Llwyd, and learn that Bran is actually Arthur's son by Guinevere, brought into the future by Merlin and left to grow up there in ignorance of his true heritage. Together they then waken the six sleepers, who pause to do homage to Bran before their silver-grey horses spring into the sky. In *Silver on the Tree*, Bran, Will and the Drew children return to Wales in order to equip Bran with the crystal sword, Eirias, before the final cataclysmic encounter between the Light and the Dark. At the crucial moment, Bran then uses Eirias to cut the silver flowers from the sacred mistletoe bough and the Dark is thereby finally overthrown.

Each of the books making up *The Dark is Rising* sequence thus uses romance memes to the full. In all but the first volume the narrative is regularly shaken loose from temporal constraints yet the struggles that ensue are firmly rooted in the present and have clear consequences for the world we know. Each novel is structured around a single task or quest designed to work towards the final task of routing the Dark permanently and each of these preliminary adventures can only be successfully

completed after the protagonists have experienced a painful process of psychic growth leading to a resolution which involves both a recovery and a rebirth.

Of all these memes, Cooper's use of time is particularly compelling. On the morning of his eleventh birthday, Will wakes to a forest world (Cooper, [1973] 1984:196) and we learn later that he has slipped back more than seven hundred years in time. In the process of learning about magic or Gramarye, Will again visits other times and even a few places, such as the great hall of the lady, that seem quite out of time (Cooper, [1973] 1984:204-218). In *Greenwitch*, the enraged totem vents her rage on Trewissick by letting loose the accumulated horrors of history so that, in one tumultuous night, Viking raiders and nineteenth-century smugglers are both set looting and burning through its streets (Cooper, [1974] 1984:432-435). These waves of unleashed human ferocity have no real power to harm the living, but instead add substance to and emphasise the terrible endurance of the Greenwitch, who has outlasted them all. Such time slips become increasingly common as Cooper uses them to stress what she presents as the recurrent patterns of all human experience. Thus in *Silver on the Tree*, Simon, Jane and Barney lift their eyes to follow a gull in Aberdovey and find when they look down again that they are gazing at a nineteenth-century scene which is both strange and familiar in that it is peopled by well-known figures, the grandparents and great-grandparents of the characters they have come to know (Cooper, [1977] 1984:672-681). Similarly, Barney is, at one point, captured by the dark and then given over to Owain Glyndwr (Cooper, [1977] 1984:745-751) while the shape-shifting vessel which carries the assembled Old Ones to the final battle seems to travel as much through time as it does through space. At one point, looking like a 'long high-prowed deckless ship', it stops at the battle of Badon to reclaim the six signs of the light that have assisted Arthur in what Welsh chronicles claim as his greatest victory. By doing this at such a crucial juncture, Cooper again

emphasises the parallels between Arthur's battle and the one that the children are about to face (Cooper, [1977] 1984:762-763). As Swinfen (1984:142) puts it:

The acute awareness of the historical perspective of the surrounding primary world is perhaps the most important aspect of heightened perception in this group of novels, and it is enhanced by the careful structuring which relates the stages in the various quests with movement back and forth through many-layered time to periods of similar struggle or endeavour, and with ancient festivals or rituals of the changing year.

To some extent, the chronological twists and turns of Cooper's plot also mimic the inhuman perspectives of those like the Greenwich or the Old Ones, who live outside the flickering parade of human history. Nothing built by even the most gifted human hands can endure, not even the dreamscape built by Gwion between sea and land to house the Lost King, who refers to him as Taliesin (Cooper, [1977] 1984:736).

Cooper's presentation of this land is a clear illustration of the free use she makes of mythic material, 'blending, reworking and transforming it in a creative and conscious literary method' (Nikolajeva, 1996:157). The land is thus reminiscent of both Atlantis and Annwyn (the Celtic land of the dead) while its desolate monarch's despair evokes that of the Fisher King. Both ruler and domain are entirely lost to the raging waves as soon as Bran claims the sword that is his birthright (Cooper, [1977] 1984:737-739).

Ironically the agents of the Light and those of the Dark, both of whom share a detached perspective on human history, seem ultimately to be more like each other than either can ever be to humans. John Rowlands, a Welsh farmer, recognises this when he tells Will that

“...men who know anything at all about the Light also know that there is a fierceness to its power, like the bare sword of the law or the white burning of the sun At the very heart, that is. Other things, like humanity, and mercy, and charity, that most men hold more precious than all else, they do not come first for the Light. Oh, sometimes they are there; often, indeed. But in the very long run the concern of you people is with the absolute good, ahead of all else. You are like fanatics. Your masters, at any rate. Like the old Crusaders – oh, like certain groups in every belief, though this is not a matter of religion, of course. At the centre of the Light there is a cold, white flame, just as at the centre of the Dark there is a great black pit bottomless as the universe. (Cooper, [1977] 1984:548)

Cooper’s achievement thus lies ultimately in the fact that she invokes the power of romance archetypes and mythical patterns so powerfully that her young readers are swept along almost irresistibly by their narrative power but, just as they begin to find in her work archetypal templates flexible enough to confer structure and meaning on their own lives, she deliberately destroys the illusion that she has spent the last five books creating. She prepares the ground for this by subtly resisting the romance tendency by which, as Frye ([1957] 1971:187-188) points out, ‘the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy’. Instead, Cooper stresses that the division is between those who live in time and those who live outside it. When Will tells John Rowlands that he is fighting a war in which “it is not possible to pause to smooth the way for one human being, because even that one small thing could mean the end of the world for all of the rest” (Cooper, [1977] 1984:549), Rowlands movingly replies:

”It is a cold world you live in, *bachgen*. I do not think so far ahead myself. I would take the one human being over all the principle, all the time.” (Cooper, [1977] 1984:549)

Gradually, the reader begins to draw back a little from the full-hearted identification with Merriman that has previously been encouraged. Instead he or she remembers the Old One's betrayal of his foster-son, Hawkin, whose life is first risked to protect the Book of Gramarye (Cooper, [1973] 1984:252-4) and then unnaturally prolonged so that he can carry one of the signs of the Light to Will in *The Dark is Rising*. Cooper also encourages her readers to understand, ironically through the words of the Black Rider, that in bringing Guinevere and her child into the future, Merlin was not primarily concerned with helping the anguished queen but rather with placing Bran where he might be most useful to the Light:

“...men forgive,” the Rider said swiftly, smoothly. “And the boy’s father would have forgiven, and believed Guinevere, if he had had the chance. But a Lord of the Light took Guinevere through Time, at her asking, and so there was no chance and the boy was taken away.”

