University of Southern Queensland

STARS AND SHADOWS: MAGIC AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN MIDDLE-GRADE FANTASY FICTION

A thesis submitted by

Jessica Marie Cook
BA(Hons)

For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2024

ABSTRACT

Australian fantasy literature for eight-to-twelve-year-olds is deeply rooted in cultural discourse and, I argue, uses the trope of magic to explore the nuances of contemporary subjectivity. This dissertation provides a textual and thematic analysis of 17 works of contemporary fantasy fiction written by Australian authors. In doing so, the thesis interrogates how magic is used to question patriarchal norms and social conventions governing identity, critiquing binary expectations of selfhood and ways of being. The feminist philosophy of Hélène Cixous is the primary theory through which possibilities of selfhood are explored, supported by Jacques Derrida's work on deconstruction and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic linguistics. Close reading and comparative literary analysis are the main research methods, allowing for rich subjective interpretation that explores a multiplicity of meanings. Each chapter centres a theme that influences subjectivity and explores its intersection with magic: witches and gender, belonging in sentient spaces, visibility and embodiment, fate, and radical Otherness. Subjectivity is revealed to be complex, with the potential for multiple and even conflicting selves in liminal spaces, held loosely and with conviction by protagonists. Cixous's position of unknowing and undecidability is revealed to be particularly pertinent for expressions of contemporary ways of being. This dissertation contributes knowledge about expansive subjectivity in an age of identity politics. The discussion of the creation of liminal spaces through which to explore selfhood is particularly relevant for cultural and literary discourse, able to be applied to a multitude of contemporary situations, literature, and classrooms.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Jessica Marie Cook declare that the thesis entitled *Stars and Shadows: Magic and Identity in Contemporary Australian Middle-grade Fantasy Fiction* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 16th September 2024

Endorsed by:

Dr. Nike Sulway
Principal Supervisor

Professor Jessica Gildersleeve
Associate Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not exist in its current form without the generous support, friendship, and guidance of Dr Daniel Hourigan and Dr Nike Sulway.

D, your efficiency is aspirational, and your very clever theoretical brain never failed to challenge mine to keep questioning.

N, you are magic incarnate, and I cannot even begin to describe all the ways you inspire me. You are the most thorough and spectacular supervisor and editor, keeping me laughing with kooky commentary in between bouts of crying, especially during the last few weeks. Thank you is not big enough.

Dr Maria Arena, thank you for providing such magnificent line edits. Your attention to detail and warm humour was much appreciated at the point in the process when I might have liked to just set it on fire rather than keep editing.

Professor Jessica Gildersleeve, who stepped in and saved the day at the last minute—thank you for your insight and deep intelligence, and for helping me to get this creation over the line.

To my seriously clever PhD friends: Gwen and Matthew. Gwen, for being a rainbow of love and fierce support, encouragement, and fun. Matthew, for procrastinating for hours and hours (and hours) with me by engaging in the most intense, nonsensical, and ridiculous philosophical conversations. I'm so pleased I finally introduced myself.

To Weefie, Ernie, Katie, Mark (phantasmagoric), AC, and MiMi–you are the best, ever. I love you endlessly.

Mickie J, Seal, Jen, Mads, and Nelly, thank you for always believing in me. I love you.

To my Femmes: Amy Jessie, Emma, and Lyce. I actually don't have any words to describe how much your love, encouragement, and kookiness means to me. You are everything, always.

This research has been supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

DEDICATION

To my heart and my person: MGC, I dedicate this to you because you always believed that I would do it. You're my favourite and my best.

Casper, your relentless curiosity, poet's heart, and absurd sense of humour make the world more magical, more complex, and more kind.

Georgie, my warrior kid, you are the toughest, softest, fiercest, sweetest, and most resilient.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to me because I worked damn hard and I am proud of myself, and of it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Words were useless. They were nothing but sounds connected to images. Some things were bigger than that" (Foxlee 300).

I have found myself in stories over and again. From being a small child, with a propensity for reading in trees, to a woman in her late thirties with a home in a forest, stories have repositioned the world for me in hundreds of ways. I have figured out who I am and how I fit in the world through fairy tales, through fiction, and especially through fantasy. I have come to know the depths of myself through narrative. Abraham Maslow incites the "dynamism of the rumpus" as self-recognition, or "a way of being oneself … A way of being at home, a kind of biological authenticity" (in Harju and Rouse 456). This is what the books I devoured as a child provided me: recognition of selfhood, my experiences elevated and presented back to me in a confirmation of worth and validity.

As I grew and changed, my bookcase became a museum that reflected my transformations. These books provided magic like an elixir as I grew, reconfiguring the world and challenging me to see it in new ways. Francis Spufford speaks to the transformative and imaginative magic of literature that I discovered as a child, writing:

> the book becomes part of the history of our self-understanding ... We can remember readings that acted like transformations. There were times when a particular book, like a seed crystal, dropped into our minds when they were ready for it, like a supersaturated 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 (9).

I kept all my books, from picture books to novels, because I'm sentimental, but also because those books remind me of the child I used to be, and of the magic that books have the potential to enact. Reading from these books with my children, I began to wonder about the effects the stories had on them. How were these stories creating crystals in their minds, and what images and distortions of self were being reflected to them? Both are neurodivergent, and one is transgender—can they find themselves in these books at all? My children have a lot of socio-cultural privilege but still have marginalised identities. How are Other identity markers communicated in these books?

I needed to limit the research to a realistic data set that was functional for this project, so I focused on contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction that I discovered 'in the wild.' By this I mean works of fantasy literature for eight- to twelve-year-olds, written by Australian authors, that I encountered naturally in my day-to-day life. I did not seek particular works or books written by certain authors, but instead searched the shelves of local bookstores and libraries. I found an increasing number of Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction in local bookshops in 2022, notably in The Book Tree and Dymocks, both in Toowoomba, which pointed to an increase in production and/or consumption of books in this subgenre. Even though I might have purchased novels online, the decision to avoid this was deliberate, and I wanted to make book choices intuitively, based on what I discovered in person. The choice to construct my data set organically was intuitive rather than academic, although it is reminiscent of Michael Lucey's work on transmission.

Before the close reading began, I was puzzling out the details and repercussions of the transmission and circulation of literature, attempting to avoid the influence of scholarly institutions, both school and university. D.F. McKenzie writes of the importance of being aware of the ways that texts are produced and circulated, and that thinking in this way unites "us as collectors, editors, librarians, historians,

makers and readers of books" to consider "the significance of (or the signifying potential of) 'the processes of their transmission'" (in Lucey 120). As I continued thinking about who decides which texts a community has access to, I chose not to censor the set of texts I came upon. Regardless, I ended up with a data set almost entirely written by white women, with a few exceptions. This is an unintentional demonstration of hegemony in the consumption of literature produced by the Australian publishing and marketing industry, revealing a trend in Australian publishing that privileges a certain demographic of authorship. Lucey writes "we become part of their circulatory patterns; we transmit them (or parts of them) to others" (121). As a white, cis, economically stable, able-bodied woman, I participate in the institutional transmission of these texts through my engagement with them.

Not only were these books written predominantly by white cis women—which may be a result of the disparagement of children's literature and of women authors who must operate within the same patriarchal systems that my dissertation engages with and critiques—but I noticed that they invoked discourses of magic and identity in similar ways. I have chosen to investigate these discourses for this thesis using the research question: How do magic and identity intersect and produce meaning in contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction? This dissertation is my exploration into how contemporary middle-grade fantasy literature converses with hegemonic patriarchy, and how notions of identity interact with several thematic discourses in expressions of diversity that are nuanced and complex.

The first chapter provides a literature review of international and Australian scholarship exploring the socio-cultural and historical implications of Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction. Coupled with the theories of intersectional feminism, deconstruction, and psychoanalytic linguistics, this chapter engages with, and expands upon, the wider field of literary and cultural studies to which my research speaks.

The methodology chapter describes my research methodology, including the primary method of thematic analysis, bolstered by three pillars of theory through which I interrogate the literature. The literary works that comprise my data set are contextualised as socio-cultural and historical artifacts that interact with social processes. In this chapter, I discuss the methods and research design of my dissertation, including the formal, structured processes of organisation I came to refer to as the 'Three C's': codes, categorisation, and close reading.

The Methodology chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the thesis. Hélène Cixous's bold poetic philosophy is a logical choice for her feminist and linguistic focus, and her use of language as a method for unravelling boundaries and binaries (Cixous & Calle Gruber). Jacques Derrida demonstrates the temporal and spatial privileging of presence over mediation in deconstruction of literary texts (*Of Grammatology*), and Jacques Lacan theorises that language is not always addressed to an Other (*Écrits*). These three theorists respond and speak to each other through my work, providing a comprehensive methodology for examining literature using linguistic and thematic interpretation. In particular, a prevailing characteristic that was most useful across all three theories is the potential for openness and multiplicity in meaning making. It was from this perspective of complexity and nuance in identity that I approached the texts, supported by linguistic and psychoanalytic, but most importantly feminist, theories.

The most logical place to begin considerations of identity in literature, for me, is gender, and the character who responds most deeply to the implications of gender in fantasy literature is the figure of the witch. In chapter three, Witches: Gender and the Patriarchy, I explore the shifting figure of the witch as representative of gender expression. I argue that the complexity of the witch is what makes her such a

malleable, persistent, and effective figure through which to explore discourses of gender, subjectivity, and ways of existing in cultural contexts. I consider the historical figure of the literary witch, as the hag, and how she has operated in literature over time. I offer two new categories of representations of the witch figure as demonstrated across the literature: The witch reborn and the witch oppressed. I explore how these modern witches respond to contemporary pressures around subjectivity. I also consider how masculinity and magic intersect in contemporary fantastic fiction, reflected through monstrous masculine witches, and what I term affable swan masculinity. Expressions of gender, and gender diversity, that are threatening to the patriarchal status quo complicate the formation and maintenance of social connections and belonging. Contemplations of the ways identity is impacted upon by belonging in community led me to consider how subjectivity is manipulated by belonging in space and place.

Chapter four, Belonging in Sentient Spaces, interrogates Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction's predisposition to bestow sentience on spaces, highlighting the complexity of belonging. The intricate characterisation of sentient spaces, and the way these spaces interact with magical protagonists, reveals the potential for challenging singular expressions of reality. By imbuing space with sentience, and by rebelling against the phallogocentric rigidity of time and space, middle-grade fantasy provides for the possibility of liminal ways of being. The knowability of space and time is destabilised, which in turn complicates notions of developing subjectivity in place and space. Interactions of self in space and place have a strongly embodied element and may be influenced by socio-cultural perception.

Chapter five, Visibility and Embodiment, explores how discourses of specularity, embodiment, perception, illusion, and visibility, manipulate expressions of subjectivity. Persistent marginalisation of magical characters in middle-grade fantasy demonstrates how supernatural bodies are socio-culturally constructed as strange, dangerous, and often transgressive. In response to this perception of their embodiment, I observe that magical child characters eventually stop trying to access hegemonic power and instead choose empowerment through curiosity and wonder. Physical subjectivity is reframed as unavoidable, but using Cixous's *écriture féminine,* I consider the possibility of de-hierachising difference. The Otherness that results from a perception of magical embodiment as strange, or transgressive, becomes a site of difference but not necessarily disempowerment. Magical bodies that play with perception, and tropes of good, evil, and monstrosity, are revealed as complex sites of ambiguous, diverse subjectivity. Perceptions of embodiment, and the powerlessness of a character to alter how they are perceived, leads me to consider the discourse of agency and ways that it influences burgeoning and diverse subjectivity.

Fate is entwined with magical capacity in most works of fantastic literature. Supernatural characters are often presented as fated, with marginalisation the expected consequence of magical identity. In the sixth chapter, Fated for Magic, I propose that fate interacts with six other discursive elements that influence subjectivity in middle-grade fantasy: agency, desire, Otherness, empowerment, superstition, and curses. Magical protagonists take one of two paths because of how fate interacts with these discourses. They may remain in their communities, Othered, but in familiar socio-cultural systems, or re-interpret their magical fate, enacting desire and empowerment, seeking subjectivity in *entredeux* (Cixous & Calle-Gruber).

Both options require a degree of agency and an ability to challenge the patriarchal status quo. But what of characters who are so Othered as to be unable to integrate into the social order? The result is Radical Otherness, which I explore in the final chapter.

Radical Otherness reaches its pinnacle through representations of the magical orphan and the queer child. I suggest that there are two significant aspects of Otherness that make magical orphans and queer children different to the representations of Otherness I have discussed in earlier chapters. The first is that Radical Otherness is not only marginalised from the hegemonic centre, but also represents the death of the family as the centre of patriarchal power. The second is that these markers of Otherness cannot be mediated by the subject; they are unchangeable characteristics that indelibly challenge hierarchical order: the orphaned child will always have dead parents, and the queer child will always be queer. Supernatural protagonists who exhibit the characteristics of Radical Otherness cannot exist without making visible the many ways they destabilise patriarchal order. They represent death, chaos, exile, and threatening empowerment. They must de-hierarchise their community and create spaces of belonging by forming a chosen family, revealing nuance in diverse expressions of identity, creativity in creating and maintaining connections, and empowerment in marginalisation.

The trope of magic in contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy literature creates opportunities for characters to reflect before motivating dynamic action. Magic moves characters to the cusp of becoming and creates the circumstances whereby characters can decide who they *wish* to be, not who they *ought* to be, according to social contracts. Magic in children's literature is never static, but

privileges transformation and magnifies socio-cultural pressures and conditions through symbolism and metonymy. According to Brian Attebery:

> Fantasy, then, makes use of the narrative and semiotic code we call magic to examine the relationship between character as imitated person and character as story function, between actor and actant… Characters are fed through the mechanism of magic like grapes through a wine press, emerging with unrecognizable shapes and flavors (*Strategies of Fantasy* 73-4).

Magic, then, is often the catalyst for dramatic transformation. It allowed me to transform from a book-loving child to a book-obsessed adolescent, to a literature-devouring adult. In this thesis, I examine the texts that contain the crystal seeds that burrow into the brain, reflecting and refracting the world through the magic of contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

> "The text must be like a good, strong coffee, as they say – so that it may become a magical philtre. That the gaps in meaning break through, the fire ashes where meaning is reborn, the scorched earth of the text sends forth narrative shoots" (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 174-75).

Fantasy literature is a diverse and multifaceted genre, with a long and robust history of scholarship. The exploration of the intersections of magic, identity, and liminality in this thesis are grounded in a comprehensive body of academic literature by Australian and international scholars. Coupled with the theories of intersectional feminism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, this thesis engages with, and expands upon, the wider field of literary and cultural studies.

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature that details the generic conventions of fantasy as well as key scholarship interrogating the socio-cultural and historical contexts of Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction. The most logical starting point is to define fantasy, and the structure and function of middle-grade fantasy in the literary field. I take the work of Attebery as key to understanding the diverse, multifaceted traditions of fantasy literature, particularly his argument that fantasy operates in three distinct ways: through formula, mode, and genre (*Strategies of Fantasy* 1). These three aspects situate works of fantasy in relation to one another, to mimetic literature, and within socio-cultural and historical contexts.

To consider the interaction between literature and culture, fictional literature is comprised of a body of works–cultural artefacts–that are historically contingent, socio-culturally coded, and psychologically conveyed. Fantasy literature functions to transgress, validate, or comment upon socio-cultural norms. Derridean deconstruction describes how linguistic meaning is derived through a series of arbitrary signs and signifiers, which are prescribed cultural meaning through binary

oppositions within social/ linguistic contexts (Anderson 253). These binaries support patriarchal cultures in communicating meaning. However, the treatment of binaries in literary works reveal how texts structure cultural and political ideology, revealing reality to be a largely subjective construct, that was 'exposed' prior to deconstruction, especially in fantasy (Jackson 4). Narrative conventions such as symbolism and metonymy are often used to represent magic and may demonstrate the instability of singular patriarchal truth and reality (Anderson 253). Australian middle-grade fantasy uses generic conventions to undermine the structural and linguistic binaries of patriarchal power in Australian culture.

The ordering of cultural power as it is reflected or challenged in fantasy also reflects the ways in which hegemonic hierarchies privilege whiteness—and its concurrent signifiers—as the preferred normative position or identity. Implicit in this privileging of whiteness are all other elements of superior cultural capital: heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, economic security, and masculinity (Booth et al 28). These are the markers of the master signifier, which occupies the position of privilege (Coats 125). Fantastic literature that tells stories about characters who are removed from hegemonic privilege destabilise literary representations of the patriarchal hierarchy, although it is important to note that who gets to tell stories of marginalised experience also informs critical evaluations of cultural power.

Emily Booth's research, and her subsequent creation of the Own Voices movement, interrogates the storytelling of marginalised perspectives. She posits that narratives expressing marginalised perspectives ought to be told by individuals from those marginalised communities (Booth and Narayan 25). Entwined with Booth's Own Voices movement are notions of power and positionality in which the negotiation of insider/outsider status ought to be considered, which can be

complicated work at several intersections (Merriam et al 405-409). The literary and cultural relevance of Booth's work is supported by the interaction of Cixous's theory of undecidability with Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly in terms of understanding that representation is vital to the creation of identity through linguistic interpellation. Booth's work is considered in the diaspora of Australian children's literature scholarship that explores the complex nature of Australian culture as it is reflected in children's literature, including the dissection of Australia's colonial past and present, and the myriad ways that colonial patriarchy impacts contemporary society and orders storytelling, along with prominent Australian scholars Clare Bradford, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens, and Debra Dudek. Representations of belonging and foreignness interact with colonialism, and multiculturalism and its effects on First Nations people, as well as many those whose identities are incongruent with the master signifier.

Literature has the capacity to explore themes of belonging, safety, emotion, and transcendence in a psychological capacity, drawing on Cixous's concept of refuge value. Magic as motif may enable the psychologically safe exploration of complex and difficult emotions, and life experiences, without real world consequences. Tolkien's concept of *eucatastrophe* (in Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 15) connects refuge value with wonder as a way of patterning narrative for emotional affect. The importance of emotion in writing about marginalised experiences, and its particular importance to the expression of the motif of magic, is expressed through Cixous's theory of feminist deconstruction and Kaustuv Roy's theory of the twice-born.

Cixous's *écriture féminine* challenges the prevailing phallogocentrism of literature through feminine writing (Cixous and Sellers xxix), a form of writing in which

“the parameters of thinking and writing are extended to their outer edges, where they summon what may ultimately be unthinkable or unwritable” (Buys and Polatinsky 80). Cixous’s intersectional and poetic philosophies propose the use of *écriture féminine* to celebrate undecidability and multiplicity as expressions of being (Cixous, *Rootprints* 83). Her seminal work ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1997) promotes rebellion against the patriarchal control of phallogocentrism. Additionally, she proposes the creation of *entredeux* between hegemonic binaries. These *entredeux* release the necessity for rigidity or conformance to socio-cultural conventions and norms (Cixous, *Rootprints* 10). In the context of this dissertation, Cixous’s concept of *entredeux* is used to refer to the process of encountering the expectations of patriarchal binaries, then subverting or transgressing them in an act of empowerment and liminality before finally engaging curiosity in exploring literary *entredeux* exposes possibility in identity.

Kaustuv Roy’s theory of the twice-born complements both Cixous’s and Derrida’s theoretical contributions to understanding the role of thresholds in the formation of identity and ways of being. According to Roy’s theory of the twice-born, identity is informed by two branches of knowledge: somatic-intuitive and psychic-affective (Roy 84). The twice-born can negotiate liminal expressions of identity, experiencing the self as a site of duality. The twice-born experiences temporality and spatiality as affording a state of perpetual growth and expansion (Roy 84-6). Roy’s theory of the twice-born exposes the potential for loosely held, expansive, literary representations of identity that reject patriarchal hierarchies and inform identity markers, challenging cultural norms around ways of being.