Merriman said, soft and deep, “*At her asking.*”

“But,” the Rider said, “and mark this... – not to a *time* of her asking.” (Cooper, [1977] 1984:769)

This clear manipulation of Guinevere's desperation stands in sharp contrast to the response of John Rowlands, who, when told that his wife will be restored to him if he will only say that Bran does not belong in the twentieth century, selflessly supports Bran's right to belong to the time in which he has lived his life (Cooper, [1977] 1984:772).

The Dark is Rising sequence, as Farah Mendlesohn (2008:15) has observed, is repeatedly 'structured around rhymes to be decoded'. As its protagonists confront text after opaque and ancient text, they learn to look beneath the printed surface to find the real significance of what they read or hear. In the same way, I would argue

that the novels themselves form a text whose true meaning is not immediately apparent. Thus, after having repeatedly used the heroic struggles of Arthur as an objective correlative for a contemporary struggle against the Dark, Cooper finally reveals that such parallelism is deeply misleading. While a permanent victory over an external evil may be possible, the battle against the complex duality of humanity itself is not so easily won. The great confrontations that have thrilled readers throughout the sequence are ultimately shown to be illusory, possessing value only as clues or triggers to a more nuanced moral awareness. Thus Merriman urges the children to look about the site of their final stand against the Dark and “keep a little of it alive”, saying:

“We have delivered you from evil, but the evil that is inside men is at the last a matter for men to control. The responsibility and the hope and the promise are in your hands – your hands and the hands of the children of all men on this earth. The future cannot blame the present, just as the present cannot blame the past. The hope is always here, always alive, but only your fierce caring can fan it into a fire to warm the world.... For Drake is no longer in his hammock, children, nor is Arthur somewhere sleeping, and you may not lie idly expecting a second coming of anybody now, because the world is yours and it is up to you....And the world will still be imperfect, because men will be imperfect. Good men will still be killed by bad, or sometimes by other good men and there will still be pain and disease and famine, anger and hate. But if you work and care and are watchful, as we have tried to be for you, then in the long run the worse will never, ever, triumph over the better. And the gifts put into some men, that shine as bright as Eirias the sword, shall light the dark corners of life for all the rest, in so brave a world.” (Cooper, [1977] 1984:783-784)

The ‘symbolic resurrection’ that Helen Cooper (2009:10) associates with romance is thus limited in *The Dark is Rising* sequence by the author’s final rejection of all forms of external salvation. Perhaps this echoes the process of growing up whereby every young adult has to learn to question parental authority even when this is entirely

benevolent. Certainly, Peter Goodrich (1988:173) argues convincingly that in Cooper's sequence, the 'completion of the struggle inevitably places the immortal Old Ones in the position of adults facing the necessity of death and relinquishing the world to the following generation'. The true hero of her work is thus not Arthur, who boards Pridwen to sail to the 'silver-circled castle at the back of the North Wind among the apple trees' (Cooper, [1977] 1984:781), but Bran, who, like Lloyd Alexander's Taran, refuses to abandon the mortal world, saying:

"I belong here....Loving bonds, Merriman said. That is what I have, here. And he said" – he was looking up at Merriman, beside him – "that those bonds are outside the High Magic, even, because they are the strongest thing on earth." (Cooper, [1977] 1984:781, italics original)

Cooper's final message is thus that the very memes into which she has breathed such alluring new life are, in the end, as Malory's Arthur says of himself, things that there 'ys no truste for to truste in' ([1485]1971:716). Her young protagonists find they need to learn what Raymond Thompson (1985:138) describes as 'heroic self-reliance' since Cooper 'denies a retreat to the past as a means of escaping full responsibility for the future' (Goodrich, 1988:172). Rather as in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *The Dark is Rising* sequence (1998-2001) thus vividly evokes a world of high romance while finally warning its readers against anything that encourages the abnegation of responsibility for the individual life and the context, however narrow or modest, in which such a life must be lived (cf. 104).

All the works discussed so far use Arthurian material, in Goodrich's (1988:175) words, not just as atavistic dreaming but as 'creative anachronism: the wisdom to accept mystery, not for the purpose of extinguishing it, but of incorporating it consciously into a fully human way of living'. The writers seem to have found in these mythical conventions ways of compensating for the deficiencies of the present and

therefore, as Jack Zipes (1984:155) suggests, a way in which they can ‘non-synchronously move forward while longing backward’.

In *Hexwood* ([1993] 2000), on the other hand, Diana Wynne Jones seems to use Arthurian allusions for more overtly critical purposes. The novel begins in a mode reminiscent of comic science fiction as Sector Controller Borasus receives a message from Earth suggesting that a clerk in the library and reference complex of Hexwood farm has managed to activate a dangerous machine, the Bannus, which ‘makes use of a field of theta-space to give you live-action scenarios of any set of facts and people you care to feed into it’ (Jones, [1993] 2000:16-17). The machine, one later learns, was initially designed as a mechanism for choosing the five Reigners who manage a multigalactic corporate entity which effectively controls the known universe. The five current Reigners are deeply corrupt and have hidden the Bannus in order to prolong their grip on power indefinitely. They also preserve their authority by means of the services of a personal assassin known as the Reigners’ servant. As successive attempts to turn off the Bannus fail, more and more individuals including the five Reigners, their servant, many of their opponents and even some of their deposed predecessors, who have been kept in suspended animation, are drawn into the machine’s sphere of influence. Because the earth-born clerk who initially activated the machine requested it to provide him with ‘a role-playing game’ involving ‘hobbits on a Grail quest’ (Jones, [1993] 2000:340), the illusions generated by the Bannus all seem at first to have a medieval and/or Arthurian flavour. Later, however, the reader learns that the experiences of Ann Stavely, a grocer’s daughter apparently leading a conventional contemporary life in a village adjacent to Hexwood farm, are also simply Bannus-generated projections.

Farah Mendlesohn (2005:73) argues that, because of the narrative role played by the Bannus, Jones is able to construct *Hexwood* using ‘concentric circles of time’. She

suggests that the outermost circle is the linear time experienced by the Reigners and others before they enter the theta-space which the Bannus generates and points out that these parts of the story are always written in the third person.

The second circle is wood time and deals with the experiences of Ann, who sees people enter but never emerge from Hexwood farm and who then repeatedly enters the wood, believing that it is only when she does so that she encounters theta-space. Ann's adventures are not linear as her encounters with Mordion, the transformed servant of the Reigners, and Hume, the boy whom Mordion appears to have created by magically mixing his blood with Ann's, follow no particular order as indicated by various clues such as the fluctuating size and age of Hume and the condition of the healing cut on Mordion's knee. According to Mendlesohn (2005:75), these sections are narrated 'with a much stronger internal voice' and something of an 'elegiac quality'. The dreamlike circularity of time in the wood is later explained by the Bannus as resulting from the activation of the ancient power of the woodland itself:

“The Wood,” explained the Bannus, “is like all woods in this country, and maybe like woods all over Earth, part of the great Forest that once covered this land. At the merest nudge, it forms its own theta-space and becomes the great Forest again. Ask any Earthman. He will tell you how, in this country, he has been lost in the smallest spinney. He can hear traffic on the road, but the road is not there, while there are sounds behind him of a great beast crawling through the undergrowth. This is the great Forest.” (Jones, [1993] 2000:328)

Interestingly, Francis Spufford (2002:23-25), in his meditation about his childhood reading in *The Child that Books Built*, suggests that there was a forest at the beginning of fiction too which 'existed to cause changes and had no pattern you could take hold of in the hope of evading change. You never came out the same as when you went in' (Spufford, 2002:25).

The third circle, which Mendlesohn (2005:76) refers to as 'Bannus time', is associated most often with the quasi-medieval castle adjacent to the wood though it later becomes clear that this time also governs the illusory primary world of Ann's village. Time moves in a more predictable fashion here in that events within the castle are narrated in chronological order but, as Mendlesohn (2005:76) stresses, the position of these events 'can change with regard to other coordinate events'. Bannus time is also associated with a narrative style midway between the other two in which Ann, at least when she is in the castle, is allowed 'self-consciousness of her actions' (Mendlesohn, 2005:76) and awareness of her real identity as Vierran, a member of a powerful off-world family that resists Reigner control.

In the novel, Jones thus plays with her readers' generic expectations of portal fantasies in which the time spent in secondary worlds does not match that of the primary world (cf. p. 79) to disguise the fact that Ann's existence in the village is no more 'real' than the life she lives in the wood. Matters are further complicated by the fact that Ann is in constant telepathic communication with four figures that she has named the King, the Slave, the Boy and the Prisoner and who, in turn, know her as the Girl Child. The four voices are perceived as possible figments of Ann's imagination and also as immeasurably distant from her in terms of both time and space. The internal dialogue with these voices ceases whenever Ann enters either wood or Bannus time, but otherwise it cleverly promotes intersubjectivity by ensuring that the subject position is never constant or stable even within the mind of the central character. At the end of the novel, the King is identified as the mythical Arthur, who functions in Bannus time as the rebel knight Sir Artegal, the Prisoner as Merlin, who functions in both Bannus and wood time as Hume, the Boy as Fitela, the dragon-killing nephew of Merlin in his earlier incarnation as Wolf or Odin, who functions in Bannus time as Ann Stavely's brother Martin, and the Slave as the Reigners' servant, who functions in wood time as Mordion and in Bannus time as

both the magician Agenos and a dragon. Once they band together, the five are able to capture and control the Bannus which, while apparently manifesting as the Grail, has actually been operating through the Yam, the robot protector of Mordion and Hume. By taking control of the machine they prove their ability to become the new Reigners and successfully complete their various quests. Yet, as Butler shows, even when the quest is completed, the discovery of true identity 'is not made in the conventional fairy-tale manner, where one stable identity replaces another unproblematically ... it occasions a much more profound questioning of what selfhood actually consists in'. Butler (2006:107-108) suggests that in *Hexwood* then, 'Jones portrays dislocation and alienation as fundamental aspects of the self, rather than as external and abnormal experiences that may happen to it'.

The Arthurian allusions in *Hexwood* seem to serve three very different purposes. The first is to create humour by imposing mythical conventions on characters unable to support them. Thus Reigner Two becomes Ambitas, a lethargic version of the Fisher King, whose grievous wound is revealed to be no more than a bad bruise (Jones, [1993] 2000:292), Reigner Three becomes the conniving Morgan La Trey, Reigner Four becomes the swaggering Sir Fors and Reigner One a menacing dragon. Ambitas subjects the castle's inhabitants to various trials by echoing romance tropes such as forbidding feasts to be served until some wonder or marvel presents itself. By focusing on the harassed cooks and disgruntled guests, Jones makes these conventions appear as ridiculous as Sir Harrison Scudamour, whose unthinking acceptance of their outer forms led him to activate the Bannus in the first place.