In situating contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction in its cultural and linguistic contexts, it becomes clear that magic and identity are sites of

meaning-making. In the next section, I establish the structure and function of fantasy as a genre, and apply it to the field of Australian children's fantasy fiction, revealing the capacity of the transgressive qualities of fantastic fiction to express diversity through subversion and nuance. Fantasy literature is exposed as a site of wonder, transgression, transformation, and possibility in multiplicity.

What is Fantasy?

This dissertation takes the work of Attebery as its guide to the diverse, multifaceted traditions of fantasy literature. Although the genre of fantasy is complex, Attebery points to transgression as one of the most potent functions of the fantastic. He writes that fantasy is "a body of literature that deliberately violates the generic conventions of realism" (*Strategies of Fantasy* viii). Attebery argues that fantasy transgresses mimetic conventions in three distinct ways: formula, mode, genre. This triad forms a continuum, with formula at one end, mode at the other, and genre as the umbrella overarching discussions of fantasy.

Attebery posits that formulaic fantasy depends on stability, "consistency and predictability" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 2), and relies on motif and trope to convey meaning. According to Attebery, while demonstrating varying degrees of complexity, the fantasy formula tends to present as "a mass-produced supplier of wish fulfillment" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 1). Formulaic fantasy relies on accepted conventions to tap into shared "psychological and social codes" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 9*).* This reliance on familiar motifs ensures that formulaic fantasy appeals to a wide variety of implied readers who share similar socio-cultural values. Fantasy-as-formula uses common tropes and motifs to simplify cultural exegesis and point to shared knowledge, without diluting broader cultural discursive analysis. If

formulaic fantasy is ontological, the other side of the fantastic continuum—fantasy-as-mode—is more concerned with the epistemology of fantasy.

Fantasy-as-mode delights in storytelling complexity and "is a way of doing something … A stance, a position on the world as well as a means of portraying it" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 2). Attebery describes fantasy-as-mode as "a vast subject, taking in all literary manifestations of the imagination's ability to soar above the merely possible" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 2). Fantasy-as-mode creates an atmosphere of wonder, and magic, by highlighting "the improbable, the implausible, the highly unlikely, and the as-yet-nonexistent" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 15). It presents the possibilities of magic and all manner of potentiality and multiplicity. Analysis of the interplay between fantasy-as-mode and reality leads to Attebery's consideration of a third function of fantasy that unites formula and mode: the fantastic genre.

Attebery defines the genre of fantasy as "a form that makes use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 17). Familiar and comforting mimetic rules and norms provide solid ground, while the fantastic mode shatters the illusion of predictability. The genre of fantasy is not fixated on the drudgery of reality, or the minutiae of daily life, but uses these conventions to highlight the possibilities of the fantastic. The fantastic genre took reality and "mingled the marvelous in order to heighten contrasts and to bring out the extraordinariness of story" (Hawthorne in Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 4). Another word for this extraordinariness might be 'wonder.' Fantasy as genre embraces the entirety of the fantastic under the umbrella of potentiality, possibility, and wonder. Fantasy and mimesis interact with, and comment upon, one

another in middle-grade fantasy. In doing so, fantasy both constructs and calls into question the production of meaning and power.

Fantasy and Mimesis

Mimetic representations of socio-cultural norms and expectations in fantasy fiction are historically contingent. Jackson posits that the "historical positions" of the authors mediate the transformation of the fantastic as a cultural product (Jackson 3), and that in speaking to a historical moment, fantasy addresses dominant cultural ideologies. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint similarly argue that fantastic literature automatically politicises and highlights cultural ideology, writing that, "all fantasy is political, even—perhaps especially—when it thinks it is not" (102). Fantasy literature uses literary conventions to comment upon the hegemonic culture within which it was created, even when it is set in an alternative world or universe. The diegesis of the text need not be mimetic to make socio-political comment. Rather, as Jackson writes of the inherently political and questioning nature of fantasy, contending that it "reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary" (4). She posits that fantasy narratives demonstrate the shifting constructs of a singular version of reality, and "thereby scrutinizes the category of the 'real'" (Jackson 21). That is, fantasy simultaneously interrogates hegemonic power by destabilising the notion that there is a singular, mimetic version of reality. Put another way, "fantasy's subversiveness lies in its disruption of the smooth surface of the bourgeois social order as constructed in the mimetic novel" (Bould and Vint 102). This subversiveness is frequently enacted through the construction and destruction of socio-cultural binaries.

At a linguistic level, Derridean deconstruction offers the opportunity to closely assess a literary text as a series of arbitrary signs and signifiers whose meanings are

culturally prescribed through oppositions (Anderson 253). Analysis through deconstruction assesses how this system of binaries and boundaries can be manoeuvred, subverted, or manipulated to support or challenge hegemonic patriarchal discourse. The socio-cultural interpretation of linguistics, and the rules associated with it, operate within the Symbolic. Authors are participants in the laws of the Symbolic, and of the societies and cultures with which they interact. Derrida writes:

> the writer takes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system (1691).

The writer of the fantastic is thus writing, and being written by, the socio-cultural linguistic systems of their time. The author relies on this hegemonic cultural knowledge to create meaning in their text, whether that is to comment upon, subvert, or confirm norms and assumptions. Nevertheless, according to a wide range of scholars, one of the primary functions of the fantastic is transgression, or subversion.

Fantastic literature frequently strives to transgress hegemonic norms and question the mimetic social order. Through this transgressiveness it may, for example, call into question the nature of the status quo as historical vestige rather than an appropriate or just distribution of power. Farah Mendlesohn states that fantasy “relies on a moral universe: it is less an argument with the universe than a sermon on the way things should be, a belief that the universe should yield to moral precepts” (5). Jack Zipes writes that transgression of the hegemonic status quo is the primary function of the fantastic. He describes the intertextual communication of cultural metanarratives that is part of this process, and argues that children are

smart, culturally adept, and able to comprehend the value of literary transgression. He writes:

> Children will learn to discriminate and make value judgements and to contend critically and imaginatively with the socioeconomic forces that are acting on them and forming and informing them (Zipes, *Sticks and Stones* 59).

Zipes contends that one of the primary roles of writers is to challenge the prevailing status quo. He writes that "one of the key roles of storytellers… is to be subversive, to pierce through the myths of the ruling elite in order to free people to recognise who they really are" (Zipes, *The Wisdom and Folly of Storytelling* 129). Zipes argues here literature, and particularly fantasy literature, interrogates hegemonic rules and accepted ways of being.

However, not all literary scholars agree that fantasy is a subversive genre or mode. Even when fantasy interrogates social upheaval, the way that magical conventions and characters are managed through narrative, can convey a conservative political message. Jose Monleón writes that the fantastic can just as easily function in "the defence of the status quo and the preservation of economic order by channelling and managing the eruption of the irrational it represents" (in Bould and Vint 103). That is, while others argue that the fantastic is inherently subversive, fairy-tale retellings may perform either a transgressive or stabilising function, so it is also true that some fantastic literature may reinforce and celebrate conformity and stasis (Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth* 109-110).

Whether the text seeks to subvert, confirm, or simply comment upon political ideology, for Jackson, the impact of reading fantastic narratives is experienced psychologically, and best described and understood psychoanalytically. She writes:

> It is in the unconscious that social structures and 'norms'

> are reproduced and sustained within us, and only by redirecting attention to this area can be begin to perceive the ways in which the relations between society and the individual are fixed (Jackson 6).

The structures of hegemonic power that support the status quo are so deeply entrenched in individuals that our contribution to the maintenance of oppressive norms becomes an unconscious process. Nevertheless, literature–reading–can draw attention to the ways identity is formed and maintained, the ways that socio-cultural pressures unconsciously mould subjectivity, and the ways in which powerful cultural processes impact on our lived realities. Whether for the purposes of subversion, commentary, or support, narratives can reveal the unconscious processes of meaning-making for their readers.

A significant way in which meaning is constructed and critiqued in fantastic literature is using symbolism and metonymy.

Symbolism and Metonymy: The Language of Fantasy

Symbols and metonymy in fantasy fiction are historically contingent, socio-culturally coded, and psychologically resonant. Attebery writes that a "reliance on traditional motifs can be an easy way to make sure that the reader will respond to the fantastic" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 8). While such responses may vary widely depending on cultural and literary competencies, symbolism and metonymy cultivate meaning.

Recurring or familiar fantastic symbols and tropes occur on multiple levels and can be interpreted through a variety of lenses depending on age, cultural background, and life experience. According to Michèle Anstey and Geoff Bull, experience may impede the process of meaning making in fantasy fiction, since "young readers can sometimes understand very sophisticated narratives or themes

while older readers can miss the point" (5). Jane Yolen confirms this complexity of meaning-making within the Symbolic. She writes:

> the writer writes about himself or herself when writing an art tale, and tries to make a serious statement within the confines of an absorbing tale. But he or she writes in a sort of code, a symbolic language. That code can be read on many levels. The child reads it on one, the adult on another (Yolen 26).

The use of symbolism or metonymy may render the text open to vastly diverse interpretations, depending on the reader. This openness is not necessarily a flaw, but instead allows for a rich multiplicity of readings, and robust interpretation between and among readers. Brian Richardson refers to interpretative multiplicity in children's literature as producing 'multiple implied readers' (259-274). The level of linguistic competency and manner of cultural competency may alter symbolic interpretation of literary discourses. Commonly used motifs, themes, characters, and narrative devices construct a set of rules that can be broken or manipulated to reinforce or transgress socio-cultural boundaries.

Fantasy fiction engages symbolism and metonymy to explore socio-cultural binaries and constructs texts that produce "the greatest attention to multiplicity, to heterogeneity, to these sharp and irreducible differences" (Derrida in Anderson 253). Complex symbolism in fantasy is at least partly apprehended and interpreted through the unconscious. As Swann Jones posits:

> fairy tales speak the language of the unconscious mind. In other words, the fantastic creations in fairy tales may be seen as metaphoric dramatizations … expressed in the symbolism of the unconscious mind, in the language of dreams (11).

Fantasy fiction destabilises the notion of a rigid and knowable reality by writing in the symbolic and metonymic language of the unconscious. Fantastic literature is a symbolically rich genre which renders it more open to multiple readings than mimetic

works. As Zipes and Yolen argue, child readers bring another layer of complication to reading, since their willingness and capacity to interpret the symbolism of fantastic literature is often, itself, more subversive and playful, less vulnerable to the limitations of adult readers to seek a truth's stable and inherent meaning-full-ness.

Fantasy often uses symbolism and metonymy to expose the instability of a shared truth and reality, and, thus, expose possibility and multiplicity. Jackson theorises that this instability is an effect of metonymy. She posits:

> Part of its subversive power lies in this resistance to allegory and metaphor. For it takes metaphorical constructions literally … It could be suggested that the movement of fantastic narrative is one of *metonymical* rather than of *metaphorical* process: one object does not *stand for* another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability (Jackson 41-42).

Here Jackson describes just one of the ways in which meaning may shift and alter in fantastic literature, resisting rigidity and the laws of the Symbolic (Lacan 414-415). In fantastic narratives for young readers, the world as it is, and the world as it ought to be, are both evoked. The world as it is–the world the reader inhabits–is brought into productive proximity with the world as it ought to be (or some other alternative reality). This very juxtaposition of the real and the fantastic disrupts the inevitability of the world as it is, rendering the real unstable. This instability “indicates the disturbing thrust of the fantastic in its resistance to the endings and meaning of closed, ‘signifying’ narratives” (Jackson 42).

What reading fantastic literature can create, then, is an openness to multiple possibilities. Fantasy fiction demonstrates potentiality and manipulates common cultural symbols and archetypes to create spaces of liminality for exploration of

multiplicity. Cixous contends that previously secure binaries can be dismantled in this manner. She writes:

> Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general—art, religion, family, language—it is all developed while bringing the same schemes to light. And the movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work (Cixous and Sellers 38).

By recognising these binaries and questioning the rigid rules and laws of the Symbolic, discourse is engaged that questions, comments upon, or manipulates the construction of socio-cultural power structures, and a fissure is created. This fissure, or *entredeux,* exposes the potential for Otherness and may reveal the invisible or the transgressive, fracturing the hegemonic status quo and altering the certitude of socio-cultural norms.

Whiteness and Invisible Norms

Australian middle-grade fantasy literature demonstrates marked/unmarked states, situating and interrogating social markers as normalised/unmarked or deviant/marked. Wayne Brekus applies the linguistic theory of markedness/unmarkedness to sociology, using Linda Waugh's argument that semiotic binaries are applicable to social contrasts and are situated in relation to hegemonic power: male/female, blackness/whiteness, homosexuality/heterosexuality (Brekus 31-32). Brekus argues that there is "marked attention and unmarked inattention" (32), resulting in subjective norms–whiteness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, economic security, and masculinity (Booth et al 28)–coming to be viewed as typical, regular, or normal, and their marked oppositions standing out as non-typical, irregular, or abnormal. Consequently, these binaries of

marked/unmarked render whiteness, along with these other markers of cultural capital, and their privileges and power, invisible (Brekus 31-33). These are the identity markers for the unmarked, or regular, Australian subject, and this idealisation projects onto literary characters. Karen Coats calls whiteness the "master signifier" and argues that it is the "screen against which any 'other' culture is projected; it embodies the universal, making any other ethnicity the particular, the curious, the deviant" (Coats 125). This linguistic process of the marked/unmarked aligns hegemony with the master signifier, default person, or "socially generic", marking Other characters as "specialised deviations" (Brekhus 33).

Mimi Marinucci articulates the effect of normalising and privileging the master signifier, stating that "granting linguistic priority to any one social group sends a powerful message about who matters and who does not" (Marinucci 95). As literature and culture reflect and inform one another, the unmarked subject inhabits the hegemonic position of cultural power and authority in literature and in society.

A psychological linguistic perspective on the gender binary reveals its inherent hierarchy, with the master signifier occupying the position of privilege. Coats writes:

> the opposition male/female should really be read male/not male. Culturally and historically speaking, male is always the dominant term: female has no definition other than not male … Lacan openly admits that 'normal' is nothing more than code for 'nor-male' or 'the norm of the male' (98).

Masculine subjectivity is linguistically coded to centralise male power. The coding of white masculine subjectivity as hegemonically central, and the internalisation of this subjectivity as the invisible norm, occurs on a subconscious level that is culturally reinforced. Coats explains how literary representations of subjectivity come to impact socio-cultural understandings of identity:

> By offering substantive representation for words and things to the child, stories, especially those found in children's literature, provide signifiers—conventional words and images—that attach themselves to unconscious processes and have material effects on the child's developing subjectivity (Coats 2).

Repeated representation of the unmarked Australian subject solidifies this unconscious hierarchisation of power. This, in turn, impacts on formation of identity. Stephens supports Coats's position in writing about how literary representations of subjectivity influence and reflect the cultural landscape. He also states that it is a primary function of literature to present opposing and alternative perspectives and experiences. Stephens posits:

> Narrative fictions are essentially performative. They may configure characters and events in ways structured to be meaningful and significant, but they also invite readers to inhabit those structures and treat them as models for understanding behaviour in the actual world and as exemplifying desirable or undesirable behaviour. In other words, a thematic textual function is to disclose how particular schemata have become naturalised within discourse and social practice, and to advance alternative schemata thematically (*Always Facing the Issues* xii).

This reinforces the importance of subversive fantastic narratives, particularly in terms of their tendency to present alternative subjectivities, to empower the marginalised, and to use magic to explore difference and diversity. Characters who express marginalised identities may be centralised in middle-grade fantasy fiction, although despite "almost fifty years of work to promote racial equality in the field ... whiteness is ubiquitous in children's literature" (Welch 369).

Most protagonists in the data set of this dissertation are white females, and one is gender diverse. There may be some unintentional bias reflected in the data set due to my preferences, novels sold in bookstores, and the effect of social media algorithms showing me texts that align with my interests. This may have led to an

unrepresentative sample of protagonists, but whiteness as the master signifier is still synchronous with hegemonic power in middle-grade fantasy fiction. Centering female voices, even if they are white, does represent one specialised deviation from the unmarked norm, and characters who promote difference are often placed in opposition to the master signifier, heightening and highlighting their difference. In many of the novels the unmarked subject or master signifier of white, cis, heterosexual, able-bodied men represents the antagonist. In creating space for expressions of Otherness, hegemonic power is shifted, the patriarchal status quo is interrupted, and this disruption and subsequent empowerment may be extrapolated onto Other marginalised identities.

Representing the Other

Literature can create space for Otherness that privileges alternative narratives. While hegemonic images of childhood are still the most prevalent reflections of childhood in Australian literature, Deepa Sreenivas writes that marginalised identities are sometimes represented. She writes that First Nations, queer, gender non-conforming, or disabled children, for example, are sometimes present in literature, but that these characters are rarely the primary focus of the narrative. She argues that, rather than being naturalised or having their stories told, marginalised characters must establish a credible reason for being included (Sreenivas 317). This is an important distinction to make concerning diversity: progressive and subversive representations of diversity do more than merely include characters with diverse identities.

Victoria Flanagan writes that “one of the most significant issues to address is reader positioning. How does the text position readers in relation to their own

community or cultural and ethnic group?" (Flanagan 21). The positioning of characters within the narrative, not just their presence, also speaks to discourses of power. This is particularly true of diverse or marginalised characters. Complex and authentic representation of diverse characters directly influences socio-cultural ideology. It also serves the vital function of promoting compassion and empathy for the lives and experiences of others. Brynn Welch states that if:

> One role of children's literature is helping children to imagine how their lives and the lives of others might go, the pervasive whiteness of children's literature restricts the circumstances in which all children imagine persons of colour. Moreover, it deprives children of colour of the value of seeing themselves in a variety of contexts, both ordinary and extraordinary (375).

The way that characters are represented, and who writes them, constructs, and manipulates the discourses of power that contribute to shifting ideological perspectives.

The increasing influence of the Own Voices literary movement, documented and championed by Emily Booth, privileges individuals from marginalised communities telling their own stories. In Australia, Own Voices has focused on Aboriginal voices, creators of colour, and queer artists and writers (Booth and Narayan 25). Booth discovered that of the 2233 young adult literary texts published in Australia in 2018, only 45 were 'authentic' narratives, written by members of the community represented in the story (Booth et al 13). This speaks to economic as well as socio-cultural power imbalances. As bell hooks argues:

> When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our actions, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination. In crucial ways, writing about cultures or experiences of ethnic [or Othered] groups different from one's own becomes

> political when the issue is who will be regarded as the 'authoritative' voice' (43-44).

Privilege and power are intrinsically implicated in the processes of writing and publishing. Who does the telling is significant both in terms of who assumes the right to speak for whom, and whose voices are heard or read. Missing or inaccurate representations of marginalised social or cultural groups created by non-diverse authors may reinforce stereotypes, leading to what Welch terms 'second-hand representation.' She argues that:

> second-hand representations are powerful, especially for young children, because these early representations have often been distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes, and left incomplete (Tatum in Welch 371).

Second-hand representations reflect the positionality of the teller. According to Sharan B Merriam et al, "the notion of positionality rests on the assumption that a culture is more than a monolithic entity to which one belongs or not" (411). An individual's positionality is complicated by the "multiplicity of social and cultural characteristics of heterogeneous populations" (411). When marginalised characters are created by writers who belong to the cultural group within which the narrative resides, the resulting complexity of representation is more likely to reflect the complex positionality of diverse peoples. Such texts can positively influence discourses around socio-cultural power in Australian culture by providing more complex, authentic, and accurate representations of diverse lives.

Literary representations of complex Otherness resist rigid social positions and phallogocentric closure. Cixous's *écriture féminine* privileges this process through engaging curiosity about subjectivity. Anthea Buys and Stefan Polatinsky write that *écriture féminine* denotes:

> *a thinking where one does not necessarily* know, where one learns '*knowing how not to know,'* which is not equated with not knowing but rather with knowing how to avoid getting closed in by the hegemony and edifice of the logos (86).