Yet, at the same time, Jones herself recognises the power of the Arthurian ideal so that when Ann first sees the castle through the trees she tells Hume that it is where the king lives with his knights who 'ride out in armour having adventures and fighting' (Jones, [1993] 2000:61) and Hume yields himself to the dream, proclaiming his

intention to become a knight and kill a dragon. Later, in the novel, Vierran recalls her first glimpse of the castle, 'like a chalky vision across the lake that seemed to promise beauty, bravery, strength, adventure, all sorts of marvels' (Jones, [1993] 2000:281) and is overwhelmed by sadness to think that beauty and bravery and all the high ideals of knighthood may simply be a sham and that 'there *are* no wonderful things in any world' (Jones, [1993] 2000:282, italics original). By implication then Jones recognises that beneath the cracked patina of the chivalric code lies an allegiance to the very ideals that will ultimately defeat the Reigners so that the second function of her Arthurian allusions, which is to reinforce chivalric ideals, is held in paradoxical balance with the first, which undermines the same ideals by associating them with inept or corrupt characters. In this way, Jones indicates that the importance of the Arthurian story does not lie in its superficial conventions but in the strength of its unyielding moral commitment.

The third function of the Arthurian material is to express again what Mendlesohn (2005:44) calls the 'thread of rage' running throughout Jones's work 'directed at those who seek to restrict the moral or creative agency of others'. The Reigners, like the hooded game players of *The Homeward Bounders* (1983), use others as tools. Mordion and his six siblings are thus painfully trained and conditioned into utter submission to them in a process so horrifying that only Mordion survives it. His creation of Hume is thus a desperate act of rebellion against his masters.⁵⁴ Once he emerges, Hume toddles off into the wood while Mordion refuses to go after him until Ann makes him see that he is behaving just as the Reigners did:

⁵⁴ Hume's very name wittily hints at Jones's use of multiple allusions and illusions by bringing to mind the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume ([1888] 1955), famous for his *A Treatise on Human Nature* in which he argues that ultimately, all meaning is located not in external reality but in the viewer's necessarily subjective view of this.

“You should look *after* him! He’s all alone in this wood and he’s quite small, and he doesn’t even know he’s not supposed to go out of it. He probably doesn’t even know how to work the field to get food. You – you calmly make him up, out of blood – and *nothing*, and you expect him to do your dirty work for you, and you don’t even tell him the rules! You can’t *do* that to a person!” (Jones, [1993] 2000:55, italics original)

Later, Mordion looks at the half-healed cut on his wrist and considers healing it by magic, but then decides to let it stay as a reminder of what he owes to Hume: ‘He owed it to Hume to bring him up as a normal person. Even when Hume was grown up, he must never, never know that Mordion had made him as a sort of puppet’ (Jones, [1993] 2000: 71). For some time, readers alert to intertextual references are encouraged to see the relationship between Hume and Mordion as paralleling that between Arthur and Merlin. Even the chaotic behaviour of time within the wood encourages this by reminding informed readers of White’s Merlyn, who explains to the young Arthur in *The Once and Future King* that he was unfortunately born at the wrong end of time and has to live ‘backwards from in front’ while surrounded by people ‘living forwards from behind’ (White, 1958:29). At one point, Hume even comes across a sword embedded in a stone. When he is able to draw it out, the reader’s genre-based expectations seem to have been confirmed but, in reality, Jones is simply using this obvious intertextual allusion to distract the reader from the far more significant link between Hume’s eye infection and Odin’s loss of an eye. At the end of the novel, Jones reveals that, in his incarnation as Wolf, Merlin was attacked by dragons imported by the Reigners from another world. In response he created a race of dragon-killing children, the greatest of whom was Fitela. Hume/Merlin/Wolf then rounds on the Bannus, crying, “‘You were telling me, ‘This time kill your own dragons!’ weren’t you?’” and the Bannus agrees, suggesting that in using both Fitela and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Arthur for his own purposes, Merlin/Wolf did profound psychic damage to himself but that, in confronting and killing the dragon incarnation of Reigner One without help, he has achieved

redemption and healing. Although it is never openly stated, one also wonders if the linguistic similarity between the names Mordred and Mordion may not also indicate that Jones is implying that Arthur's refusal to acknowledge his illegitimate son may be yet another repetition of the same abuse of responsibility. Such a reading is supported by Deborah Kaplan's (2002:56-57) observation that in Jones's work one rarely finds static truth but rather that 'truth, reality, and language are all endlessly shifting, and power rests with those who are aware of the many possible readings of the language all the characters use and do not try to deny the essential fluidity of both reality and language'. Such a perspective necessarily denies easy assumptions about absolute truth while alerting young readers to the necessity of active yet flexible engagement with the texts they themselves routinely encounter.

What is seen in many of the 'texts of quotation' (Wilkie-Stibbs, 1999:170) discussed in this chapter then is a shifting tension and interplay between a currently marginalised romance framework that has nevertheless done much to shape unspoken cultural assumptions and beliefs and a more recently developed realism that draws freely on images of contemporary life. As Butler (2006:274) says,

[n]one of us can shrug off the laws of physics, but no more do we experience life as mechanistically calculable; fantasy literature shows us something of the way in which our lives hold these two impossibilities in suspension and negotiation, precipitating a vision that, like Penelope's web, is constantly unpicked and renewed, as the border between the mundane and the magical (or Britain and Logres) blurs and shifts.

Some might argue that works like those discussed in this chapter, which hold literary and lived experience in such a delicate balance, are flawed by the very duality that means they can only be fully appreciated by readers familiar with a network of

potentially unfamiliar first-version or ur-texts. Such a polyphonic and layered structure is, as Wilkie-Stibbs (1999:175) suggests, albeit not in response to romance-derived texts, 'particularly interesting to an intertextuality of children's literature because it breaks the intertextual discursive codes and conventions of the single viewpoint and linear narrative that are typical of the form'. Obviously, readers who come to the works discussed above with an explicit knowledge of their intertexts will have a different experience from those unfamiliar with them or accustomed only to the diluted versions of Arthurian myth still current in popular culture. In the case of the informed reader, the reading experience will, as Wikie-Stibbs (1999:175) notes, restrict the reader's opportunity for free intertextual interplay in favour of encouraging a reading process where there is a need to refer back to 'specific obligatory intertexts now being quoted as metaphor and/or metonymy', a form of reading described by Barthes (1976:36) as 'the circular memory of reading'. Such a form of reading thus moves away from the

textually-focused reading that is a more usual kind of narrative engagement to one that is simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal as the reader seeks to refer to the "borrowing" and at the same time to integrate it into a new context. It is the essence of this kind of reading to deny readers an opportunity for linear reading as they move in and out of the text to make connections between it and the intertext(s).
(Wilkie-Stibbs, 1999:175)

Of course, texts for younger readers need to tread a fine line between being either overreferential in explaining intertextual links or allowing readers to miss these altogether. I would argue though that, in general, it is preferable to be guilty of the second fault rather than the first, since children are accustomed to living in a world where meaning must be snatched and constructed from brief and muted glimpses of adult realities and generally prefer to be given enough intertextual space to construct

their own meaning(s) even if these rely only on an intuitive apprehension of unfamiliar mythical codes. As Susan Cooper (1976:362) reminds us, children's capacity for negative capability is probably greater than that of adults, for they 'aren't a different species. They're us a little while ago. It's just that they are still able to accept mystery'. It is obviously true too that books for the young cannot afford to be too restricted if they are to fulfil their task of initiating readers not only into adult life but also into the literary and cultural memes of their linguistic community. Books that draw on romance tropes in general and Arthurian material in particular can thus perhaps be seen as valuable mechanisms for extending literary competence and guiding adolescents into the new experience of Barthes's 'circular memory of reading' (Cooper, 1976:361).

Intriguingly too, in his seminal essay, 'Myth in the Narrative' (1975), Italo Calvino states unambiguously that it is always story rather than meaning that is primary. He thus consciously resists the idea that it is in any way possible to construct a text in which the narrative significance is fixed and independent of the reader. Nevertheless, he stops short of denying the possibility that story can lead to epiphany, suggesting instead that tribal storytellers go on 'permuting jaguars and toucans until there comes a moment when one of [their] innocent little stories explodes into a terrible revelation: a myth, which demands to be recited in secret and in a sacred place' (Calvino, 1975:79). One might argue that, in the tribal narratives of the English-speaking world, Calvino's jaguars and toucans may correspond to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. To see the revival of these ancient narrative memes in such a way is to understand that, as Attebery (1992:34) argues in relation to fairytales and myths in general, revisiting the Arthurian corpus in works for young readers

...is not necessarily a nostalgic enterprise. Insofar as these myths continue to reside in our language and to offer insight into our psychic

organization and our relationship to nature, they are not archaic but contemporary. They reflect human nature as it is perceivable in our time and place.... [they] emphasize the role of storymaking in our efforts to invent integrated selves and a comprehensible world.

Conclusion: 'Inside it was another world'

In *Incarceron* (2007) and its successor *Sapphique* (2008), award-winning young adult author Catherine Fisher creates a post-apocalyptic future world in which a chronic shortage of resources has led to the bulk of humanity being imprisoned in a miniaturized nanoworld guarded by a hereditary Warden while the remainder have retreated into a technology-resistant recreation of seventeenth-century life, ironically sustained by technology-dependent holographic illusions. In both locations, the teenage protagonists are initially unaware of the limitations and deceptions that inform their existences, but gradually those in the prison-without begin to interact with those in the prison-within thus initiating a process which will eventually allow them all to view their worlds objectively for the first time. Significantly, the achievement of this new perspective ensures that *Sapphique* ends with neither restoration nor instauration, but rather with a process of constructive disillusionment as the lies of the past are stripped away to allow for a new beginning in a less seductively beautiful but potentially far more democratic state. This change is subtly marked in the novel's final paragraphs in which 'The Realm' is stripped even of the definite article and initial capital letter that have previously defined it, suggesting that it has become both less distinct and more open to re-vision by those within it:

The Realm was dark. The distant army of refugees huddled round campfires, flickers of flame. Beyond them the land rose in dim hills and the black fringes of the forest, *a realm* without power, exposed to the night, all its finery as shrivelled and battered as the silk flag with its black swan that fluttered, shredded, over their heads.

"We'll never survive." Claudia shook her head. "We don't know how to any more."

“Yes we do,” Attia said.

Keiro pointed. “So do they.”

And she saw, faint and far, the candlepoints of flame in the cottages of the poor, the hovels where the Prison’s wrath and fury had brought no change. (Fisher, 2008:470, italics and underscoring mine)

Incarceron and *Sapphique* can thus be seen to exemplify not only the complexity and moral sophistication of many contemporary young adult fantasies, but also the curious experience of absorptive reading itself. To those within the prison, life beyond it seems the stuff of dreams, while to those who inhabit ‘The Realm’, the world of the prison seems equally unreal. At one point in *Sapphique*, Jared Sapiens, tutor to the Warden’s daughter, realises the true nature and location of the great and almost legendary prison world. He then re-examines the tiny silver charm containing it before making a comment equally applicable to books themselves:

The Warden had told him that this cube was Incarceron.

He spun it gently with his little finger.

So small.

So mysterious.

A prison you could hang on your watchchain.

He had subjected it to every analysis he knew, and there were no readings. It had no density, no magnetic field, and no whisper of power. No instrument he possessed had been able to penetrate its silvery silence. It was a cube of unknown composition, and inside it was another world. (Fisher, 2008:164)

Like all engrossed readers, Fisher’s teenage protagonists take imaginative leave of the familiar world and explore alien realms before returning to where they began, subtly but incalculably changed by all they have learned and experienced. Similarly,

just as the pages of a book give little overt indication of the complex fictional worlds they contain, so the apparently innocuous surface of *Incarceron* effectively disguises its true nature. The paradoxical intangibility of this great but tiny prison locked into a 'silvery silence' that no scientific instruments can penetrate thus brilliantly echoes Francis Spufford's (2002:3) previously-noted observation that '[o]ne of the first things you learn as you begin to read is the amazing exterior invisibility of all the rush of event and image which narrative pours through you'.