Through complex representations of Otherness, subjectivity is revealed as fluid, unstable, and transformative. Jackson writes that a Lacanian "desire for otherness" is one way to reassess socio-cultural order and surge towards transformation (19). She posits that desire is located in the Other, and that this challenge to subjectivity may be driven by curiosity about the unknown. This is partly why Own Voices, and the positionality of the writer of complex characters is so important. Avoiding second-hand and inaccurate representation ensures that curiosity towards Others is respectful and rejects hierarchies. Jackson contends that desire is:

> directed towards the absent areas of this world, transforming it into something 'other' than the familiar, comfortable one. Instead of an alternative order, it creates 'alterity,' this world re-placed and dis-located. A useful term for understanding and expressing this process of transformation and de-formation is 'paraxis' (Jackson 19).

Fantasy offers an opportunity to view Otherness as nothing more than a point of difference to be explored, rather than an expression of a hierarchical understanding of identity. Alterity indicates that "there is no 'one' without an 'other'" (de Beauvoir in Marinucci 89), therefore, recognising Otherness as *not me*, may be useful in constructing a sense of self. Indeed, Attebery writes that recognising the Other is "essential to the formation of the self" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 6). Middle-grade fantasy fiction, then, may legitimate a plethora of expressions of subjectivity by exploring Otherness.

bell hooks describes the formation of selfhood as "self-recovery" and embraces multiplicity when writing that "the self is not a signifier of one 'I' but the

coming together of many ‘I’s,’ the self as embodying collective reality of past and present” (30-31). Cixous, too, posits that singular ‘I’ does not exist, and that alterity exists in complex constructs of self, not merely in the distance between self and Other. She writes that “The difference is not one, that there is never one without the other ... I is never an individual. I is haunted” (in Sellers xiiiv). The Haunted-I may be understood as a robust expression of selfhood. However, progress towards full realisation as a subject requires a language of expression: without exposure to language with which to identify and explore, subjectivity is delayed or derailed.

Through a Lacanian lens, the self becomes a subject “with his entry into language” and “it is therefore within the language and images of a specific culture that the subject must both *find* and *create* himself” (Coats 3-4). The linguistic process of achieving self-representation is typically represented in one of two ways in middle-grade fantasy literature. The first sees the protagonist assume their ‘proper’ place within society, where “the magical adventures are tied together and the story given shape by the hero’s gradual assumption of his proper powers and his place in society” (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 88). However, an alternative representation of self-realisation, or identity formation, is reflected in fantastic narratives in which the protagonist embraces “difference and otherness, rebellion and nonconformity” (Zipes, *Sticks and Stones* 12). The rejection of hegemonic power as necessary for forming an identity may be represented through a character’s access to and embracing of forbidden knowledge. Such taboo or transgressive forms of knowing become “commodities that children are encouraged to acquire because they can use them to defy parents and the community” (Zipes, *Sticks and Stones* 12).

Australian Scholarship: The World Upside-Down

Children's literature and cultural exegesis are inseparable, reflecting and influencing each other in inescapable ways, as Stephens confirms, writing that the "social, political, and economic interests of children's publishing" are inseparable from the broader context of Australian culture (Stephens, *Ways of Being Male* 15). Contemporary Australian fantasy literature reflects our socio-cultural preoccupations, yet distances itself from discourse about the consequences of colonial history. One way that children's fantasy literature avoids addressing the consequences of our colonialist history is through representations of migrant characters, situated within idealistically multicultural communities.

In acknowledging the ongoing effects of colonisation, Bradford notes the historical relationship between England and its colonised countries, and catastrophic ramifications of colonialism for Indigenous populations. She describes the persistent infantilisation of Indigenous people, who were portrayed as "incapable of the higher order reasoning of Europeans and hence in need of supervision and discipline" (Bradford, *The Stolen Generations of Australia* 242). This hierarchical mind-set solidified the "logic of elimination," which Patrick Wolfe describes as the processes through which "settler colonies sought to eliminate native societies in order to replace them with settlers" (in Bradford, *The Stolen Generations of Australia* 243). This process of elimination, including through assimilation, is ongoing and supported by "structural amnesia" (Bradford 246), which Anna Haebich defines as a strategy whereby groups with hegemonic power "'forget' what is not socio-culturally important to them" (Bradford, *The Stolen Generations of Australia* 246). Structural amnesia is woven into the fabric of institutional racism, which privileges whiteness and 'forgets' both the valuable contributions of non-whiteness, and the flaws of whiteness. With

the support of structural amnesia and other processes, whiteness—and its concurrent signifiers—is privileged through socio-cultural, political, and economic discourses and practices. This privilege is reflected in the binary of belonging and foreignness.

There are limited opportunities for marginalised authors to publish stories about their experiences. These limitations expose the tension between discourses of belonging and foreignness. Booth and Narayan provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which the Australian writing and publishing industries support and celebrate white voices and white narratives (2), resulting in a literary landscape where the voices and stories of non-whites are marginalised. Ambelin Kwaymullina contends that, rather than being a diversity problem, the lack of diverse stories is a "privilege problem" that constitutes "a set of structures and attitudes that consistently privilege one set of voices over another" (in Booth and Narayan 2).

Issues of Otherness, belonging, and foreignness are sometimes addressed in Australian children's literature, but often in a manner that reinforces the status quo and disempowers marginalised characters. Bradford argues that ethnic and cultural Otherness in children's literature is represented through two paradigms: "first, that alterity is presented as a boon to white children; and secondly, that the ideal outcome is one in which difference is assimilated into whiteness" (in Flanagan 14). The lack of diverse characters and voices in Australian children's literature is significant for a range of reasons.

Limiting representation of diversity in children's literature significantly constrains the worldview of the reader. One way of thinking about this is that "a child deprived of stories is deprived, as well, of certain ways of viewing other people" (Nussbaum in Welch 372). Persistent privileging of whiteness, including white

characters, voices, and stories, contributes to structural amnesia. Children can only understand what they are exposed to; by continuing to privilege stories that celebrate and support whiteness, and marginalise stories from and about non-whiteness, stakeholders in the Australian writing and publishing industry contribute to structural amnesia.

The discourse of difference is entwined with whiteness in children's fantasy literature. White characters reflect the master signifier, and are unmarked in ways that normalise their privilege. There are few profound consequences, in terms of achieving belonging, for white characters who are superficially coded as 'different'. However, when a character is not white, difference is perceived as foreignness and the character is unable to be assimilated into whiteness and consequently, socio-cultural power. The privileging of whiteness, coupled with inaccurate representations of marginalised identities, are just two of the limitations of efforts to increase the diversity of Australian literature.

Centralising whiteness and aligning it with systemic power has created what Dudek terms a "unity in diversity" form of multiculturalism (*Dogboys and Lost Things* 18). According to Dudek, multiculturalism was "named and sanctioned by the government in response to diverse groups of immigrants entering Australia" (*Dogboys and Lost Things* 4). She claims that Australia's multiculturalism discourses neglect the historical and ongoing struggle of many cultural groups, especially Indigenous peoples. Dudek argues that multiculturalism fails to adequately include Indigenous Australians, who "generally and rightly resist being categorised under this term. Multiculturalism was not created to acknowledge the diverse First nations within nation-state borders" (Dudek, *Dogboys and Lost Things* 4) and instead denies the ancient knowledge and customs of First Nations people and negates the

customs and values of marginalised cultures. This unity in diversity form of multiculturalism maintains the hierarchy that privileges whiteness as the invisible norm for an 'Australian person.'

The persistent dominance of whiteness in Australian literature creates disconnection and imbalance. Historically, Australian children's literature has reflected the multicultural movement that "promotes a respect for difference" yet negates it by "relying upon a rhetoric of sameness rather than by demonstrating respect and responsibility for all people regardless of difference" (Dudek, *Seeing the Human Face* 373). Nevertheless, Dudek notes a positive trend in contemporary literature. She contends that contemporary Australian children's literature has entered a new stage of multiculturalism. Dudek describes this stage as "critical multiculturalism" (*Dogboys and Lost Things* 18), and argues that critical multiculturalism contributes to the creation of stories that:

> speak back to and warn against a 'unity in diversity' version of multiculturalism that works only as long as radical difference, and especially racial difference, can be transformed into or controlled by the figure of the (white) nationalist (Dudek, *Dogboys and Lost Things* 18).

'Radical difference' refers to the intersectionality of diversity, recognising that gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, ability, and financial status may influence access to socio-cultural and structural power. Critical multiculturalism challenges the colonial patriarchal hierarchy and promotes the understanding that the Australian socio-cultural landscape is constructed by a great number of radically diverse identities. Narrative representations of critical multiculturalism promote the concept that diverse identity is central to cultural understanding, or competence, and therefore to contemporary children's literature.

Robust representations of personal and cultural identity are vital to literature. Stephens states that “children’s books predominantly deal with how people live, interact and forge their own identities in a social community” (*Children’s Literature, Interdisciplinarity, and Cultural Studies* 163). The way ideological impulses are represented in contemporary literature, particularly in relation to difference and Otherness, is commonly thematised. Ien Ang discusses the importance of literature in demonstrating how to enact an identity in the world, writing:

> Through ideologies people acquire an identity, they become subjects with their own convictions, their own will, their own preferences … Not only does one’s own identity take on form in this way, but the ideology serves also to outline the identity of other people (in Stephens, *Children’s Literature, Interdisciplinarity, and Cultural Studies* 168).

Stephens extrapolates the processes of self-actualisation and recognition of Otherness that occur through the narrative organisation of ideological discourses. He explains that “the structure of narrative moves through conflict to resolution, and its outcomes reflect some kind of change—in characters, in a situation, in the represented world” (Stephens, *Children’s Literature, Interdisciplinarity, and Cultural Studies* 168). In children’s literature, the drive from conflict to resolution frequently involves distance from adult authority and the subsequent empowerment of the child protagonist. In fantasy, this process is assisted by the development of magical ability.

The structural and narratorial devices of middle-grade fantasy often preempt character development by isolating the child character from adult figures. Sarah Gilead writes that “child and adult can only ‘dream’ each other, remaining ‘half a life asunder’” (283), and argues that this schism is exploited in middle-grade fantasy for transformative purposes. Through the creation of this “clear binary of childhood and adulthood” (Bottigheimer 205), magical children frequently find themselves

orphaned, without adult guidance to steer them through the challenges of a magical existence. The expanse between adulthood and childhood is marked by difference, separated by space and secrecy, and informed by an imbalance of competencies. As Mallan ruminates regarding the binary of adulthood and childhood:

> these oppositional pairings define one category in terms of its relation to its Other. It also serves to rationalize the power differential that separates according to age and a sense of superior knowledge, skill, and experience (*Picturing the Male* 169).

The child without adult guidance not only lacks access to the knowledge necessary to grow an advanced skill set but, in middle-grade fantasy, must also contend with the difficulties of navigating magic. The child's elevated independence is, therefore, a narrative convention that places the onus and responsibility for becoming-adult, becoming-self with the child, rather than with their carer or parent. The magic-wielder must follow their curiosity and sense of wonder to figure out who they are, and how to occupy space as a supernatural being.

The space between adulthood and childhood in contemporary middle-grade fantasy fiction is filled with challenges. The lack of adult guidance often precipitates the protagonist's stark and frightening realisation regarding their lack of competency, as well as removes the likelihood that the adult would prevent the child from attempting the dangerous tasks that their stories require of them. This destabilising experience may, however, lead to one of the key benefits of fantastic narratives; Fantasy may become a space of supernatural potential that serves an important psychological function: that of providing refuge value.

Refuge Value

Magic in fantasy fiction is used to transcend ordinary life and stimulate a sense of

refuge value, which, according to Cixous, is where the power and purpose of literature lies. She describes the confronting violence of the world that she is powerless to prevent and suggests that words and stories became the shields with which she protects herself from psychological difficulties. Cixous writes:

> the reality of the world to which I was witness was so violent. Like today: the world comes at me with such violence that I could not stand it without a shield … I gathered up twigs, magic words (*Rootprints* 95-96).

In providing a shield from the harsh realities of life, fantasy literature may offer respite from the tumult. Transforming the world with magic stimulates the potential for psychological transcendence and contributes to the refuge value of a narrative. Griesinger concurs, writing that "magic is a literary device that helps the reader transcend the ordinary and the familiar and enter an extraordinary and unfamiliar 'other' world" (475). The interaction between the mundane and the supernatural that Griesinger describes heightens the psychological and symbolic refuge value of a narrative. Yolen asserts that fantasy provides a necessary support for engaging satisfactorily with the ordinary 'real' world. She argues that:

> children's fantasy literature is a special form of imaginative self-transcendence that works in similar fashion to equip children to transcend difficult circumstances in their present lives and to hope for something better in the future … In short, children's fantasy allows children to survive reality long enough to grow up and be ready to change it. In this way, fairy tales and fantasy literature fit children for survival (Yolen 459).

Yolen is describing a psychological transformation that prepares the reader to engage with the world as it is. The refuge value in storytelling, for children, could therefore be perceived as vicariously engaging with the tumult of the world in preparation for real life.

For children especially, literature can function as a space of freedom and potentiality in which the problems of the world can be assessed and processed

without real world consequences. Attebery writes that in fantasy, the "presence of the impossible blocks a literal reading" and the text becomes "some sort of iconic stand-in for everyday life" rather than an extension of it (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 21). Welch writes that narrative fictions "present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of the engagement" (372). Fantastic outcomes can then be applied to real-world resolutions with a view to securing psychological safety. The reader not only vicariously experiences dangerous situations or unfamiliar emotional terrain, but may also be exposed to different points of view or life experiences. This enhances the potential for developing compassion and for practicing emotional competency.

An essential element of refuge value is emotional affect. According to Mendlesohn, "we are reading here to feel these emotions, to thrill with the hero, to fear with the onlooker" (37). The reader is invited on the emotional journey of the protagonist, yet they have no control over the choices of the characters or the narrative events. The reader is powerless to manipulate outcomes, yet they are also safe from the consequences of the protagonist's choices. Fantasy invokes emotional affect as a key method of achieving refuge value and constructing meaning. Yolen posits that fantasy literature requires one thing of its authors and readers: total surrender to the world of the story and the feelings and experiences that it presents. Margrete Lamond goes as far as positing that "affect-rich storytelling, rather than fairy-tale enchantment, is the key factor" (136) of the success of a fantasy novel.

Griesinger links this affect-richness with religious, and specifically Christian, belief. She argues that the primary function of fantasy literature is to provide hope and to act as a "special form of imaginative self-transcendence" (459). This imaginative self-transcendence allows the reader to hope for a brighter future, which, she goes on to imply, is a form of emotional baptism (Griesinger 460). While an

ecclesiastical lens is not the sole outcome of the emotional effects of fantasy storytelling, hope does create opportunities to feel psychological and emotional safety. Optimism is a powerful emotion and may be perceived as a kind of magic in and of itself. No matter what catastrophes befall the protagonist, no matter the comrades lost, no matter the size of the dragon to slay, the emotional fortitude to survive may be instinctual, but hope and wonder are allies on the path.

Wonder: Fantasy and Fairy Tales

The sparkling heart of wonder lies at the core of both fantastic literature and fairy tales and speaks to a shared structural characteristic of optimism. Tolkien calls this "eucatastrophe," meaning that no matter the challenges and burdens within the narrative, fantasy must have "an intact structure, must have such a final turn toward deliverance" (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 15). The ending ought to be wondrous, which does not necessarily mean happy. The difference lies in wonder's capacity to encompass rather than deny the broad range of human emotion and experience. Fantasy literature and fairy tales employ eucatastrophe as a way of mediating the wide emotional range explored through fantastic literature. Historically, fairy tales were not necessarily intended as children's literature, though due to their family resemblance, fairy tale scholarship is often relevant to the study of middle-grade fantasy fiction. Bacchilega's work on fairy tales and wonder is especially useful in analysing fantasy literature.

The central position of wonder in fantasy and fairy tales is significant. Bacchilega explains that fairy tales are also known as 'wonder tales' (5), reflecting the central role wonder plays in such tales. She describes wonder as evoking "awe and curiosity" (5), and quotes Marina Warner who writes:

> Wonder has no opposite; it springs already doubled in itself, compounded of dread and desire at once, attraction and recoil, producing a thrill, the shudder of pleasure and fear. It names the marvel, the prodigy, the surprise as well as the responses they excite, of fascination and inquiry; it conveys the active motion towards experience and the passive stance of enrapturement (in Bacchilega 5).

Wonder is, thus, not just a feeling but a method of engaging with narrative and with ways of seeing (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 16). Wonder as a method involves openness and curiosity towards possibility and potential.

The connection between wonder and potentiality is noted by Attebery, who writes that fantasy "offers the possibility of generating not merely meaning but an awareness of and pattern for meaningfulness. This we call wonder" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 17). He explains that fantasy has a "way of playing with symbols that encourages the reader to see meaning as something unstable and elusive, rather than single and self-evident" (Attebery, *Stories About Stories* 2). Wonder, magic, and symbolism are intertwined in middle-grade fantasy fiction. They interact to create alternative pathways, to explore multiplicity, and to examine potentiality. All these attributes are reflected in Cixous's poetic philosophies, undermining certainty and revelling in the unknown as well as the wondrousness and awe of not-knowing.

Cixous: Écriture Féminine

Cixous's writing celebrates "undecidability" and multiplicity as an expression of *écriture féminine* (Cixous and Calle Gruber 158). Cixous describes undecidability as:

> the thinking of tolerance, the thinking that does not sever, the thinking capable of concavity, of turning in on itself to make room for difference. The undecidable thinks all of the possibilities (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 158).

Undecidability is a rebellion against the phallogocentrism of patriarchal control and its overreliance on knowable, enforceable linguistic binaries that dictate appropriate ways of being in the world. Undecidability operates as a force that demonstrates the power of "a feminine writing [that] will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression" (Sellers xxix).

Feminine writing is not dependent on the biological womanhood of the writer. Instead, it is a rejection of heterosexual masculinity as the dominant literary voice that embraces the liminal self or selves. As Susan Sellers writes, "a feminine subject position refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other's difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery" (Sellers xxix). According to Sellers, Cixous's theories are revolutionary and consciousness-changing:

> Not only can writing exceed the binary logic that informs our present system … but, she stresses, through its transformations, feminine writing will initiate changes in the social and political sphere to challenge the very foundation of the patriarchal and capitalist state (Sellers xxix).

Rather than participate in what she perceives as a broken system, Cixous describes a new ideology that focuses on openness and potential, rather than suppression and lack. Cixous argues that in rejecting phallogocentrism, writing can be reappropriated to signify subjective empowerment rather than power over others.

In *écriture féminine,* subjective empowerment may occur in an 'in-between' space of transition called an *entredeux.* As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, *entredeux* are liminal spaces that refer to, yet deconstruct, the binaries that frame identity formation. *Entredeux* reject the rigid limitations of binaries and exist beyond the pressures of hegemonic socio-cultural expectations and norms (Cixous, *Rootprints* 9-10). This liminal space lies somewhere "between familiar and alien"

(Mukherji xix) and contain a spark of recognition or familiarity that exposes potentiality. The *entredeux* signals an opportunity for an expression of Otherness that can be claimed, yet held loosely, and used to express a free-flowing and untethered subjectivity (Cixous, *Rootprints* 9-13).

Cixous writes of *entredeux* as a form of the uncanny, positing that "at times we are thrown into strangeness. This being abroad at home is what I call an *entredeux*" (Cixous, *Rootprints* 10). The *unheimlich* nature of an *entredeux* signals an opportunity for open-ended questioning of preconceived norms. This state of unknowing may be conceived as strange, removed from the known and knowable. Cixous imagines that this passage opens linearly, rather than vertically. It exposes Otherness as a point of difference in multiplicity, exorbitance, and linguistic overflow, rather than exclusion and rigidity (Buys and Polatinsky 82).

In the following untitled poem, Cixous captures the undecidability and potentiality of *écriture féminine,* as well as the capacity of the *entredeux* to express difference:

> Bi: two—only?
> Why not all the twos [two les deux] and the between's
> (*Rootprints* 51).

Cixous demonstrates the limitations of linguistic binaries and reveals the potential for multitudes in this simple two line poem. Using *écriture féminine* to explore a multitude of ways of being creates an intersectional space where Otherness is celebrated as potential. An *entredeux* is created that challenges patriarchal norms, thresholds, and boundaries, and celebrates difference as individuality. *Entredeux* exist between and beyond all binaries yet remain historically and socio-culturally contingent. An *entredeux* is transgressive by its very nature and is "a way of de-hierarchizing—everything" (Cixous, *Rootprints* 10). It promotes connection rather

than patriarchal domination over others. Similarly, transgressing boundaries is a core element of fantasy, marking middle-grade fantasy fiction as an ideal vehicle for expressions of undecidability and liminality in the *entredeux*.

Liminality, Transgression, and the Twice-Born

Fantasy fiction may expose boundaries and thresholds as sites of transgression and potentiality. In fact, Subha Mukherji argues that writing exists in liminal space and is an act of liminality. Mukherji posits that writing is "the place where (as Derrida puts it) one may remain, avoid speaking or naming, yet speak from" (xvii). Here, Mukherji imagines the liminal space as inhabitable, rather than transitory. This concept has interesting implications for the construction of liminal identities as semi-permanent states of being within fantasy fiction. Mukherji describes the complexity and attraction of liminality, suggesting that the tension lies:

> partly in the tease of being made to pause on the brink, at the moment when clarity, definition, and even interiority are just beyond grasp; partly in the risk, even unease, underlying moments of transition, and the excitement of not knowing where one might end up (xvii).

These moments of liminal wonder, curiosity, and unease present the opportunity for transmogrification.

The embodied character may also become a site of liminality. Terence Cave uses Cixous's theory of undecidability as a key element in understanding a character's interactions with thresholds. He posits that:

> their asymmetries, their lost threads, their occasional awkwardness, are symptoms of their positioning in relation to a threshold that may not previously have been perceived in such ways, and of the necessarily unresolved states of reflection they embody. Non-resolution is a precondition of their capacity for engendering further reflective transformations (Cave 81).

Cave speaks to the conscious reflection and socio-cultural awareness of *écriture féminine* that tends towards openness without solidifying identity or reality. Liminality, by its very nature, is the state of being "betwixt or between… In a period of transition between states" (Turner in Hamer 1). In denying the socio-cultural limitations of selfhood that are imposed in patriarchal societies, liminal identities may be perceived as being transgressive. In denying fixed patriarchal norms and ways of being, liminal identities that exist within *entredeux* engender the transformative condition and celebrate non-resolution and undecidability. A character may experience subjective multiplicity as they continue to question and break down thresholds. This capacity for multiplicity in liminal spaces "may be seen as the period of ambiguity where individuals are 'neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere'" (Turner in Hamer 1). Liminal subjectivity does not demand fixity or surety; it does not present boundaries to be overcome but instead offers openness: 'and' rather than 'or.' Roy calls this position the "excluded middle" (153) and details the ways that this middle—an *entredeux*—is inhabitable by the twice-born.

Roy's theory of the twice-born envisions a way of being in the world that is informed by two branches of knowledge: somatic-intuitive and psychic-affective (Roy 84). Somatic-intuitive knowledge involves experiencing the corporeal body as a site of intuitive wisdom. Somatic-intuitive wisdom acknowledges embodied and individual realities as genuine and knowledge-producing. Roy asserts that embodied experience is "not something abstract" and, importantly, that the corporeal body is "able to perform the most incredible tasks without the help of any intellectual schema" (Roy 76). Psychic-affective knowledge is related to intellectual, logical,

socio-cultural information. The twice-born may assimilate these branches of knowledge in engaging with the world and constructing identity. They experience multiplicity and are not limited by socio-cultural norms and expectations.

Roy writes that “the experience of the twice-born as this surge-toward-authenticity comes with properly oriented cognitive receptivity,” (80) which structures identity within culture. Both forms of knowledge—somatic-intuitive, and psychic-affective—are implicated in the formation and development of self. Socio-cultural pressures to conform to patriarchal hierarchies and hegemonic power structures are disregarded, and intellect is perceived as equal to intuition. The twice-born can reject the laws of the Symbolic as the root of singular truth. Thresholds, boundaries, and binaries are “not relevant to the true needs of the emergent entity” (Roy 80), as these limitations can be subverted or disregarded by intuitive, embodied knowledge. The twice-born may participate fully in socio-cultural experiences but are not limited by the opinions or expectations of others. The twice-born privileges holism, revealing subjective experience as mutable, becoming expansive and multiple (Roy 84).

The twice-born individual is in a state of perpetual growth and expansion. Roy posits that the “experiencer must emerge from experience itself and cannot precede it” (Roy 84). Characters demonstrate openness and adaptability in being shaped by their experiences. Personal identity is constantly evolving and is deferred, reminiscent of Derrida’s *différance,* which is examined in detail in chapter two.

By incorporating psychic-affective and somatic-intuitive knowledge, the twice-born discovers a new conception of time in which each moment is experienced as a beginning and as an end. Each moment is encountered, critically reflected upon, and absorbed as new knowledge, therefore “each moment is momentous, a

review of the previous instant, and a closure" (Roy 86). The temporal, socio-cultural, embodied, intuitive, and intellectual coalesce within the twice-born, speaking in transgressive overtones to the dualistic knowledge of developing magical subjectivity.

Scholarship about subjectivity in children's fantasy fiction confirms the potential for multiplicity, fluidity, connection, and belonging that I noticed in my close reading practice of contemporary texts. While I have demonstrated that scholarship around fantasy literature offers a substantial critical awareness of the socio-cultural and historical moment that literature responds to, references, and subverts through mimetic representation. There is nevertheless room to further explore the complex ways in which contemporary subjectivity is explored and represented in recent works of middle-grade fantasy fiction by Australian writers. In particular, in expanding on the criticism around fantasy literature for middle-grade readers this thesis challenges and extends upon binaried, patriarchal understandings of identity, empowerment, and belonging. In the next chapter I describe the methodology I employed to undertake a critical scholarly analysis of the function of magic in middle-grade fantasy fiction.

METHODOLOGY

"Where else do you get ideas from, if not books?" (Plozza 103)

The methodology of my dissertation is motivated by the research question: how do magic and identity intersect to produce meaning in contemporary middle-grade fantasy fiction? This line of questioning explores magic as a convention of fantasy literature and contextualises subjectivity within cultural power.

Researchers who conduct literary analysis use a methodology that seeks new insights into culture and literature through close and considered interrogations of texts. Daniel Hourigan argues that literature is "charged with overseeing the values that make us who we are and what we embody" (4). Literary studies highlight and evaluate cultural shifts because literature works to interpret the world, and "interpretations of reality are culturally derived and historically situated" (Moon and Blackman 1169). Hourigan argues:

> As long as the critic is focused on the literary and remains engaged in close reading criticism that is faithful to its texts, literary criticism as a method is able to appeal to any question about literatures, what they are, how they operate, who they represent, where they are situated critically, and when they emerge from the shadows (4).

Therefore, literary criticism is invested in generating new knowledge by engaging with literature in a critical manner, "questioning the assumptions of the groups whose preferred reality" is expressed through conventional rhetoric (Frank 114). Rather than assume an implied reader, the methodology of this project is more concerned with literature as a reflection of society, because "the writing and reading of children's literature [act] as processes for confirming personal and group identity" (Bottigheimer

209). Paula Moya explains that “literature exists as an institution within what social psychologists describe as a ‘culture cycle’... [that is] fundamentally ideological” and thus is capable of revealing the “complex ways in which our diverse cultural ideas inform and motivate our equally diverse practices and behaviours” (7).

This dissertation explores diversity, and privileges multiple and complex readings, arrived at through questioning, searching for spaces of openness and multiplicity in the literature, rather than rigidity. In this sense, my use of literary analysis as a methodology questions literature’s capacity to reflect a single and stable core truth or value (Williams 3). Instead, this methodology creates the potential for multiple sites of value through literary representation. Martin Lipman argues that “being one thing and being many things are compatible ways of being and hence one and the same thing can be both one thing and many things” (Lipman 4455). I have interrogated the texts, seeking multiplicity and complexity, with the understanding that children’s literature both reflect and embody contemporary ideas about identity formation and influence the subjectivity of their readers. Subjectivity is developed and ordered through words and stories, and therein lies the importance of exploring how the stories available to child readers describe and represent subjectivity.

Theoretical Framework

As a feminist researcher with an interest in queer experiences, identity, and social justice, I conducted this research using an interpretivist paradigm. I selected texts that include explorations of gender and power and approached these texts using theories that supported my position of analysing representations of identity in a cultural context. An interpretive paradigm embraces the nuance of individual

expression and the interpretation of experience that firmly situates literature as cultural-historical artefact (Moon and Blackman 1169). An interpretive paradigm maintains consciousness of the socio-cultural and political nature of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and geography, and the effect of these on the communication of reality (Butler 3). Interpretivism rejects the concept of a natural state (Williams 11, Marrinucci 99), and may be applied across a range of texts, aiding in the work of deconstructing hegemonic rhetoric (Frank 114), which was useful for my thematic analysis. In particular, I approached the texts through three theoretical lenses: Intersectional feminism, deconstruction, and psychoanalytic linguistics.

Intersectional feminism, Derridean deconstruction, and Lacanian psychoanalytic linguistics—broadly, poststructuralist theories—are employed in this dissertation to interrogate gender and other enculturated differences that are represented in children's fantasy. These theoretical lenses interact to inform my literary analysis, and to produce multiple, focused, socio-culturally, and historically-informed textual analyses. They provided helpful frameworks for my position on the critical examination of hegemonic power, and for considering the function of literature in relation to patriarchal hierarchies. Cixous's intersectional feminist and deconstructive perspective, for example, resists the logic of a singular phallogocentric reality and complements an interpretivist paradigm in attempting to expose a broader range of truths, possibilities, and perspectives expressed through a text.

An intersectional feminist theoretical framework assists in identifying structures of hegemonic power and disrupting dominant patriarchal literary ideologies about identity. It provides a lens through which to view texts that resists

the apparent “truth” of a text, and “guard[s] against the sometimes overt, sometimes hidden, violence of established values” (Williams 4). Through my feminist stance I seek to expose the way that patriarchal structures have historically and linguistically centred an idealised (male)body—”white, European or North American, formally educated, upper-middle class, able-bodied, Christian, heterosexual”—and constructed this as the norm (Marinucci 99). This leads to the marginalisation of people who exist outside of these markers of core hegemonic power. This socio-cultural process of Othering is linguistically supported within patriarchal social structures and intersects with many areas of identity.

Patriarchy maintains a hierarchy of Otherness “that holds certain female bodies in higher regard than others” (Smith in Crenshaw 369). Intersectional feminism is informed by critical race theory, which identifies and critiques the ways in which socio-cultural power is multiply conditional, based on the distance of bodies from the idealised norm. According to Crenshaw–a key theorist of intersectionality–patriarchies maintain power by denying the unique experiences of certain groups of humanity and by essentialising markers of identity. Intersectional feminism establishes the importance of recognising diversity, and the arbitrariness of the cultural constructs that reinforce patriarchal power. As Sue Thornham argues:

> In place of an essential, universal man or woman, both feminism and postmodernism offer, in Jane Flax’s words, ‘a profound scepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature, and powers of reason, progress, science, language and the subject/self’ (40).

Intersectional feminism critiques essentialising claims and exposes, among many things, disruptions of the gender binary.

Judith Butler's writing centres on gender as a social construct, revealing the inadequacy of patriarchy in accounting for diversity. She questions the connectedness of biological sex, gender, and sexuality through the patriarchal condition of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and posits that gender is performative: changeable and contingent (Butler i-xv). Butler disrupts the binaries that connect sex, gender, and sexuality in a similar manner to the French feminists, most importantly for my research, Cixous, but also Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. These writers developed complex psychoanalytic challenges to patriarchal discourse and language that interrogate the porousness of literary representations of gender.

Cixous observed the prevailing linguistics of patriarchy and challenged it through the disruptive "potentiality that resides in words" (Puri 270). She demonstrated the ability of *écriture féminine* to challenge the essentialist singularity of gendered identity. Cixous describes the impossibility of "talk[ing] about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one consciousness resembling another" (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa* 876). Cixous's work emphasises "difference rather than hierarchy" (Puri 278), exposing an intersectional awareness of patriarchal power in which 'woman' comes to stand for "those who have been suppressed and marginalised by the dominant masculine economy" (Puri 278). While not explicitly intersectional, I contend that Cixous's recognition and framing of subjectivity that challenges the patriarchal marginalisation of some bodies more than others supports an intersectional feminist framework.

Cixous's *écriture féminine* pushes against phallogocentrism and rejects reliance on binarised thinking to produce meaning. Marinucci argues that one danger of binaries is their entrenchment in cultural ideology, culminating in "lasting divisions

that would endure even major shifts in the existing power structure" (90). For Cixous, language inherently carries a "cultural and historical burden" (Puri 284), but her feminist realignment of Derridean deconstruction offers an opportunity to explore the multiplicity and potentiality of literature and a way to re-think identity. Cixous's poetic and philosophic theory de-hierarchises linguistic representations of identity in literature and challenges the legitimacy of patriarchal power.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction considers language within its socio-cultural context to question the centrality, or possibility, of a singular truth. He developed the concept of *différance* to describe the social complexities of language and how these can be explored as units of meaning in an infinite system of cultural communications. Derrida writes of *différance* that "meaning is neither before nor after the fact," (*Writing and Difference* 36) because no word, or sign, is ever simply "present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces" (Derrida, *Positions* 26). According to Derrida, meaning is constructed in the interaction between signs within a socio-cultural context: a constant and never-ending process of creation. Derrida posits that there is:

> no intrinsic connection between a thing (in the world) and a word (in language). Thus, within the sign (ie. The signifier/word and the signified/concept), there is always a reference to something that is non-present (or absent), or something 'wholly other', an alterity that is never fully present, precisely because signs are a result of a process of differing (of not being identical; a differentiation that 'produces different things') and deferring (a spacing/temporalisation, or an operation of delay and detour between one word/thought and another) (*Positions* 9).

Consequently, meaning is deferred, contingent, connected, and always evolving.

Derrida takes issue with the limitations of structuralist thought, writing that “the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure” (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 109). He proposes decentring the *logos* as the locus of truth and argues that when the centre is removed, the structure crumbles. Space is created for subjective realities between the signifier and the signified, through the “rupture and a redoubling” (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 108) that may occur when the logos is considered as one link in a chain that refers to the links surrounding it and defers meaning. In deconstructing the structural organisation of language and meaning, a tension is created, which Derrida terms ‘reading-as-writing’. That is, the act of reading as *writing* meaning onto the text (Phillips 124). Derrida also refers to this process as *play,* which occurs both as I interpret the texts within their socio-cultural context, informed by my own subjective experience, and as a narrative convention within the literature itself.

A double-pronged theory, play is a philosophical activity in which the subject is performing an action and constructing “a difference or interval between two things” (N. Anderson 256). Through the process of creating/interpreting meaning in the space of play, several “metaphysical dichotomies” are constructed, including between “being and non-being, subject and object, subject and other” (N. Anderson 256). This occurs in the same temporally “present” space where the act of reading-as-writing is performed (N. Anderson 256). The subject—either myself as reader or a literary character experimenting with magic in the novels—consequently exists inside the space, constructing yet another binary—inside/outside—where the subject is temporarily unified within time and space as they are wholly present in a temporal and spatial moment (Derrida, *The Ear of the Other* 69). Existing

concurrently to play as a temporal act of creation and subjectivity, a “second notion of play deconstructs the first” (N. Anderson 256).

Derrida calls this second form play *of* the world rather than play *in* the world (N. Anderson 256). Play *of* the world is an awareness of difference as alterity, producing meaning within a socio-cultural context. Play of the world also defers meaning, with an awareness of temporality and spatiality, and the pause between connecting words and thoughts (N. Anderson 259). Because language is referential and not intrinsic, it must always be constructed from both presence and absence. Derrida contends that this renders all “totalization, fulfillment, plenitude impossible’” (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 116). Play *of* the world reveals that truth is unstable, existing as many potential truths in any moment of time. Multiplicity, potentiality, and connection are represented within Derrida’s theories of play and *différance*. Like Derrida, Lacan argued that language and meaning are culturally constituted, and “that no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification” (Lacan 415).

Lacan writes extensively about the way that language operates within a culturally encoded system, and how the subject enters this system “at a certain moment in his mental development” (Lacan 413). This moment—the mirror stage—is when the infant identifies with an ideal image of whole selfhood in an imago, which situates the ego “prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (Lacan 76). Lacan argues that the function of the mirror stage is to “establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Unwelt*” (78). Upon the subject’s initiation into the Symbolic they

gain access to language, which they will use to craft a stable sense of self: the subject. According to Lacan:

> For the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that will proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopedic' form of totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure (78).

The subject, acted upon and manipulated by outside forces in what Lacan terms "radical heteronomy" (436), must have access to representation to frame the self within the larger cultural system of the Symbolic.

Using fantastic literature to frame language and representation exposes the function of desire through absence, alterity, and otherness. Jackson notes that fantasy "is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (Jackson 3). Lacan invokes need and demand when writing of desire, arguing that desire is what is left after need is subtracted from demand (Lacan 580); when needs are met, desire remains. It is unsatisfiable, situated in what can never be obtained: the Other. The Other is perceived as whole: a desired image that a character seeks to replicate for themselves. This binary of self and Otherness through Lacanian desire informs my position through interpretation, exposing the underlying ideological impulses and complexity of identity and culture.

Methods: Text selection

In the initial phases of my research, I planned to complete a survey of Australian fantasy literature, from picture books to young adult fiction. However, I discovered this was too large a pool for analysis, so I limited the project to the largest number of generic texts I had in my selection of sources: middle-grade fantasy fiction.

After choosing to focus on middle-grade fantasy texts, I decided on an intuitive text-selection method. I chose middle-grade fantasy texts that were readily available in local bookshops as I wanted to focus less on texts that were more widely critically discussed, and more on books that were both contemporary, and readily accessible to their target readers. The number of texts available increased significantly in the second year of my project, which suggests an increase in production and publishing in this subgenre.

One potential side effect of this text selection process includes a focus on texts accessible to child readers within rural Australia, and in particular rural Queensland. I visited several small, independently-owned bookstores in Brisbane and purchased one or two novels there but found most of the literature in Toowoomba. I did access both independent bookstores and chain bookstores, but it is possible that a wider, and more diverse, array of books are readily available to children living in urban and developed regions. This may have unintentionally skewed the data set, but not in a manner that makes it irreconcilable with broader contemporary Australian culture.

Methods: Close Reading

As a method of literary analysis, close reading offers a vast number of advantages for the literary studies scholar. Renowned researcher Barbara Herrnstein Smith refers to close reading as “expansive” (*What Was Close Reading* 69). She argues that close reading encapsulates not just the cultural and historical moment that produced the literature but articulates patterns of human experience. Smith writes that close reading results in “observations and reflections—more or less subtle, more or less original—about related human circumstances and experiences” (*What Was*

Close Reading 69-70). The observations and reflections that are generated through close reading can be organised into themes and interpreted as expressions of socio-cultural information.

Close reading can be understood as an attempt to understand the human experience and, specifically within this project, how identity is informed and manipulated in middle-grade fantasy fiction. Close reading's purpose is not to produce scientific data (Smith, *What Was Close Reading* 62, Doecke 235) but rich and detailed interpretations (Smith, *What Was Close Reading* 66, Manuel and Carter 233). To practice close reading to best effect requires "attention, training, and judgement" (Moya 9). As a literary scholar, it is "the most powerful discipline-specific tool we have at our disposal" (Moya 9) and is central to literary analysis. For my purpose of exploring the nuanced explorations of diverse identity in contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy literature, it was a most effective method for the interrogation of literature, and exposing the ways that literature and culture inform and reflect one another. Close reading allowed me to deeply explore the construction of identity, including how each individual text uses the trope of magic to highlight selfhood, as well as serving as a useful tool for identifying thematic and other connections between texts.