In part, as this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, the improbable intangibility of the immersive reading experience arises from the fact that engagement with books allows readers the possibility of gaining access to an alternative world offering ludic, and therefore non-threatening, yet still very real engagement with their own fledgling desires and unspoken fears. This is beautifully acknowledged by Ursula K. Le Guin (1976:51), who writes in her essay 'The Child and The Shadow':

The great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious – symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter.

The capacity of fantasy to offer such psychic engagement arises at least in part from the fact that the act of reading fantasy continually provides access to wonder. Because of this, David Hartwell (1984:50-51) suggests that '[f]or many young people today, [such texts] ... take the place of religious texts from times gone by, stimulating their readers to take interest in and hunger for something larger than mundane life'. Yet it is also abundantly clear that despite the capacity of such works to evoke wonder, they are also, as has been repeatedly emphasised elsewhere in this thesis, just as much about reality and the human condition as their realist counterparts are. It

is this tenacious connection to the mundane that allows Ann Swinfen (1984:231) to observe,

Indeed the fundamental purpose of serious fantasy is to comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it. This process may be described less as didacticism, although this is sometimes present, than as a form of creative questioning; and, it may be argued, without such questioning in any intellectual field, there can be no advance.

Adult awareness of the power of fantasy to provoke Swinfen's 'creative questioning' has necessarily resulted in the genre becoming a field of contestation. As Jack Zipes (1990:8) describes the current state of play in children's literature more generally, 'Essentially, the forces on the Left want to "decommodify" the child and enable the young girl or boy to gain a sense of autonomy and take a critical stance vis à vis the social forces that are exploiting and reifying children; the forces on the Right want greater moral or social control over children and feel that they should be more compliant and not question certain eternal truths such as God, fatherland, and the state'. The result of this ongoing struggle, Zipes (1990:12) argues, is that the 'manipulation of child readers of all ages ... is central to the production of children's books'.

While anyone working in the field of children's literature will readily acknowledge the conflict identified by Zipes and recognise that it is still operative even more than twenty years after he first defined it, not all of them will endorse his perspective on the contestants. Zipes's view of the Left is conditioned by his American environment in which representatives of the extreme Left are so marginalized as to be almost invisible. Studies such as Felicity O'Dell's *Socialisation through Children's Literature: The Soviet Example* (1978), however, provide clear evidence of state manipulation of

children's books under communism to limit independent thought among the young, while promoting eternal truths such as Marx, fatherland and the State. From a more diachronic and global perspective therefore, what Zipes categorises as 'the forces on the Left' could probably be more accurately defined as the forces of the sceptical centre.

Since this is where my own allegiance unquestionably lies, I would suggest that it is vitally important that those who believe in encouraging a sense of autonomy and critical thinking among the young should understand that backing away from involvement in childhood studies because of sensitivities about imbalances of power within this field is also to abandon the young to forces considerably less scrupulous about their exploitation. In my introduction, I suggest that the three necessary conditions allowing young adult novels to promote critical thinking are the acknowledgement of the young reader's agency, the conscious highlighting by metafictional techniques of the adult author's own memetic preferences, and the maintenance of easy access to a heterogenous literary meme store. To some extent, every one of these is currently under threat.

With regard to the first of these, just as the economic post-war boom years in the west extended the period of education for the young and thus established young adulthood as unique developmental phase offering expanded opportunities for experimentation with identity formation, so the current global economic crisis may well result in the curtailment of these indicators of adolescent empowerment. While rising unemployment figures and modern child labour laws may ensure that, in the developed world at least, all but the poorest children will continue to complete their schooling, growing anxiety about employment prospects is also likely to reinforce current trends favouring the development of an education system more and more narrowly career driven and less and less inclined to foster the formation of

subjectivity and the development of a sense of self by raising what Clare Bradford *et al* (2011:12) list as the essential adolescent questions such as ‘who am I, why am I here, where am I going, and what does it all mean?’.

Secondly, with regard to the use of metafictional techniques by writers for the young, there is no doubt that the growth of academic interest in children’s and young adult literature in the second half of the twentieth century has done much to privilege more demanding texts whose complex conceptual frameworks and levels of metafictional awareness have, in turn, required young readers to develop considerably more sophisticated cognitive and reading skills. In *Criticism, Theory, and Children’s Literature*, Peter Hunt (1991a:54) suggests that before such books could access the privileged status of literature from which they had historically been excluded, they either had to become part of the power structure or the power structure itself had to change and in the post-war period, both of these things happened. In examining the growing influence of academic criticism on the production of children’s and young adult books during this time, Anne De Vries (1997:43) distinguishes three distinct but overlapping phases, each of which contributed to the development of a new kind of children’s literature no longer bound by traditional requirements of simplicity, stability and optimism. He defines these periods or phases as follows: the 1960s, during which strict moral codes disappeared and the horizon in children’s books broadened; the 1970s, during which ‘there was an abolition of all kinds of taboos and an increasing attention to the emotions of children’; and the period since the 1980s in which ‘there has been a “literary emancipation” in a narrower sense, affecting the literary form’ as traditional restrictions have been rejected by many authors and critics, and children’s literature has become increasingly complex in challenging ways. One of the most important strategies by which this new complexity has come to be achieved is by the increasing use of metafictional techniques whose power to challenge the norms of consensus reality is wonderfully evoked by Steven Connor’s

(1989:127) claim in *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* that metafiction forges a 'link between text and world', not because it masks a text's 'fictionality' or effaces the text 'in the interests of a return to the real, but by an intensification of textuality such that it becomes coextensive with the real'.

Eva-Maria Metcalf (1997:50-51) similarly argues that two parallel developments changed academic attitudes to children's literature: 'the demythification and democratization of childhood – on both conceptual and experiential levels – and the demythification and democratization of the literary establishment' in response to a postmodern tendency to erase barriers. The result, she claims, was that the field of youth literature 'experienced an unparalleled professionalization and literarization, as well as a concomitant and unprecedented growth in status' (Metcalf, 1997:50) in the process of becoming what Suman Gupta (2005:299) calls 'a comprehensively institutionalised academic arena'.

More recently, however, and at least partially in response to Jacqueline Rose's ([1984] 1994:1) attack on 'the impossible relation between adult and child', academic criticism of children's literature has begun to focus increasingly on approaching children's literature by way of adult memories of childhood reading in the same way that historians may use oral sources in full awareness of their possible or even probable unreliability in an attempt to reconstruct a historical experience (see Judith Armstrong, 2003; Hugh Crago, 1990; Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, 1995; Peter Hollindale, 1997; Roni Natov, 2003; Maria Tatar, 2009 and Alison Waller, 2008 and 2010). As Waller (2010:285) observes, '[i]f nothing else, these remembered accounts of reading and subsequent accounts of rereading question assumptions about what might happen between the adult, child, and text because they demonstrate the traces of textual encounters that remain prominent in the memory [and this] type of criticism does not have to be wracked with anxiety about the "real child" because in

place of the psychic barrier between adult and child there is a continuum of reading experience accessed through memory and rereading'. While this approach is undoubtedly intriguing and seems poised to throw more light on the links between childhood reading and the development of adult identity, it undoubtedly also has the potential to reduce academic involvement in the field of current children's literature and this, in turn, may inadvertently encourage a resurgence of children's books more acceptable to a practitioner world less willing and certainly less well-equipped to wrestle with or consciously expose issues such as authorial intention and narrative strategy. This seems even more likely when one considers Heather Scutter's (1999:224) observation that conservatism is deeply embedded in all forms of children's literature:

Children's and young adult books are full of oxymoronic discourses which rely on notions of the child as both pure and potentially corruptible, both simple and infinitely complex, both small and potentially powerful, both tabula rasa and completed text. Such fictions tell us much about adult preoccupations, especially about adult resistance to cultural change. Children's texts are often a kind of speculative fiction in fast reverse, which re-track mis-taken adult roads and return to a crossroads in time and space. The child protagonist is sent packing along another road, towards new territory. The rewriting that takes place, the remapping of frontiers, while appearing to subvert, is often radically reactionary'.

Both the movements towards a new utilitarianism in education and towards a children's literature criticism that evades consideration of contemporary children because it is focused instead on adult memories of childhood reading are therefore likely to reduce the options available to young readers by impacting on the third requirement for literature which promotes critical thinking, the maintenance of an extensive and varied literary meme store.

Yet another factor that may have an impact on the ability of the young to access memes running counter to those dominating their own communities is the continuing confusion in the market about the status of teenage and young adult books. Scutter (1999:4) notes that it has been claimed, in England, the U.S.A. and Australia, that 'the labelling or classification of certain books as "young adult" is a cynical marketing ploy, an opportunistic exploiting of a constructed space and commodity'. In a capitalist world, there is likely to be at least an element of truth in such an accusation since markets generally work on precisely this recognition of a perceived need in commodifiable terms. What Phillip Adams (1997) cuttingly calls 'corporate paedophilia' is certainly not restricted to the targeting of the young by those selling branded clothing, electronic gadgetry, music or designer drugs, but extends also to both the producers and sellers of young adult fiction. Thus, contrary to Peter Hunt's (1991b:6) somewhat complacent assertion, it is far from self-evident that everyone in the children's/teenage/young adult book world is 'on the side of the angels'.

Since the late nineties, it has also become increasingly apparent that there is money to be made from teenage fantasy fiction.⁵⁵ Ironically, however, this has not resulted in the publication of a greater or memetically more diverse range of authors, but rather in attempts to reproduce the essential ingredients of best-selling titles.⁵⁶ As a result bookstores are flooded with derivative works strongly resembling the less imaginative forms of internet fan fiction. The bulk of these feature either young magicians bearing

⁵⁵ The financial power of teenage fiction is now so widely recognised that, in a recent South African newspaper review of E.L. James's erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2012), the reviewer disapprovingly observes that 'it is far too sexually obsessive and graphic to be the heir apparent to Hollywood's teen flick empire' (Jan Broeke, 2012:s.p.). The enormous sales of James's work and perhaps the fact that the novel is the first of a trilogy about a young literature student's affair with an older man have obviously been enough to persuade the reviewer that, despite the extended descriptions of sado-masochistic sexual encounters, the novel can only have been intended for the young adult market.

⁵⁶ The effect that this has had on the young adult sections of many bookstores is clearly illustrated by the fact that on a visit to my local bookshop in September 2011, I witnessed an elderly woman approach the counter saying that she wished to purchase a book for her granddaughter and wondered if there were any teenage books that *weren't* about vampires.

a strong resemblance to Harry Potter or human girls pursued by supernatural lovers in the mode of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008).⁵⁷ Thus, whether the immortal lovers in question are vampires, death deities, angels or faeries, they and the teenage girls drawn to them relentlessly play out the conventional erotic patterns familiar to readers of the *Twilight* series or indeed of all traditional romantic fiction since Eros first fell in love with Psyche.⁵⁸ This relentless commodification of the teenage erotic imagination ensures that even when a powerful new fantasy series such as Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) emerges, the marketing of it is so manipulated as to suggest that it contains a love triangle in the *Twilight* mode (*People*, March 2012:49). Ironically, it seems then that the rampant homogenisation of young adult fantasy novels may have done more to limit the genre's range and tame its characteristically unruly memes than all the waves of adult disapproval that effectively marginalised fantasy for much of the twentieth century.