I also applied my personalised systems of coding and categorisation—which I will explore in more detail in the following section—to academic, theoretical, and more informal social texts. I read extremely widely during this research process, and though I did not directly cite every source of information about Australian culture that informed my thinking while developing this dissertation, this immersion in contemporary culture situated my research practice within the contemporary

socio-historical context. The depth and breadth of reading conducted, particularly during the early stages of this project, allowed me to identify the gaps in knowledge that this research addresses, and the theory that it builds and expands upon.

Critics of close reading question whether it is sufficient for gaining a cohesive view of contemporary socio-cultural climates. Some query the usefulness of a system that requires such detailed attention to a single document, arguing that the world is too full of information and is too fast paced to justify such fastidious regard. According to Matthew Jockers:

> the literary scholar of the twenty-first century can no longer be content with anecdotal evidence, with a few random 'things' gathered from a few, even 'representative,' texts … Like it or not, today's literary-historical scholar can no longer risk being just a close reader: the sheer quantity of available data makes the traditional practice of close reading untenable as an exhaustive or definitive method of evidence gathering (8-9).

This is a valid point to consider, yet I argue that failing to engage with depth and attention to many forms of cultural output contributes to an oversimplification of diversity. I suggest that, rather than reducing or simplifying engagement, technological advancement and an increase in readily-available information complicates its intake. Close attention must be paid to a greater number of texts, both scholarly and otherwise, and connections observed between a larger number of sources through thematic analysis. We must, as literary and cultural scholars, pay *closer* attention.

In response to Jocker's assertion about close reading being overly limited in its consideration of sufficient sources, Smith counters that "it would be remarkable for a literary scholar *not* to consult and invoke other documents and other types of

data" (*What Was Close Reading* 69). Far from being ignored or disregarded, consideration of a wide range of cultural and technological information is a common, and enriching, part of the process of close reading, where texts are considered in relation to other texts. Further, according to Braun and Clarke, the active role of the researcher in considering texts within a web of inter-textual relationships is vital to the success of thematic analysis, informing the researcher's process of "identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them" (80).

In other words, reading widely and critically provides the researcher with the capacity to consider the texts being analysed as in conversation with other literary works, as well as scholarly theory, and the wider cultural discussions that are frequently conveyed through informal discussion and debate, including via online publishing and social media.

Close reading remains the most effective method for attuning the reader to the nuances of socio-cultural representation in a wide range of texts. Close reading as a part of my methodology, informed by my interpretive paradigm, places the researcher inside the critical process by allowing me to make full and frank use of my experiences, competencies, deficits, and biases in the process of constructing critical analyses. More than that, however, such a nuanced form of close reading turns the informed and transparent subjectivity of the researcher into a strength, providing me with the capacity to produce unique, overtly situated responses to the texts.

As Smith notes, the interpretive nature of close reading relies on the researcher bringing their individual experience and intertextual knowledge to the act of analysis. Smith writes:

> the fact that a critic's interpretation is based in part on his or her observations as an individual reader does not compromise the interest or usefulness of that interpretation … Of course that individuality—and inevitable, but not necessarily pernicious, bias—leaves the interpretation, claim, or account open to dispute by other readers or scholars. At the same time, however, the grounding in personal observation and experience opens the possibility of shareable insights and of connection to shareable experiences, which—largely, if not wholly—is what motivates our interest in a literary interpretation as such (*What Was Close Reading* 68-69).

Put simply, close reading and thematic analysis incorporate the researcher's experiences and knowledge as an act of reading-as-writing. In fact, the reader/researcher's experiences and competencies influence a reading of a text and the paradigm through which the work is interpreted. A literary work is "a sensitive indicator of ideological underpinning of human experiences" (Moya 8); similarly, the humanity of the researcher informs the analytical process.

My more formal and isolated experiences as a researcher conducting thematic analysis through close reading were robustly supported through conversation with colleagues, friends, family, other readers, my children, and, most importantly, my supervisors. This feedback came through more formal avenues, such as written feedback on drafts, but also informally, over coffee. These conversations were as valuable in helping me to situate my research and knowledge in contemporary socio-cultural climate, and order my thoughts and ideas, as my many hours of solitary reading.

Methods: Thematic Analysis

The flexibility of thematic analysis was crucial to the research design of my dissertation, allowing the relationships between my methods of text selection, close reading, discussion and so forth, to remain dynamic and responsive, growing and shifting (Braun and Clarke 77). Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke argue that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (Braun and Clarke 79). Further, thematic analysis is recursive, involving fluid movement that occurs "back and forth as needed … It is also a process that develops over time" (86-87). Braun and Clarke identify six phases of thematic analysis, including "generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes" (87).

In developing this research project, the early phases of thematic analysis involved holding themes loosely, drawing connections between texts, searching for more themes or greater detail as the themes were reviewed, renamed, and refined over time. These themes eventually became the chapters in this dissertation: gender and the patriarchy, space and belonging, visibility and embodiment, fate, and finally, radical Otherness represented as the queer, and orphaned child.

I developed a thematic coding system as I progressed through the early research-gathering and organisation stages. This coding was an organic process, driven by my need to organise enormous amounts of complex information. I used different coloured highlighters and handwritten notes in the margins of the literature, as well as colour-coded notes in reading journals, to create a record of my reading,

reflect on my thinking as it progressed, order my thoughts and identity patterns as they emerged. As it progressed, my coding became an essential tool for mapping the themes I identified across my reading, revealing sub-themes, and tracking textual evidence to support the process of defining and describing each one.

I organised these codes by collating quotations, insights, reflections regarding each theme into separate word documents, each of which grew in both size and critical depth, facilitating the process of identifying patterns and building theoretical insights. According to Joseph Maxwell and Margaret Chmiel the process and purpose of coding connects it to categorisation as a logical analytical outcome, writing that it is:

> a researcher-generated construct that symbolises and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building and other analytical processes (26).

This cumulative process of thematic analysis developed over time, and with consistent effort. The documents relating to each theme were regularly reviewed, added to, and amended as my reading progressed and my insights deepened. Critical thinking and reflection were essential to the process of coding and categorisation, particularly in identifying and analysing thematic links within and between texts.

My methods of thematic analysis and close reading were informed by my intention to seek out and pay close attention to marginalised voices, as articulated in my theoretical framework. In structuring stories, and interrogating literary representations of the patriarchal order, literature can help to imagine the

possibilities of identity, belonging, and diverse empowerment. Language and identity are intertwined, each dependent on the other for meaning. Put another way:

> Language, in Lacan's analysis, operates on us as much as we operate on it. We follow the signs. Language speaks us. But in the process, we become split between a conscious self and an unconscious self that we repress, deny, and repeat (Simon 1160).

As Coats notes, "subjectivity, then, is more than identity—it is a movement between that which we control and that which controls us" (5). Some of this tension may be tested—and resolved—through literature.

Coats applies Lacanian analysis to children's literature, writing of the comfort and order that comes from structuring the world through stories. She argues:

> The only way we come to make sense of the world is through the stories we are told. They pattern the world we have fallen into, effectively replacing its terrors and inconsistencies with structural images that assure us of its manageability. And in the process of structuring the world, stories structure us as beings in that world (Coats 1).

The subject is informed by, and informs, culture, on social and linguistic levels. Coats writes of this dynamic, interconnected process of influence between the self and the world. She quotes Lacan, who privileges masculine pronouns in his writing, arguing that meaning making is an ongoing and dynamic process, and that it is "within the language and images of a specific culture that the subject must both *find* and *create* himself" (Coats 3-4). Regardless of gender, the subject is thus formed by both intrinsic and external forces. Coats argues:

> The modernist model figures the subject as a split, a construction of both natural and cultural influences, of conscious and unconscious processes … 'Prodigiously open,' the child (unconsciously) uses his books to precipitate his split, to fill his unconscious with

> representations and images, shape his reality, and define the parameters of his possibilities (6).

Subjectivity is developed and ordered through words and stories, and therein lies the importance of exploring how the stories available to child readers describe and represent subjectivity.

Using Cixous's feminist philosophy, which is intersectional in approach even though much of her work predates the use of that word, along with deconstruction, and psychoanalytic linguistics, I have interrogated the ways that magic informs subjectivity in middle-grade fantasy texts. These theoretical lenses support the method of thematic analysis by exploring the binaries of patriarchal order that inform Australian culture and are reflected in Australian middle-grade fantasy. I am thus able, through interrogating such texts, to demonstrate how magical characters subvert and transgress contemporary Australian socio-cultural expectations of selfhood. Magic protagonists refer to the existence of binarised identity roles and use the trope of magic to undo them, creating liminal spaces of possibility and unknowing. This dissertation identifies and describes these instances of linguistic transgression where the socio-cultural systems that uphold patriarchal hegemonic power are identified and questioned. In employing a methodology that emphasises the relationship between reading and identity, I draw attention to the ways in which literary works are part of a larger web of cultural messaging that reflects socio-cultural ideology.

The ideologies of identity in contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy are incredibly varied, but gender seemed the most logical place to begin. The witch is one face of gender transgression historically, but also very clearly–as identified through my thematic analysis of the texts–in contemporary middle-grade literature.

She is a persistent and powerful literary figure, deeply reflective of the fears, inconsistencies, and changing face of gender as a social and cultural construct in contemporary Australian society.

WITCHES: GENDER AND THE PATRIARCHY

"Our own subjective singularities are in truth composed, on the one hand, of many dear or distant humans, we are carriers of previous generations, we are, without knowing it, heirs, caretakers, witnesses of known or unknown ancestors" (Cixous in Sellers xx).

Witches occupy a significant position in middle-grade fantasy fiction, functioning as cultural markers that explore discourses of gender, subjectivity, and ways of being in the world. Indeed, the witch has endured many incarnations over time yet remains omnipresent in many contemporary fantasy texts, not just children's literature. Robin Briggs writes that the ability of the witch to transmogrify according to "the spirit of each age" (3) is one of the strengths of the archetype. She shifts and changes with the fears and preoccupations of each successive generation of literature. According to Sheldon Cashdan, the lingering hold of the witch as "the dominant character who frames the battle between good and evil" (30), and the most compelling of characters, lies in her vividness, and the impact she has on her community for better or worse.

Witches have maintained some consistent characteristics across time and generations, but I suggest that it is the complexity of the witch that makes her such an interesting protagonist in contemporary middle-grade fantasy. The following twelve Australian middle-grade fantasy novels explore the role of the witch in mediating or transgressing discourses of gender, subjectivity, and liminality: Fienberg's *Tashi and the Baba Yaga*, Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't,* Miller's *The Hotel Witch,* Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* McKenna's *Hedgewitch,* Townsend's *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow,* Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse,* Millard's *Kingdom of Silk* series, Foxlee's *Dragon Skin,* Sulway's *Winter's Tale,* Wang's *Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon,* and

Armstrong's *Big Magic.* I contend that the complexity in these works holds space for the multiplicity that contemporary witches require in the current socio-cultural and historical moment.

In this chapter I begin by exploring the figure of the hag, and in particular various representations of Baba Yaga. I then go on to explore the function of the witch oppressed; one of two contemporary categories of literary witches that I propose challenge patriarchal power through gender. After this I discuss magical masculinity through the juxtaposition of the monstrous masculine witch, and the affable swan. From here I explore the way middle fantasy also demonstrates non-binary, gender diverse, or deliberately transgressive expressions of gender as a demonstration of liminality, using the deconstructive philosophy of Cixous. Lastly, I propose my second category of contemporary literary witch: the witch reborn, whose engagement with magic allows them to develop beyond pre-conceived and socially mitigated gender limitations. In some ways, the witch reborn reflects the ambiguity and empowerment of the witch-as-hag, demonstrating traits of empowerment like that of Baba Yaga, their literary predecessor.

Hags

Witches have a long literary history that reflects and informs current representations of witches and magic in contemporary texts. The word 'witch' is historically associated with wisdom. Sibelan Forrester writes that the English root of the word is wit, the Russian root is *ved-*, and the Russian word for witch is "*ved'ma,* meaning 'to know'" (xxii). Despite this European connection with wisdom and knowledge, Forrester states that in Russian and English, common usage of the word suggests "age and ugliness first, power second" (xxii). The connection between these

stereotypes, which are reflected in the European witch hunts and literary representation of witches, was thoroughly mapped in Penelope Young's *Witch Images in Australian Children's Literature.* Young writes:

> The stereotypical witch figure from the European witch-hunts conducted between 1450-1700 continued to be a powerful figure in Australian children's literature ... Although set in Australia, the witches mirrored the European precedent, confirming the strength of the European witch image in Australian children's literature from an early age. The witches in the books reinforced the stereotypical images of gender, physical ugliness, and demonstrated behaviour that challenged the social structure (152).

As Young suggests, literary representations of witches in Australia are largely inherited through British colonialism and are intertwined with pervasive images of the witch as elderly and physically repugnant. Fearful, to be sure, though her power is secondary to her hideous physicality. This double-pronged representation of witches hearkens back to European patriarchal conceptions of elderly women dating from as early as the sixteenth century (Young, *Witch Images* 152).

Reginald Scott described hags in 1584 as "'women which be commonly, old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles'; they were also 'lean and deformed, showing melancholy in their faces to the horror of all that see them'" (in Briggs 15). These women, or hags, were uncomfortable to look upon and no longer biologically useful to the patriarchy as child-bearers. This evidence of their age was horrific for Scott to behold. Further, in neglecting to present a cheerful or 'feminine' disposition, Scott suggests that part of the horror of the hag is her refusal to adhere to patriarchal expectations of subservience and gratitude to masculine authority.

Sixty-two years later, in 1646, Minister John Gaule continued the patriarchal diatribe against elderly women. He lists their physical features and determines that

the very existence of these attributes all but guarantees that old women are possessed of malevolent supernatural abilities. He wrote:

> Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a rugged coat on her back, a skullcap on her head, a spindle in her hand, and a dog or cat by her side, is not only suspect but pronounced for a witch (in Briggs 15).

His list of attributes goes beyond Scott's list of physical markers that disgust him in elderly women. Gaule's words reflect society's growing—and lingering—fear of women who scold: who presume the authority to speak critically of others. The hag of Gaule's writing is old and hideous, but more than that, she is distasteful for her scolding tongue. She is not quiet or meek but openly states her opinions and, therefore, transgresses notions of wizened femininity. She is not so destitute that she is without clothing, and her physical detractors are not due to illness or ill-health. Her crimes are being elderly, skilled with a spindle, and noncompliant. This hag image is not the lame, pitiable figure of Scott's hag of 1584. Gaule's hag has a trade, she is well enough to care for something other than herself—a 'dog or cat' familiar—and she is not kind or pliable. The threatening nature of the hags Gaule describes reflect the socio-cultural fears about wise, old women that led to the witch hunts.

The witch hunts demonstrate the functioning of the patriarchy in pre-colonial times. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English analyse the European witch hunts between 1500-1700 as predominantly directed at the threat that women posed to the institutions of power. While men and children were sometimes also marginalised, the witch hunts principally policed and punished women. Ehrenreich and English write that the span of the witch hunts:

> took different forms at different times and places, but never lost its essential character: that of a ruling class campaign of terror directed against the female peasant

> population. Witches represented a political, religious, and sexual threat to the Protestant and Catholic churches alike, as well as to the state (33).

The threat that women presented to both state and religious rule provided sufficient cause for the ruling elite to marginalise women with unlawful knowledge. Those with prohibited knowledge that threatened patriarchal power were branded witches and suffered socio-cultural and economic consequences. Interestingly, although repression and marginalisation were the consequences of transgressing patriarchal power, these women were necessary for the health of the community.

The knowledge held by women accused of possessing supernatural ability was not only feared but was vital to the functioning of society. Witches had knowledge"of harming, but also of healing" (Ehrenreich and English 39), that is, of the body, how it worked, and how it could be both healed and harmed. According to Forrester, many women accused of witchcraft were midwives or herbal healers (Forrester xxii), using knowledge of the body and nature to treat their communities. This contributed to the symbolic connection between female-gendered bodies and nature that has persisted to the present day. Perry Nodelman describes the connection between women and nature and the ways that it has been used to suppress and oppress women throughout history, including its impact on how gender is organised within patriarchal societies:

> Women are lower on the evolutionary scale than men, irrational and controlled by their bodies. In terms of this set of assumptions, we identify nature as a mother and see such things as menstrual cycles and the ability to give birth as evidence that women are more tied to biological functioning (Nodelman, *Making Boys Appear* 6).

The complexity of this hierarchy of gender is reflected in the literary figure of the witch. Mother, harmer, helper, irrevocably tied to the seasons and cycles of

nature and her body, the witch represents intuitive (female) knowing rather than (masculine) logic.

Baba Yaga

A prominent character in traditional and contemporary fairy tales, Baba Yaga embodies many of the characteristics of the literary witch, including a complexity that complicates gender roles. She rejects patriarchal norms and expectations, dwelling either in solitude, or with the daughters that she conceived as a parthenogenetic mother (Zipes, *Baba Yaga* viii). This total rejection of patriarchal culture and heterosexual reproduction means she escapes stereotypical crone status; she is, according to Forrester, so much more than the "grotesque aftermath of female fertility" (Forrester xxxv). Her magical objects, the evidence of her witchcraft and the tools she uses to wield magic, are bastardised implements of feminine domesticity: "she travels in a mortar wielding a pestle as a club or rudder and a broom to sweep away the tracks behind her" (Zipes, *Baba Yaga* viii). She requires no outside biological material to reproduce, supernatural or otherwise, and can heal or harm at will.

British colonial perceptions of witchcraft sometimes linked witches' power with the devil, suggesting that contact with demonic sources or devils provided the witch with access to (masculine) power (Briggs 2). However, Baba Yaga has no need for any external sources of magic or masculinity. Zipes writes that she is "inscrutable and so powerful that she does not owe allegiance to the Devil or God" (*Baba Yaga* viii). As such, Baba Yaga does not fit into any stereotypes or binaries.

Baba Yaga embodies monstrous motherhood and connection with nature. She is wise and will offer advice at her discretion. Zipes writes that "hope may be

best generated when a wise woman does not mince her words, and a true Baba Yaga is never one to mince her words" (*Baba Yaga* xii). She is entwined with the natural world and her identity is enmeshed with her home in forests and the deepest, shadowy places in nature. "Animals venerate her, and she protects the forest as a mother-earth figure" (Zipes, *Baba Yaga* viii). As part of her magical duties, "she orchestrates the coming of day and night" (Cashdan 120). Baba Yaga is removed from patriarchal notions of masculinity or femininity and, therefore, dwells in liminal spaces. She represents a spark of wisdom, mystery, and the potential for hope, coupled with the threat of violence or death. Baba Yaga is unpredictable in her Otherness and ambiguity, and that makes her a compelling witch figure, ensuring her continued presence in contemporary fantasy fiction.

The transformation of contemporary representations of witches will be discussed in detail in the coming sections of this chapter, but they do not replace the complex hag, crone, or Baba Yaga figure in literature. She persists in several incarnations, echoing culturally pervasive eighteenth-century witch hunt ideologies and socio-cultural fears. Naturally, she remains present in her guise as wizened and ancient source of wisdom and, according to Cashdan, in posing an "external threat to the hero or heroine, she magnifies inner flaws and frailties in the reader" (17). This magical crone character may appear in several disguises or forms, including "sorceresses, orgresses, vengeful queens, and evil stepmothers" (Cashdan 1), who are "resentful, angry, difficult/quarrelsome, vengeful, poor or old women" (Briggs 18-19). In several of the books in this dissertation, Baba Yaga appears in the role of transgressor and violent threat.