⁵⁷ In this series, an American teenager falls in love with a handsome, brooding classmate named Edward Cullen only to discover that he and his family are vampires. Despite the attentions of Jacob, a Native American boy who is also a werewolf, Bella's love for Edward remains constant and after an extended period of unconsummated yearning, the two eventually marry and produce a hybrid daughter to whom Jacob conveniently transfers his affections.

⁵⁸ These formulaic *Twilight*-inspired supernatural romances are now so numerous that a comprehensive listing of them would require far more space than I have available, but other teenage novels involving attractive vampires include L.J. Smith's *The Awakening* (1991a), *The Struggle* (1991b), *The Fury* (1991c) and *Dark Reunion* (1992) as well as Melissa de la Cruz's *Bluebloods* (2006), *Masquerade* (2007) and *Revelations* (2008). In *Wicked Lovely* (2007), *Ink Exchange* (2009) and *Fragile Eternity* (2010) by Melissa Marr, the teenage heroine is able to see faeries and finds herself the target of a faerie prince's desires. Other novels dealing with relationships between the sidhe or faeries and mortal girls include Carrie Jones's *Need* (2010), *Captivate* (2010), *Entice* (2011) and *Endure* (2012) and Julie Kagawa's *The Iron Knight* (2010), *The Iron Daughter* (2010), *The Iron King* (2011) and *The Iron Queen* (2012). Interestingly, the latter series is published by Harlequin, a firm better known for formulaic adult romance novels. In Maggie Stiefvater's *Shiver* (2009), *Linger* (2010) and *Forever* (2011), on the other hand, the central female character falls in love with a werewolf while Rebecca Fitzpatrick's *Hush Hush* (2010) and Heather Terrell's *Fallen Angel* (2011) present sexual temptation in the form of the fallen angels of Terrell's title. Even best-selling teenage author Meg Cabot seems to have been unable to resist market pressure to produce novels about erotically-charged romances between human girls and magical males although her *Abandon* (2011) and *Underworld* (2012), which describe the relationship between an American schoolgirl and a minor death deity, seem to have been written at least partially tongue in cheek.

Susanna Clarke, a prize-winning author of fantasy for adults, begins the title story of her collection *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* with a mock epigraph in which she states:

Above all remember this: that magic belongs as much to the heart as to the head and everything which is done, should be done from love or joy or righteous anger.

And if we honour this principle we shall discover that our magic is much greater than all the sum of all the spells that were ever taught. Then magic is to us as flight is to the birds, because then our magic comes from the dark and dreaming heart, just as the flight of a bird comes from the heart. And we will feel the same joy in performing that magic that the bird feels as it casts itself into the void and we will know that magic is part of what a man is, just as flight is part of what a bird is. (Clarke, 2007:7)

This epigraph emerges from and reflects a world in which magic is both possible and commonly practised, but Clarke's admonition can also be applied to the complex and magical processes of reading, which similarly has the power to engage both mind and heart. For adolescents, preparing to cast themselves into 'the void' of adulthood, fantasy novels can often provide an imaginative space in which to stretch untried intellectual wings and vicariously experience the transforming magic of vicarious flight. In the previous chapters, I have attempted to trace ways in which such texts are free to interrogate and play with a number of crucial contexts including time, space, gender, ethnicity, power and narrative structures themselves. Readers engaging with cultural memes as mediated by such works may well recognise recombination occurring as they learn that ideas can reshape their experience of the world as surely as magic may have reshaped their experience of literature for, as Rita Felski (2008:25) observes, the experience of recognition that literature may offer its readers is not the same as mere repetition. Instead, recognition

... denotes not just the previously known but the becoming known. Something that may have been sensed in a vague, diffuse, or semi-

conscious way now takes on distant shape, is amplified, heightened, or made newly visible. In a mobile interplay of exteriority and interiority, something that exists outside of me inspires a revised or altered sense of who I am.

In part this recognition is a necessary byproduct of the empathy that what Moira von Wright (2002: 407-416) calls 'the narrative imagination' seems to offer to those who choose to develop it.⁵⁹ As Spufford (2002:10) puts it:

The books you read as a child brought you sights you hadn't seen yourself, scents you hadn't smelled, sounds you hadn't heard. They introduced you to people you hadn't met, and helped you to sample ways of being that would never have occurred to you. And the result was, if not "an intellectual and rational being", then somebody who was enriched by the knowledge that their own particular life only occupied one little space in a much bigger world of possibilities.

Of course, Felski (2008:27) reminds us that for 'theorists weaned on the language of alterity and difference the mere mention of recognition is likely to inspire raised eyebrows' since for them to 'recognize is not just to trivialize, but also to colonize; it is a sign of narcissistic self-duplication, a scandalous solipsism, an imperious expansion of a subjectivity that seeks to appropriate otherness by turning everything into a version of itself'.

Yet I would argue that, instead of almost automatically dismissing a range of reader responses in this way, it is perhaps time to re-vision the old idea that self-discovery may be facilitated by imaginative contact with what is outside the self and that the experience of reading allows children to escape at least some of the limitations of age-graded schooling, which Lesko (2001:121), for instance, presents as 'an

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Martha Nussbaum (1997) suggests that such narrative imagination is crucial to the development of both a consciousness and a conscience that may be better suited to life in a multicultural environment.

intensification of age and related norms' which has reduced tolerance of and support for various forms of perceived deviance including both 'slowness' and 'precocity'. The ability of children to choose their reading material themselves is thus especially important in the light of the fact that a growing body of evidence from other disciplines has clearly begun to indicate that '[t]he stories that mean most to us join the process by which we come to be securely our own' (Spufford, 2002:9). As Jonathan Gottschall (2012:56), having drawn on the latest research in neuroscience, psychology and evolutionary biology, puts it, it is time we recognised that 'the human mind was shaped *for* story so that it could be shaped *by* story' (italics mine). Once this is fully understood, it becomes quite obvious that the more stories young readers encounter and the more self aware and open-ended such stories are, the more nuanced and complex that shaping is likely to be.

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