Fienberg and Fienberg set their problematic young protagonist, Tashi, against the antagonist Baba Yaga. Aside from being threatening, she is depicted as very fat,

with a hunchback, wrinkles, wild hair, and patched, ill-fitting clothes. In the preface to *Tashi and the Baba Yaga*, Fienberg and Fienberg draw an image of the Baba Yaga that is consistent with traditional depictions of the witch-as-crone. Fienberg's Baba Yaga is described with little complexity, though with echoes of Western-Europeanfears about witches as companions of the devil. They describe her as:

> a bad witch … Sometimes she appears as a thunder witch—the devil's grandmother. She is an ugly old woman with a monstrous nose and long teeth. Her hair is a frightful mess, and sometimes in the worst cases, she eats boys and girls for dinner (1).

With her ugly monstrosity and unruly appearance, Fienberg's Baba Yaga retains the disorder of a woman outside patriarchal control, but has lost much of the complexity that makes her such an interesting figure of witch-hood.

Shelley, likewise, presents a contemporary Baba Yaga character in, *The Monster Who Wasn't*. This witch, compared to the two-dimensional Baba Yaga in Fienberg's *Tashi*, is far more vicious, truer to the complexity of the traditional character. She has been driven underground with the rest of monster-kind, unable to consume human flesh due to a curse that will turn her to ashes if she dares. She maintains her connection with nature, appearing in skeletal form as "a bony hag with sunken eyes and skin like gnarled wood" (Shelley 197). In traditional tales, Baba Yaga lives in a house in the forest that is not rooted in the ground. It has chicken legs upon which it walks at Baba Yaga's direction. In Shelley's novel Baba Yaga has chicken legs, rather than her house. This narrative choice evokes the spatial and temporal complexity of the fairy-tale figure through a simplified expression of character. With her "dry and shrunken" (Shelley 198) appearance, Baba Yaga assumes the attributes of a poltergeist: she can interact corporeally with protagonist

Sam but is unable to eat him. She aims to hold him captive until a more frightening foe arrives, telling him, “Stop wriggling. It no use; we no muscle to harm; we just hair, eye, tooth. You can’t fight” (Shelley 197). The insubstantial and gruesome nature of her physical body makes her a frightening character who is complex and historically informed.

Shelley draws on several fairy-tale witch traditions from around the world in her novel. Baba Yaga keeps the company of an Irish Banshee-crone and a Japanese Mountain Witch (in the futakuchi-onna tradition). Yama-Uba possesses “a mouth on the crown of her head spitting out hair, puffing and pfaffing as the strands tumbled back and caught in its yellow teeth” (Shelley 197). This image might be comical were the uncanniness not so horrifying in its monstrosity. The witches wait for the leader of their coven and feed dragon bones to a fire, which is pertinent for two reasons.

The first reflects the way Baba Yaga is “strongly associated with fire” (Forrester xiiv). Fire reflects the duality of Baba Yaga’s helping-or-harming nature: it might warm, or it might maim. Additionally, according to Forrester, bones are “ambiguous. Bones are the leftovers of a body after death, but they are also a repository of life force, a link between two incarnations” (xxvi). In burning bones, the witches are symbolically represented as having power over life and warmth, as well as death. The three witches in the novel represent the liminality of an immortal life lived in shadow. Baba Yaga and her two companions are ancient crones of mystery and ambiguity. In Shelley’s novel they are forced underground; a liminal space that has strong connections with hell and the devil. They are not alive, yet are not dead—they are between incarnations. The third witch is Maggie, a Banshee-crone who, unlike the others, can transgress boundaries to travel into the world above.

Maggie is the most dangerous and terrifying of this trio of hags. She cunningly represents both the maternal nurturing and murderous sides of Baba Yaga. Maggie attempts to manipulate Sam into destroying the sword that keeps all monster-kind captive in the darkness, starved of humanity upon which to feast. Baba Yaga and Yama-Uma call the Banshee crone Moya Solnishka, which, in an ironic double-play, is a Russian term of endearment that translates to *my little sun*. She is believed to be omniscient and the pair call her "Queen of everywhere" (Shelley 199). She appears as a beautiful, young, crimson-haired, and emerald-eyed woman at will, yet her true form is a monstrous inversion of patriarchal feminine beauty. Shelley describes the moment Maggie reveals her monstrous form:

> Maggie smiled and pulled her hand towards her as if dragging dark air into her chest. She shrank a little, her face dried, the colour in her red hair leached from the tips and deepened at the roots until they turned a blood-red so dark they could have been black. Even her clothes decayed and frayed to rags in the same moments. Her dazzling green eyes simply faded. The crone was as emaciated as the first two, but while the others hunched and scrambled in the dirt, she stood tall … She held herself with real arrogance: her grayed head and her hands, although clenched in painful talons, moved with grace. Her voice, though croaky and aged, was still Maggie's. Her eyes were pure hunger (Shelley 205).

Maggie is such a threatening character because of her duality, revealing a rejection of patriarchy that echoes Baba Yaga in the forest. Maggie represents duality and ambiguity as the crone figure of old and the recurrent witch figure of the bad mother (Briggs 210). She happily puts Sam in danger to advance the cause of monster-kind, even as she speaks kind words and cajoles him with promises of family. Like Baba Yaga, she has parthenogenetic tendencies, creating Sam in the manner of monster-kind without male genetic input. These three witches represent the chaos of the Baba Yaga figure who transgresses the expected roles for the ageing

women–hags–in patriarchal hierarchies. The complexity of Shelley's depiction of the coven reflects the depth of the witches of literary tradition. Modern expressions of the witch embody the complexity of the old witch, but also demonstrate how contemporary women interact with institutions of patriarchy, embodying a mode of being I have called 'the witch oppressed.'

The Witch Oppressed

As the not-so-ugly stepsister of the bad mother, the witch oppressed is manipulated by patriarchal expectations. She responds to these pressures by absorbing and reflecting them onto her protégé. Her role is to instruct the young witch protagonist in the correct and appropriate use of magic that works to uphold the greater good and maintain the status quo. She is a contemporary literary figure with a comprehensive historical heritage, responding to contemporary limitations. The witch oppressed responds to these conditions by being contained and ordered. The inherent struggles of the witch oppressed are summarised by Attebery: "the problem is unleashing rather than mastering herself, and outside rather than within the institutional constraints of her culture" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 88-89). She masters her instincts and magic by conforming to the expectations of the patriarchy, and by training other witches to do the same.

The witch oppressed acts as civilising pressure on her students, communicating the conventions she has learnt. The witch oppressed interprets the world for her students, through a patriarchal gender-normative lens. This means she restricts and denies the young protagonist's own knowledge and understanding of the world, including its "dangers and forbidden pleasures. The terrors and anxieties, transmutations and subliminations" (Lock 93). She instructs her students in the suppression and control of magical powers, thus maintaining socio-cultural norms

and ensuring their continuity. The witch oppressed personifies the institutionalised pressure of the patriarchy. The role of her students, who are the next magical generation, is to question, and to disrupt, the conservative understanding she offers. Put another way, “the physical and social universes alike were designed to be ordered but were constantly menaced or disrupted by disorder” (Briggs 82). The witch oppressed is determined to have order; the supernatural youth represents chaos.

Miller’s *The Hotel Witch* presents the character of Grandma as the witch oppressed figure, teaching Sibyl spells from *The Book of Domestic Magic* that are useful to her work and nothing more. Grandma’s perceptions of magic have narrowed to include only what is needed to be of feminine service to others. Sibyl is a threat to this social and economic system: she struggles to focus her attention on the magic spells despite repeated admonitions from Grandma. Grandma maintains that it is vital to concentrate and “just because a spell is simple, Sibyl, doesn’t make it boring” (Miller 2). Eventually, however, after Grandma gets lost in the Hotel and Sibyl is left to perform her own kind of magic, Grandma concedes that performing magic need not be boring and prescriptive, and it may also involve flexibility and creativity. Grandma tells Sibyl:

> Don’t let your mind wander. Remember to *concentrate ...*
> But it’s not the only important thing. To do advanced magic, you need to concentrate. But you also need to be hard-working. And determined. And quick-thinking. And, sometimes, just as you say, you need to let your thoughts wander a little. So perhaps, in your own way, you are ready (Miller 266).

Grandma expresses a conservative and old-fashioned approach to magic, honed through years of wielding magic under the patriarchy, narrowing her understanding of performing magic to repeated and controlled conventions. She represents the witch

oppressed in her attempts to transmit this restrictive attitude to Sibyl. The chaos that Sibyl represents muddies the patriarchal ordering of Grandma's existence.

Gespard, in Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*, exerts socio-cultural pressure on Willa Birdwhistle. He speaks in the language of repression, maintaining that wild magic is dangerous and requires controlling. Further, he implies that this can only occur through approved patriarchal institutions:

> Magic is about control, Willa … You're right to fear wild magic. It's nasty stuff. But once you tame it, once you learn coven magic and take the initiation, that's when you'll be in control of it. And what better way to keep your promise to your parents? (Plozza 80-81).

Gespard cites several civilising systems here, including coven (institutional) and family, emphasising the obligations Willa must meet. The problem for Willa is that "should an Ordinary child exhibit magical powers, they must choose a coven before their thirteenth birthday *or else*… You'll explode" (Plozza 31). In Plozza's novel there are two Covens locked in an eternal war. Choosing either coven will fulfil Willa's obligations as both 'a good girl' and 'a good witch,' and the difference between these two labels lies in the use of magic as both civilising and dangerous. A 'good girl' and 'a good witch' follow instructions and maintain the status quo, even if that is dangerous for Ordinary folk. A 'good witch' is initiated into a coven and, even when caught in a magical battle that is disruptive and dangerous to the Ordinary people, does not transgress or dismantle the boundary between the magical and the mundane. A bad witch is out of place, uncontrolled, and can bring catastrophe to mundane characters. A 'good witch' is in her place, and reinforces the status quo; a 'bad witch', who transgresses boundaries, may enact profound change. It is the role of the witch oppressed to make 'good' witches out of unruly protagonists.

McKenna explores the consequences of participating in the patriarchy for the witch oppressed in *Hedgewitch.* Miranda, the Hedgewitch of the town of Hedgely, is a repressed representative of the patriarchy. One of her duties is to teach and surveil the next generation of witches, which she does by enforcing strict limits and boundaries. She teaches the young witches how to protect the town and use their magic in a controlled, ordered manner. She expects her niece, fledgling witch, Cassie, to be:

> independent, responsible and to behave in a way befitting a Morgan. We have a reputation in this village, you understand, people turn to us for help, so we must be irreproachable in our conduct (McKenna 105-106).

Miranda is smart and resourceful, and though she comes to question patriarchal power, her commitment to maintaining the status quo means that she never transgresses her culture's norms and expectations. Miranda reflects the compromises many women make within patriarchal contexts, as discussed by Stephens. He argues that "females are now expected to assert themselves, but have to do so within male-derived paradigms while remaining feminine" (*Always Facing the Issues* xvi). Miranda maintains the status quo through respecting and enforcing on others rigid boundaries and binaries.

Miranda's brother represents the limits of her power. He is a member of the Wardens, the magical law enforcement organisation who "have a duty to investigate peculiar happenings" (McKenna 17). He consistently undermines her authority and dismisses her evidence-based fears about corruption in the institution as nonsense:

> 'Oh, I'm sure there's nothing to worry about. One over-imaginative and slightly unhinged witch who believes some nonsense about a goblin king and took it a step too far. We'll make a full investigation, of course, see if we can't bring her in, but no need to cause a general panic.' Miranda pursed her lips in that disapproving way

> Cassie knew only too well. Her uncle ignored her (McKenna 363-64).

The tension between Miranda and her brother reflects the gender hierarchy of the patriarchy. Miranda's fears are dismissed as the nonsense of an overactive imagination. Her brother, holding power over Miranda due to his gender and institutional position, refutes her authority and insight, and, and he insinuates that her concerns are the product of her hysterical femininity.

Despite the challenges she represents to the subjective growth of the young witches, the witch oppressed wields her magic for what she believes is the greater good. She is, however, unable to escape patriarchal control, instead often acting as its spokesperson and apologist. Masculine power, seen in this example from McKenna's *Hedgewitch*, occupies a location of hegemonic centrality in representations of patriarchy. However, masculinity does not escape scrutiny and exploration through magic in middle-grade fantasy fiction.

Monstrous Masculinity and the Affable Swan

According to Reynolds, masculinity is privileged over femininity in patriarchal societies, particularly upon "entry into language and the social world" (Reynolds 98). Middle-grade fantasy often interrogates this binary by critiquing magical masculinity. Stephens writes that gender norms and expectations are socially constructed. He writes that:

> 'man' and 'woman' are gendered terms, and signify social, that is, behavioural and experiential, difference; they represent coded behaviours which must be learned (*Ways of Being Male* x).

Masculinity and femininity constitute a binary in which 'masculine' is the more powerful or preferred term (the unmarked state). Men are expected to embrace and

perform masculinity while women must embrace the coded behaviours associated with femininity: with not having or exercising power. Each binarised term is not, however, monolithic. While men are expected to internalise and perform masculinity, masculinity includes a range of possibilities, with some forms of masculinity more strongly aligned with power and privilege than others.

R. W. Connell coined the term 'hegemonic masculinity' in the 1980s to draw attention to the links between masculinity, power, and capitalism. According to Connell and James Messerschmidt:

> hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative (832).

The relatively small number of men who embody hegemonic masculinity hold the most power, and have the greatest capacity to develop and police socio-cultural norms and expectations. In other words, as Attenbery notes, despite the tendency to see masculinity and the "male experience as a universal norm" (Attebery, *Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales* 315*),* masculinity is just as complex and multiple as femininity. While contemporary hegemonic masculinity privileges aggressiveness, authoritarianism, and domination, Stephens posits that this is socio-historically contingent and subject to change (Stephens *Ways of Being Male* ix).

The data set of contemporary middle-grade fantasy interrogated in this thesis frequently set representatives of hegemonic masculinity against more subversive paradigms, using the trope of magic to convey masculinity in one of two ways, which I term 'affable swan masculinity' and the 'monstrous male witch'.

Monstrous Male Witch

The monstrous masculinity of middle-grade fantasy fiction is rooted in narcissism, and expressed through destruction and violence. The social norms that are exposed through representations of monstrous masculinity relate principally to gender and family dynamics, particularly, “anxieties that altering women’s social roles would negatively affect men’s hegemonic power” (Reynolds 97). Using Freudian analysis, Jorge Luis Maldonado links the narcissistic traits of the monstrous masculine with gender through “phallic-narcissistic pathology” in which the “subject identifies with the phallus, which is seen as having absolute value” (192). The monstrous masculine seeks solitude because it views itself as the pinnacle of the socio-cultural hierarchy and, possessing the phallus, has no need for connection. In a strange contradiction, the monstrous masculine demonstrates an obsession with control over and manipulation of domestic spaces (Paur and Rai 119), which are typically women’s spaces. The monstrous masculine is obsessed with femininity and motherhood. They often appropriate the title ‘witch’ and, in doing so, attempt to absorb feminine power and block women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals from altering the psychological and socio-cultural status quo. Such attempts to exercise power and control are a version of corrupted rule, reflecting the overdeveloped ego-drives of many monstrous masculine witches.

The Wundersmith in Townsend’s *Morrigan Crow* is an excellent example of the narcissistic and monstrous masculine witch, describing himself in a grandiose manner. Pretending to be a lowly worker, Squall boasts to Morrigan of his elevated worth. Townsend writes:

> ‘Ezra Squall is the nation’s greatest hero … More than that – he is their benevolent god, the source of their every comfort and happiness. The only living person with the ability to harvest, distribute and command Wunder. Our

> Republic relies on him totally … Imagine, Miss Crow,' he whispered. '*Imagine* how it must feel to be so beloved. So respected and *needed*' (36-37).

Squall lives a solitary existence where he imagines emotional ties with strangers over whom he wields absolute control. The narcissist requires domination over others as "their self-esteem is bolstered by the omnipotent control that they exert over the object's emotions" (Maldonado 188). Squall is convinced of his superiority while simultaneously being obsessed with what others think and feel about him.

Likewise, Plozza's Gespard in *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic* has an enormous ego that comes rushing out in an unhinged monologue. He demonstrates a familial fixation, particularly on his mother's rejection, despite his complete separation from the family unit. Like Squall, he is fixated on what others think about him, which impacts on his decision-making. In a rant Gespard reveals his preoccupation with the way others perceive him and his desire for power over them:

> 'They said I had so little magical ability I might as well be Ordinary. My own mother kicked me out of the coven. She said I was an embarrassment to her!' He glared at Opalina. 'Why don't you ask me how come I'm so powerful now, Mother? How come I can modify spells? How come I'm stronger than any coven witch? ... You think you can stop me?' Gaspard laughed. 'You might be powerful, Willa, but you have no idea how to wield that power to its fullest. I will *crush* you in a battle. But obviously I don't want to do that. So let's see if I can find a way to persuade you' (Plozza 254-255).

Gespard demonstrates the interference of the ego in achieving and maintaining power. The monstrous masculine figure seeks to deny, or to control, the witch reborn.

Freud writes of negation that it is "at bottom, to say: 'This is something which I should prefer to repress'" (in Akhtar and O'Neil 14). The monstrous witch sees and begrudgingly acknowledges the power of the witch reborn. He has identified the

young witch as special and powerful, though not as special or as powerful as himself. When he realises that others will not cede power to him, he turns on them, initially attempting to delegitimise their magical skills and make them feel insignificant and worthless.

Carter's Worst Witch in *A Girl Called Corpse* dismisses Corpse's wax body that she created using magic as "tragically amateur magic, performed by someone with only the most basic grasp on spells" (Carter 103). McKenna's Glashtyn in *Hedgewitch*, a shapeshifter, takes the form of her Aunt Miranda and taunts Cassie, "You might as well give up, Cass-sandra, give me the key and run away, like your foolish mother… You are worthless to me" (McKenna 382). Townsend's Wundersmith in *Nevermoor* infantilises Morrigan by referring to her as "Little Crowling" (Townsend 434).

When the emerging witch refuses to submit to the monstrous masculine character he attempts to obliterate her. This overwhelming threat of physical violence forces the protagonist to, intentionally, step towards their subjectivity and inhabit the role of the witch reborn

The witch reborn represents the young generation of witches who embody the chaotic, joyful, transgressive nature of magic, existing outside of patriarchal hierarchies.

McKenna's *Hedgewitch* offers an interesting and unique representation of the monstrous masculine. In McKenna's novel it is exclusively female-gendered characters who can learn to wield magic, and who are called witches. Abuse of patriarchally endorsed magic in service of the evil King of the Goblins, the Erl King, renders one a 'warlock' regardless of gender identity. A warlock is "a witch in league with Faerie, a traitor to the Witch's Assembly. One who seeks to use magic to harm

and destroy rather than heal and protect" (McKenna 172). *Hedgewitch* is the only literary text in this data set of Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction that linguistically differentiates between witches and warlocks. It is interesting, indeed, that these gendered terms are more a reflection of ethical orientation than gender.

Affable swan masculinity

Affable swan masculinity represents a rejection of disempowering forms of masculinity. Stephens suggests that a predominantly female reading audience results in a 'feminised' masculinity being foregrounded in children's literature:

> the textual objective is to influence girls to contribute to changing images of masculinity by showing preference for males who are, for example, communicative, intellectually and emotionally sensitive, and whose relationships with females are based on friendliness, companionability, empathy and equality (*Always Facing the Issues* xv).

These qualities of subversive masculinity conform to some attributes of the version of masculinity that Attebery terms the 'Erotic Swan' (*Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales by Men* 330). Given the age of the characters and the implied reader of my data set of middle-grade fantasy, and therefore, the absence of erotic material, I have substituted the term 'erotic' for 'affable.' Affable swan masculinity conveys empowerment, but not power over others, as well as grace, generosity, and charm. Although personable, swan masculinity is not tame (Attebery, *Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales by Men* 330-331). It is a form of masculinity that may not either embody nor benefit from hegemonic masculinity. Attebery states that characters who do not embody heteronormative masculinity are coded as "unfit for patriarchal service" due to their "subtractive masculinity" (*Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales by Men* 333):

> In order to be eligible for the social benefits of patriarchy, men must give up any traits that might be labelled feminine, because masculinity is defined primarily by not being womanly and secondarily by not being effeminate ...This means, in Anglo-American culture, that a man should not dance, cry, gesture, nurture, empathize, or show any sort of vulnerability. All of these and more are subtracted from the range of possible expressions (Attebery, *Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales by Men* 332-3).

From Hawthorne in *Nevermoor*, Gish in *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*, Mika in *Dragon Skin*, Flip in *A Girl Called Corpse*, Samuel in *The Monster Who Wasn't*, Arlo in *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*, Kit in *Big Magic*, to Griffin in *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*, masculine affable swans subvert and trouble patriarchal standards. In Australian middle-grade fantasy, affable swan masculinity is represented as productive, privileging joyful connection and community over the aggression and dominance associated with hegemonic masculinity. Powerful and empowering representations of affable swan masculinity subvert patriarchal social structures by emphasising the pleasures and productiveness of collaboration, and the potential for relationships based on connection rather than oppression.

The character traits of the affable swan represent *écriture féminine* in the texts. The way these traits de-hierchise interactions by focusing on empowerment over repression rejects notions of phallogocentrism in favour of potentiality and subjective power. As Stephens observes:

> A central issue is the question of subjective agency. Hegemonic masculinity perpetuates itself by denying agency to Others (women, gays, children), so remodelled subjectivities may be depicted by affirming that gender norms are unstable and mutable and hence agency may take other forms (Stephens, *Ways of Being Male* xi).

This openness of expression epitomises the potentiality of *écriture féminine*. In refusing to adhere to destructive gender hierarchies and norms the affable swan is

empowered, and, in turn, encourages his friends to reject social hierarchies. This iteration of masculinity demonstrates *ècriture féminine* through a propensity to cause chaos. This chaos disrupts the dominant phallogocentric systems of classification and order (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa*). Affable swan masculinity does not seek to dominate female or gender-diverse characters and can, consequently, be found in sidekicks, and gentle protagonists in middle-grade fantasy. It is empowered, but it does not situate itself as the only viable,worthy, or empowered expression of gender identity.

Millard's Griffin in *The Kingdom of Silk* series is described on the first page of the novel as an "uncommon sort of boy" (Millard 1). He is the only boy in a sea of sisters, painfully shy and bullied for his 'weird name', 'feminine' hair, and proximity to femininity. Griffin is quiet, thoughtful, and linked to fantastic conventions through his name. He makes daisy chains and secretly believes that his feelings of jealousy towards his new baby sister caused her cot death. When he is taunted, feminised, and infantilised at school, being called a 'baby', Griffin stands up for himself, asserting his identity with an emphasis on his family connections. He tells the bullies "I'm not a baby. My name is Griffin Silk and I live with my Daddy and Nell and my five big sisters and soon Mama will come home and bring my little sister" (Millard 5). His identity is intertwined with and informed by his relationships; he does not centre himself or place himself above those he loves.

On another occasion, the class bully declares that Griffin's family are "all weird, and the old lady's a witch" (Millard 43). Layla, Griffin's friend, stands at the top of the monkey bars, physically dominating the boys, and declares:

> If my grandmother was a witch, the first thing I would ask her to do would be to put a spell on all of you and the second thing would be to send her pet crow after you, to

> peck your eyes out! So if I was you guys, I wouldn't be saying too much to my friend Griffin (Millard 47).

This interaction subverts expectations around gender roles and expression, showing Layla as embodying masculine traits (authoritative, willing to engage in confrontation and intimidation), while Griffin embodies a more feminised response to (fading into the background, keeping silent). While Griffin slowly gains confidence through his friendship with Layla, he retains his softness and an associated potential for a highly feminised, emotive form of magic: "Griffin soon realized that Layla had the gift of reading people's hearts just like he and Mama and Daddy, and like Tishkin before she went away" (Millard 66). Griffin represents an affable swan masculinity that seeks to create room for others. His character development validates kindness and foregrounds gender expression as full of potential when not limited by patriarchal constraints.

Foxlee's *Dragon Skin* explores affable swan masculinity by juxtaposing it with hegemonic masculinity. Pip's deceased friend, Mika, acts as a guide for Pip as she 'finds a dragon' and navigates her grief. Foxlee juxtaposes hegemonic masculinity against affable swan masculinity:

> Matt said 'real boys don't cry,' but they did. She'd seen Mika cry and she'd liked him even more for it. The problem with most boys was that they held all their crying in and then when they did it was like Krakatoa. *Kaboom*, they blurted out their tears, all snotty and hot. They wailed and behaved as though the world was about to end over a stolen Pokémon card or coming fourth in a race or getting picked on, one too many times. If they'd let their tears out more often, they'd be okay. They wouldn't nearly destroy civilization every time they cried (121).

Hegemonic masculinity is presented as being dangerous and, if not capable of destroying whole civilizations, catastrophic on a small scale, collapsing corporeal as well as socio-cultural boundaries. Affable swan masculinity, on the other hand, sees

Mika expressing his feelings in a safe manner through crying. Foxlee disrupts patriarchal masculinity by demonstrating that crying is a legitimate and necessary method of emotional regulation that, when denied to boys, deregulates them to a catastrophic degree and may result in harm to those around them. Further, Mika encourages Pip to be less rigid and more open to the world and its magical possibilities. He tells her:

> 'This place is magic. Do you believe in it?'
> She wanted to say no but that wasn't telling the truth.
> They sat in silence and the first dark clouds cast a
> shadow across their waterhole.
> 'Say you do,' he said and he sounded sad.
> 'I do,' she said. 'Of course I do' (Foxlee 304).

Mika is determined to connect Pip with the sense of possibility he feels about the world. Mika's affable swan masculinity is gentle, inclusive, welcoming, and expansive. It prompts consideration of expressions of gender that lie outside, or between, patriarchal notions of binaries and boundaries.

An Entredeux Between the Gender Binary

As evidenced throughout this chapter, children's literature provides diverse and rich representations of gender. I argue that Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction uses the motif of magic to explore liminality and multiplicity in relation to gender identity. Without the motif of magic, however, middle-grade fantasy fiction retains its ability to investigate gender identities that occupy an *entredeux* between masculine and feminine. Stephens argues that resignifying masculinity and femininity to "degender social relations" undoes binary gender oppositions, and that this is one of the tasks of children's literature (Stephens, *Ways of Being Male* xiv). I argue that children's literature employs Cixous's *entredeux* in degendering social relations. Once multiplicity is embraced, socio-cultural pressures and expectations are delegitimised,

and gender identity becomes just one of many character traits, not the primary limiting factor for subjectivity.

Magic provides the opportunity for masculinity and femininity to interact less in opposition than "in indecision, participating thus in the *intertwining* of the person. Even more, they intersect" (Calle-Gruber 158). The presence of magic within the fantastic disrupts the process by which normative gender performativity is legitimised. As Nodelman writes:

> What we call 'normal' is usually the imposition of culturally constructed and therefore politically motivated ideals that serve to repress individual differences by identifying the supposed ideal as the norm (*Making Boys Appear* 2).

By confusing mimetic representation and decentring gender norms, gender becomes unstable, and the binary of femininity and masculinity opens into an *entredeux*. Difference still exists, of course, as "pure I, identical to I-self, does not exist. I is always in difference" (Cixous and Sellers xvii), but gender as a binary construct loses traction in terms of hegemonic power.

Once the gender binary is destabilised, a next logical step is to explore the ways gender can be enacted. The relationship between the performance of gender and power is a focus of Marinucci's work. She posits that:

> gender is not so much who people are, but what they do … The idea that gender is performative serves as a reminder that maintaining the hegemonic binary is an active process … People have the power, both individually and collectively, to choose forms of expression that deliberately disrupt the hegemonic binary (Marinucci 105).

Maintaining the normative gender binary is an active process, and one that involves interaction of gender performance and hegemonic power. Sexual difference guides socio-cultural norms regarding gender with a view to upholding or challenging the

patriarchal order (Sellers xxvii). Cixous writes, however, that “we are not who we are said to be” (Cixous and Sellers xv), and identity is much richer and more nuanced than the strict binaries and rigid norms that are constructed through patriarchal thinking suggest.

Winter, the protagonist in Sulway’s novel, *Winter’s Tale,* epitomises the power of children’s literature for telling stories of liminality. They are a non-binary, and potentially intersexual, person who is described as “blue as [the] hare” (Sulway 2) who can be seen on the surface of the full moon. “’Is it a boy or a girl?’ somebody asks. The boy shrugged. ‘Who knows?’ he said. That’s how things were with Winter, right from the start” (Sulway 3). Sulway delves into the consequences of Otherness when Winter overhears their foster fathers having a conversation about them. The trauma of being abandoned with a note tied around a jar of peanut butter as a baby has created the belief in Winter that different is wrong:

> ‘People aren’t always kind to those of us who are a little different.’
> ‘They don’t understand that different isn’t the same as wrong.’
> ‘They don’t understand that *everyone’s* a little bit strange.’
> *Special*, Winter thinks. *Different*.
> Those are the words that were written in the note wrapped around the jar of peanut butter. *This child is very different to others. Winter has special needs. We can’t look after them any more.*
> Those are the words that people used when they sent Winter away (Sulway 36-7).

Winter fails to adequately perform gender according to socio-cultural norms and, as such, they are sent from foster family to foster family, always marginalised as the system cannot account for such profound difference. It is not until Winter is placed within a familial culture that has the capacity to embrace them for exactly who they are that Winter is able to embrace non-conformity, become empowered, and the system is changed. Conformity to normative gender roles becomes the least

important part of Winter's identity throughout the novel as they find belonging and settle into expressions of multiplicity.

Sparrow in Wang's *Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon* is not explicitly transgender, but her gender performance marks her as Other. Both naming herself, and choosing an animal (bird) species, reflect both the real-world process by which trans people choose their own names and pronouns, and the fantastical-literary motif in which magical characters are often strongly associated with animals. Her self-naming immediately indicates both self-awareness, and a celebration of liminality and empowerment to the reader. She tells Zadie: "Eleanor Elspeth Eaglemont is the name my parents gave me when I was born ... but it's not who I am. I am Sparrow Eaglemont, Sparrow for short" (Wang 30). When Zadie questions Sparrow about her choice of name, she links her chosen name to her identity, remarking, "'I like sparrows. They're gritty little critters, always on the go and you find 'em all over the world so they're real explorers'" (Wang 78). Grittiness and wandering, or exploration, are not traits that are commonly associated with femininity. Sparrow distances herself from Zadie's performative femininity. She tells her: "You're pretty … You'll hook the boys when you're older for sure … I'm not gonna get married or have kids … I know it's what you're s'posed to do but it's not *my* dream" (Wang 76). Sparrow applies gender-based expectations to her understanding of female-gendered characters while rejecting them for herself. Through self-identifying as Sparrow, she frees herself from participating in those norms. Sparrow exhibits a liminal gender identity and the fantastic conventions of the novel legitimate this *entredeux.* Sparrow's character explores a non-conformity that denies the patriarchal hierarchy and explores potentiality and empowerment.

Morrigan Crow similarly comes under scrutiny for non-conformance to gender expectations during the trials for admittance to the Wundrous Society. Unlike Sparrow, however, Morrigan has not internalised the patriarchal association of femininity with passivity or infantilisation. An older male demonstrates racism and gender-normativity in his initial assessment of her. He says she is a:

> Bit miserable-looking … She foreign? Where'd you find her? ... I don't understand. What's the appeal? I mean, those *eyes*, North, those awful black eyes. The Elders don't go for the mean-looking ones. This one would as soon kill you as look at— (Townsend 151).

At this point he is interrupted by Morrigan's patron, who comes to her defence. Morrigan is baffled by the encounter: "Was she supposed to walk around constantly smiling like an idiot?" (Townsend 149). Morrigan seems unconcerned by the attack on her physical appearance; she does not focus on his assessment of her as mean, foreign, or potentially murderous. Her complaint lies in the assumption that she ought to perform her gender appropriately. Morrigan rejects the gender-based norms that are imposed on her as a young girl; her refusal to perform niceties to maintain the status quo are reinforced by her liminal status as Wundersmith. Being a Wundersmith in a female-gendered body is a particular kind of monstrosity, according to the patriarchal world in which she lives.

Gender and monstrous identity are a puzzle for Sam, the imp from Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't.* Questions around his identity lead to the following exchange, in which various stakeholders attempt to determine how his identity fits within their prior understandings of both gender and monstrosity. Bladder and Wheedle are gargoyles, and the angel is Gabriel from the Catholic tradition:

> 'It's not a boy; it's a monster!' Bladder stamped his foot, dislodging dust.
> 'He's a boy.'
> 'No boy gets made from a sigh.'

> The angel laced his fingers together. ‘He may not be human, but he’s definitely a boy.’
> Wheedle stared at the imp boy. ‘I thought he picked that up in the sewer.’
> ‘Human males and females have different … er … anatomy … er …’ The angel peered at the imp boy and went red again. ‘You’re a bit young for this conversation. Anyway, he also has a belly button.’
> ‘So?’ Wheedle said. ‘Goblins are boys and girls, and one troll I know’s got a belly button. Gargoyles come in all shapes and weirdnesses. It’s part of our charm. Don’t you worry, you’re just the same as the rest of us’ (Shelley 40-1).

Sam’s uncategorisable monstrosity suggests that his identity exists in the liminal unknown. The struggle for identity formation and affirmation stay with Sam throughout the novel. He eventually creates an identity for himself that embraces duality in a liminal space. In doing so, he moves away from gender or monstrousness as key to his identity and focuses instead on empowerment, belonging, and acceptance. Sam’s identity formation rejects phallogocentrism and embraces *écriture féminine*.

The Witch Reborn Moment

Within middle-grade fantasy fiction there is frequently a moment in which the boundaries of gender appropriateness are overthrown. This occurs through the motif of magic, and I suggest that it represents the moment of birth of the witch-as-subject, which I term the witch reborn moment.

Contemporary middle-grade fantasy embraces and celebrates liminality and duality in the character of the witch reborn. These characters are predominantly female, although there are also examples of transgressively masculine and gender diverse reborn witches. These characters undermine gender norms and expectations through magic, existing in a space of growth towards subjectivity. They respond

to—and rebel against—contemporary socio-cultural fears. The witch reborn is often placed in direct opposition to the archetype of Baba Yaga, the witch oppressed, or monstrous masculinity. This oppositional framework creates the conditions for a moment in which they must choose between magic for the greater good, magic for power over others, or themselves, or an unknown third path.

When a witch reborn accepts their power through magic, they experience an empowerment that decentralises binary limits on gender performativity in favour of fluidity, transgression, and self-empowerment. Through this process the witch reborn obliterates or ignores the boundaries that circumscribe female or gender diverse bodies. When they do this, through the avenue of magic, they gain the ability to choose the unknown.

Arbitrary and predetermined socio-cultural structures of power are disturbed through *écriture féminine*, "so that the bottom has the same prestige, that it be restored to us with its treasures, with its beauties" (Cixous, *Rootprints* 11). Fantasy fiction creates pockets of possibility for gender identity that are imbued with personal power and use magic as the means for transformation. Coats writes:

> The female subjects of children's literature help us to understand what forms female subjectivity might take, what possibilities may be open. Moreover, many preadolescent characters in particular operate in the queer space of openness and fluidity, adopting an antinormative, anti-identitarian stance towards the structures of authority they confound and confront. As interpellative fictions by which children engender themselves, they also help structure and perpetuate a desire for such openness (118).

Coats describes the ways that middle-grade fantasy fiction creates an *entredeux* in which gender possibility is explored. Coats describes this space as a queer space, characterised by fluidity, that is antinormative and anti-identitarian. This reflects what I observed across all the witch reborn characters in the data set. The drive for

individuation and an eventual disregard for patriarchal norms carves liminal spaces of *entredeux,* in which they construct their own expansive or contradictory systems of values that confound conventional ways of being.Within the entredeux, magic renders identity open and multiple. Gender, as one aspect of identity, is no longer binary, stable or hierarchical, but infinite, unstable, and non-hierarchical.

Lacanian psychoanalysis reveals several dichotomies and tensions within these literary interactions. The witch reborn finds herself historically constituted but as a contemporary subject. Becoming immersed in the language of witchcraft places the witch reborn in the position from which they must create an identity within the present socio-cultural context, while bearing the weight of historical expectations and biases around gender and magic. This entry into the language of witchcraft is the first step into the socio-cultural and historical representational systems of the Symbolic, which the subject-as-witch uses both to define themself and to craft a meaningful identity. Young witches in *Nevermoor, Hedgewitch, Big Magic, A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* and *The Hotel Witch* must learn to speak a new language of magic through which they separate from their oppressed identities and become empowered. The transition from child to witch differs from the transition from child to adolescent. The ability to wield magic frames the transition to adolescence within the fantastic, using symbolism that transcends mimetic representation and magnifies the significance of this developmental process.

For Tulsi, from Armstrong's *Big Magic*, the language of witchcraft is not her first language—her spell craft is strongest in Welsh. Her grandmother tells her, "you must draw on your ancestors' knowledge, back to Eunice and beyond. The wisdom of all those women is within you, Tulsi. Find it" (Armstrong 72). She must use her ancestral language to access her magic in its strongest capacity. In practicing her

spell craft, Tulsi exhibits the temporal and spatial creation of subjective power that Derrida terms 'play in the world.' Immersed in the moment, with the weight of socio-cultural knowledge informing her identity, Tulsi claims her subjective power. She outgrows the limits placed upon her as a female-gendered magical being who is expected to conform, as her ancestors have done before her. This is her witch reborn moment. When Tulsi defies her grandmother, her magical heredity is weaponised in an attempt to demand obedience, and Tulsi rebels:

> 'How dare you!' She points at me and I fly through the air,
> over the back of the couch and land heavily on the floor.
> Her face is twisted. 'Who do you think you are, Tulsi?
> You're only alive because of me. You are my blood and
> you should do as I say' …
> My throat is choked with anger and fear. 'I owe you
> nothing,' I spit out. 'I would rather have no magic than
> work for you' (Armstrong 261).

Tulsi's blood overflows with magic inherited from her maternal bloodline. The invocation of blood and ancestry demands a level of obedience not just to immediate family but to the continuation of the family bloodline. Therefore, when Tulsi rejects her grandmother, she is metaphorically rejecting her role in the maintenance and continuation of ancestral obligation. Tulsi transitions from child to witch at this moment. The witch reborn must learn, often through Derrida's concept of play in the world—a socio-culturally and historically informed process—to interact from a space that transcends boundaries and binaries and extends their journey towards selfhood.

Initially, Townsend's Morrigan Crow of *Nevermoor* believes that she is cursed to die on Eventide. Her early life is dedicated to apologising for her existence and the make-believe havoc that it causes her community. But she does not die as the curse foretold. Instead, she escapes to Nevermoor and begins her quest to gain admittance, through a series of trials, to the exclusive and powerful Wundrous society. Wundrous society members are guided by the witch reborn's determination

to contain their magic, wielding it only for the greater good. Morrigan strives to find "something interesting. And useful. And good" (Townsend 132) that marks her as special enough to join their ranks. She discovers that she is a Wundersmith, a dangerous magical entity, and finds herself once more feared and despised by her community.

Morrigan decides she will be a Wundersmith of her own making. Squall facilitates this self-determination by providing Morrigan with insight into her identity, and her relationship to magical power. He tells her:

> You were born a Wundersmith, but if you do not learn how to harness Wunder, it will harness *you*. If you do not learn to control Wunder, it will control *you*. It will burn you slowly from the inside, and eventually … it will destroy you (Townsend 434).

Like her fellow witches reborn, the consequences of not taking ownership of her magic are potentially catastrophic for Morrigan. In her witch reborn moment, Morrigan experiences a violent separation of the potentiality of her identity from the narcissistic and murderous power-seeking that Ezra Squall—the only other Wundersmith in the world—represents. Townsend writes:

> Suddenly that was what she was—a living tidal wave of rage and fear. She was *not* like him, she would *never be like him!* ...
> A bright, blinding light filled the room ... one booming golden-white pulse that lasted several seconds, or maybe several days, or maybe an entire lifetime, and then it was gone.
> In its wake, silence ...
> Squall, wide-eyed and lightning-struck, sprawled on the ground as if he'd been thrown there. Staring up at Morrigan as if he'd just now been given the gift of sight. (433).

Morrigan's magic power enables her to reject the gendered expectations of meekness and pliability. In one explosive moment, she throws off expectations of femininity and creates an *entredeux* that encompasses her gender and her magic as

a supernatural being. Her acceptance of her powers comes with acceptance of a liminal identity and existence. She chooses the unknown third path—that of the 'good' Wundersmith. Morrigan exceeds the boundaries placed upon her by choosing herself and who she might become, in the liminal unknown.

Like Morrigan, Willa Birdwhistle, the witch reborn in Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*, feels the pressure of patriarchy and rebels against it. In an altercation with the monstrous masculine menace, he leers at her, "Why can't you just be a good little girl? ... If you won't do as you're told, I'll have to teach you a lesson. How about I turn both your friends into clouds?" (Plozza 267). Willa responds to this violent threat with unadulterated anger. Plozza writes:

> Willa's rage was so wild, she shook with it … Her magic was waiting, too. Her magic that fought tooth and nail against being squashed into the shape of 'proper' spells … 'I will not do as I'm told!' she cried. 'Not when you're forcing me to be someone I'm not. Not when you only want to control me. My magic doesn't listen to bullies' (Plozza 267).

This moment marks Willa's emergence from child to witch reborn. She realises that, as a character with magical powers, she was exercising control over herself, imposing boundaries and limitations, on behalf of repressive forces.

Like her fellow witches in their witch reborn moments, Willa realises the liminal path may be unknown, but it contains more potential than the binaries previously imposed on her. Plozza narrates Willa's thoughts:

> There ought to at least be an alternative. A choice to live a quiet, uneventful life as a witch who would rather stay home than go to war ... She was a witch: magic ran deep within her and always had. If she'd had a choice, she would have been someone her parents could have loved unconditionally. But her choices were Silverclaw, Irontongue, or explode (102).

After her witch reborn moment, Willa realises that “perhaps she could just … *be.* Just be Willa Birdwhistle. Friend of Gish and Marceline. Queen of cats. A swan, not a duck. Someone good. A witch of her own choosing” (Plozza 209). Eventually, she shuns her assigned gender and magical roles and chooses a liminal path, saying: “I choose me …I choose my friends and my cats and all the things I haven’t discovered yet … I choose a different path” (Plozza 277). Willa chooses an unknown path of subjectivity and potentiality, unconstrained by patriarchal pressure. The witch reborn, responding to contemporary concerns around subjectivity and patriarchal control, must find a new path towards personal subjectivity, different from the path taken by generations of witches before her.

Contemporary representations of witches as complex figures respond to the pressures of subjectivity in modern patriarchal society. These literary witches change in response to the diverse needs of their readers. Evolving from the hag of old and the irrepressible figure of the Baba Yaga, whose greatest strength is her complete and dangerous unpredictability, come contemporary literary figures: the witch oppressed and the witch reborn. The purposes of magic, for the greater good or for subjective empowerment, are interrogated through these literary figures. Contemporary literary witches demonstrate how subjective complexity creates space for multiplicity, celebrating liminality and empowerment. The witch reborn embraces their magic as personal power, as a site of transformation, as providing a capacity for more nuanced, complex forms of selfhood.

This chapter has also explored how middle-grade fantasy texts critique hegemonic masculinity as a byproduct of the patriarchy. Monstrous masculinity is rooted in narcissism, and expressed through destruction, power over others, and violence. The monstrous masculine witch engages the psychological concept of

negation and attempts to obliterate the witch reborn when she refuses to occupy her proper place beneath him in the patriarchal hierarchy. In contrast, affable swan masculinity destabilises notions of a gender hierarchy of power. Alongside such complex and subversive representations of gender, magic is used to complicate the potential for diverse subjectivity, but also connection.

Community and connection are important, and recurrent, topics in middle-grade fantasy fiction. These intertwining concepts are expressed through various aspects of stories, including in representations of the intersection of subjectivity and space. Fantastic conventions that explore ways of being in the world frequently open up new ways of understanding time and space, including by complicating the ways in which magical protagonists experience belonging or marginalisation

BELONGING IN SENTIENT SPACES

"Home. Quil felt the warm air in the room quiver" (Rodda 62).

Middle-grade fantasy fiction novels play with concepts of space and place by employing discourses of liminality, belonging, and strangeness. Magical spaces are imagined as complex, sentient entities who have multifaceted relationships with magical protagonists. This chapter explores ten Australian middle-grade fantasy works of fiction that reveal this tendency: Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse,* Sulway's *Winter's Tale,* Armstrong's *Big Magic,* Tanner's *Spellhound,* McKenna's *Hedgewitch,* French's *Phaery Phredde and Other Stories to Eat with a Banana,* Foxlee's *Dragon Skin,* Miller's *The Hotel Witch,* Townsend's *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow,* and Reilly's *Troll Mountain.*

Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* proposes that literature may present contradictory, multiplicitous expressions of potentiality, rather than adhering to singular and patriarchal expressions of selfhood or reality. The feminist philosophy of Cixous is reflected in the openness and playfulness evident in the characterisation of sentient spaces. Her theory rejects the "homogenizing, reductive, unifying reason [that] has always been an ally of the Master, of the one Subject, stable and socializable" (Cixous and Sellars 32). The instability of subjective reality as rebellion against phallogocentrism is explored through the destabilisation of space and time in middle-grade fantasy fiction. All is in flux, and all is becoming, overflowing with possibility.

Cixous's concept of linguistic overflow into *entredeux*—the space between binaries—describes a process of becoming, and the many potential and viable

expressions of being that result from such exuberance (Cixous and Calle-Gruber). In fantastic literature, non-sentient entities and objects are often imbued with sentience. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which middle-grade fantasy novels grant spaces the opportunity to explore multiple expressions of being, which, in turn, inform the way the stories set within such sentient spaces express the relationships between subjectivity and belonging.

Current scholarship on literary space is predominantly focused on its socio-cultural importance and physical boundaries. Yi-Fu Tuan describes *space* as "virtually untouched, undescribed or unexperienced," while *place* is "named, experienced, and claimed by humanity" (686). Jane Carroll's work on landscape in children's literature is also helpful. She defines *landscape* as a "perceived spatial area" that is "a construct … that is shaped and given order either physically (through cultivation or building) or imaginatively (through art or literature)" (Carroll 2). This literary focus on the relationship between humanity, space, and place is foundational to understanding their functions in texts but is subverted by fantastic conventions, which tend to present "landscape as a participant in the adventure" (Mendlesohn 35). Middle-grade fantasy fiction extends this fantastical convention of personifying space by granting various spaces personality and agency.

Sentient spaces in fantastic fiction are powerful beings, capable of interacting with magical characters, or ignoring them. This chapter uses Cixous's theories to explore the potential that sentient space represents. I apply Cixous's work on phallocentric binaries to explore the ways that middle-grade fantasy questions their logic, and usefulness, in understanding the relationships between characters and spaces. I also draw on the work of contemporary scholars to explore how sentient spaces complicate notions of temporal and spatial stability and reality through portal

magic, tree magic and the narrative figure of the stranger. I explore the ways that sentient spaces exhibit agency and intrude upon the agency of other characters. Discourses of belonging, liminality, and identity are interrogated, drawing attention to the impact they have on the representations of being, and becoming, in place and space.

A (Usually) Benevolent Interest

Spaces and places often function as magically imbued characters with personal agency in children's fantasy texts. All spaces in such texts are significant, serving literal, metaphoric, or metonymic functions. The creation, upholding, and transgression of supernatural spaces and their boundaries is, for example, a significant aspect of the characterisation of magical spaces.

Liminality is explored through sentient space by defying patriarchal notions of singular truth and masculine rationality in favour of the qualities of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing), including openness, possibility, and multiplicity. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs writes that deliberate confusion in the expression of reality raises questions "about the status of the body as physical, ephemeral, or supernatural" (24). She argues that a focus on fantastic corporeality means that the fantastic may be understood "as a manifestation of the *féminine"* (Wilkie-Stibbs 24). The language of corporeality complicates patriarchal reality and may be applied to sentient spaces in a demonstration of *écriture féminine,* as well as to supernatural characters. The opportunity to present space as sentient, and therefore, as a character, may be shown through interactions with magical protagonists. Magical spaces have their own agency, either helping or hindering the progress and development of magical protagonists. Indeed, I argue they are sometimes described as having distinctly

human traits and motives while simultaneously existing in temporal and spatial separateness from humans, and humanlike characters. This representation reflects their relationship to the liminality of *écriture féminine*.

The sentient space of Elston-Fright in Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse* exerts its agency as a magically-imbued character. Elston-Fright is hostile to Corpse. The entire geographical location is empowered by the evil magic that stifles the area with masculine energy. Corpse struggles to mediate her sense of self when she is in Elston-Fright. The space is oppressive in exercising its dominion over her, complicating her sense of reality and causing her to question what she has power over and what exercises power over her (Coats 5). Corpse must make her way to the Ungeneral Store, a site of evil magic galore, which, far from suffering from the maleficence of the landscape, "snaps and pops and fizzles with bad magic" and "seems to draw the darkness *closer*" (Carter 89). Corpse is overwhelmed by the malicious nature of the town, although it is during this interaction that Corpse finds a source of unexpected support in the graveyard of Elston-Fright.

The empowerment that Corpse feels takes her by surprise even though it seems logical for the reader—Gothic tropes situate ghosts within graveyards, and even though Corpse is her name, Corpse is, indeed, a ghost. Corpse narrates:

> The moment my feet touch the earth, some familiar force reaches up out of the ground to welcome me … It wants to take care of us. Maybe cemeteries always side with the dead … This place makes me feel so much … more. More powerful. More *ghostly* (Carter 124-125).

The graveyard invigorates her supernatural spectral abilities, which Corpse attributes to their shared relationship to the dead. Corpse rejoices because, when she is in dire need, "the cemetery supercharges my ghostliness" (Carter 137), yet to other characters, the graveyard is merely a garden of bones. The graveyard exhibits

agency in contributing to Corpse's powers when her after-life is threatened, although it receives nothing in return. The demonstration of the power the graveyard chooses to exercise in this interaction with Corpse complicates notions of space as static and inert. The graveyard's agency–its sentience–is revealed through its capacity to choose whether to act, or not act, revealing that it is an actor, rather than an inert background to be acted upon.

Sentient space in Sulway's *Winter's Tale* similarly reflects its capacity to interact with characters in need, with a more joyful focus. The sentient space of the Otherworld has a temporal and spatial porousness that allows Winter to experience belonging, acceptance, and celebration. John Carey writes that temporal and spatial complexity is intrinsic to the Otherworld, and it is "fundamentally paradoxical" in its characteristics, and links to "mortal reality" (1). Carey posits that:

> the Otherworld's *separation* from our world—the radical contrast expressed by its supernatural characteristics, inversion of mortal norms, and usual inaccessibility—coexists with its *immediacy*: it is hidden within, or identified with, the landmarks of each locale (2).

Both present and hidden, the Otherworld is usually inaccessible, even though it is adjacent to Winter's reality. The presence of the Otherworld in *Winter's Tale* is rendered partially and inconsistently visible through the painted murals that adorn the town's streets, while it maintains agency by neither remaining stable (the murals shift and change over time), and by not presenting a door, or portal, to characters it doesn't wish to welcome.

The separate-presentness of the Otherworld is also expressed in *Winter's Tale* through the instability of spatial reality—the city physically rearranges itself overnight. It appears to be unconcerned about the impact of this whimsical agency on the characters who live there. The Otherworld and the world that Winters inhabits

coexist peacefully, resisting the 'truth' of any one version of reality. However, Winter finds they can access the Otherworld with the help of the Crowned Hare, a supernatural being. Sulway writes:

> And then there is the crowned hare. He doesn't say a word, just waits til the cake is cut and the wishes are wished. Then he comes forward, reaches out a paw and leads Winter towards the mural of paper boats on the old brick wall around the rose garden. Well, that's when the magic happens. The crowned hare and Winter, Fox and Bo and Wren, leap through the wall, or, not *through* the wall, exactly, but *into* the paper boats. The world of murals. The Otherworld (70).

The Otherworld is a liminal space that exhibits sentience by exerting agency in its rearrangement of reality. *Winter's Tale* reveals patriarchal singularity to be unimportant and irrelevant to the possibilities of reality and to feeling a sense of being at home in space and in self.

The characters can expose their truest selves in safety and security in the Otherworld, disregarding essentialising cultural claims concerning their identities. The magic of this liminal space grants the characters freedom to accept the others as their truest selves. The characters' inner and outer selves align in an image of wholeness as they are perceived in the embodied forms that best represent their idealised imago (Lacan 76). It is only in interaction with the Otherworld that this alignment occurs in *Winter's Tale,* supporting my theory that sentient spaces enact agency as characters in middle-grade fantasy. In interactions with magical characters, sentient spaces frame the subjectivity of others. Sentient spaces may, likewise, maintain their individuality through expressions of selfhood beyond relationships with magical characters, which are frequently framed through past and future temporality.

Changing Places

Sentient space is represented in middle-grade fantasy literature as a living character in a historical context with the capacity for future growth and change. From an ecofeminist perspective, Samantha Clark writes that the conceptual and physical distance between humanity and the environment has direct ramifications on the relationship between the two. She argues:

> The environmental impacts of our actions are often hidden or indirect, with effects remote from cause in space and time, and demanding improbably difficult and far-reaching changes to our lives. The 'environment' seems to be something vast, distant, and impossibly complex (Clark 9).

This physical distance between contemporary society and the natural world echoes an *entredeux* often represented in middle-grade fantasy's complication of binary patriarchal discourses of space and place, culture and nature, and belonging and strangeness. Middle-grade fantasy turns toward the chasms that are created in the imbalance between these binaries and crafts bridges, *entredeux,* that reflect and embody the conceptual gaps between nature and humanity. I contend that one method of referring to the power imbalance of binaries, or exploring the *entredeux* between space and place*,* is by granting space sentience. Characterising space or landscape as sentient and mortal draws it close and emphasises the dynamic nature of humanity's interactions with space.

Sulway interrogates *entredeux* between space and place by bringing the outside *inside* contemporary ideologies of home. In doing so, she explores the porousness of the inside/outside boundary and inscribes place—that is, space that is claimed or inhabited by humanity—with a sense of wildness. In her novel, *Winter's Tale,* Sulway describes Fox and Bo's house in fecund, earthy language that connotes growth, expansion, and change. The family eat breakfast around a tree

stump, seated on mushrooms, with mice running about their feet (Sulway 18). Sulway writes that “the light that spills through it is not like the light from a lamp or a candle, but like the light in a forest on a summer afternoon” (34). The wild, bright atmosphere that fills the inside of the house subverts discourses of nature and belonging, particularly when contrasted with the world outside.

Comparatively, the garden that surrounds the house is “dark and wild and strange” (Sulway 39). The inside of the home is filled with wildness in a way that replicates the growth of nature outside, yet it is homely in its strangeness, both *heimlich* and *unheimlich* (Freud, *From the Uncanny* 826). The outside is conceptually distant and unfamiliar; it is ‘not home.’ The outside exists in a temporal realm of growth and subjectivity that maintains separateness from other characters. Inside/outside boundaries are somewhat porous, complicated by the framing of space as sentient. Fox and Bo’s home displays sentience in permitting its habitation by the family. In middle-grade fantasy, nature may engage with homeliness, but when granted sentience, it may choose to maintain a complicating distance from human and other sentient actors.

Entredeux of liminal possibility extends to the wider environment in *Winter’s Tale,* where sentience is not determined by, or dependent on, human interaction. In Winter’s world, “each evening the parks dream. And in the morning everything’s different” (Sulway 26). The capacity of sentient space to grow and change is not questioned, as it transforms from space to place and back again. The landscape of the novel is a forceful character, represented as having been growing and changing for longer than the characters have experienced it, with the unspoken understanding that it will continue to do so even if/when the characters leave. All is in flux, expressing fluidity through connection and distance. This fluidity can be expressed

through the transformation of space to place through developing relationships with magical characters, such as in the case of Fox and Bo's dwelling. Though in some cases, sentient space resists domestication or even familiarity.

Responsiveness: Reciprocity, Symbiosis, and Refusal

The responsiveness that sentient spaces exhibit with magical characters occurs, characteristically, in three modes: reciprocity, symbiosis, or refusal. From a cultural perspective, children transform the spaces they inhabit as much as the space and place transforms them because "childhood is not merely a social construct, but a *spatial* one" (Kraft et al in Hamilton-McKenna 319). This reciprocity is heightened in middle-grade fantasy through their relationships to sentient space. While reciprocal relationships between sentient space and other characters occur with differing intensity, sentient space is often most explicitly responsive to the needs and desires of magical child protagonists.

This tender responsiveness reflects the ecofeminist perspective that natural spaces have inherent value, possessing as much worth as humans and animals, and deserve at least equal respect and care. Vikki VanSickle explains that ecofeminist notions of community demonstrate that "community is inclusive but not homogenizing, and interdependent but not codependent. It consists of both human and nonhuman members" (134). Magic in middle-grade fantasy fiction is frequently linked to the natural world, echoing an ecofeminist and matriarchal perspective on community, empowerment, and belonging. The patriarchal hierarchy is unravelled in such landscapes, as sentient space is characterised with potential and duality, particularly if the relationship is reciprocal.

Tulsi's relationship with sentient space in Armstrong's *Big Magic* is both responsive and reciprocal. Tulsi must learn to interact with the community of natural

elements by offering it careful and undivided attention. The strength of her magical abilities relies on the reciprocity of her relationship with nature, which requires effort and focus on her behalf. Sylvie instructs Tulsi on this reciprocity during their magic lessons, as Armstrong narrates:

> when you can truly hear nature, you will fill with energy … Certain places will offer you more energy than others. Mountain peaks, the mouth of a river, somewhere like this with a big rock. And old trees—not young ones (87-8).

Tulsi must learn to listen to the voices of trees and absorb the power they offer her. During her magical training, she accidentally fells an enormous old tree. Her grandmother admonishes her, asking if she can hear it "groaning," and tells her that she must commune with the tree and apologise for ending its life (Armstrong 93). She sets Tulsi a new test, to "go and listen to one of those trees and tell me what it says. Any tree is fine, they're all sisters" (Armstrong 97).

Freya Mathews writes of "the natural world as a community of beings, related, in the manner of a family, but nevertheless distinct" (in VanSickle134). Tulsi responds to the trees in the matriarchal manner informed by ecofeminism. Tulsi describes the experience of connecting with the tree in reciprocal terms:

> My whole body is heating up now, and I know with absolute certainty that this tree is a being who knows I'm here. *I'm sorry I killed your sister,* I say inside my head as hot, guilty tears press at my eyelids. The tree-noise grows louder. I hear a word. It's not English, it's nothing like English, but I know what it means. There's an exhilarating whooshing and buzzing under my skin … 'The tree's saying *courage*' (Armstrong 104).

The tree offers compassionate wisdom to Tulsi, in an act of willed reciprocity. It provides insight to Tulsi as a seer might, solidifying its more-than-human sentience as a liminal and numinous being. Interactions with sentient trees is not peculiar to *Big Magic:* similar sentient flora play a significant role in Tanner's *Spellhound*.

While Armstrong's Tulsi must focus on giving and receiving attention and energy in an intentional act of reciprocity, the inhabitants of the Floating Forest inadvertently imbibe magic in a symbiotic relationship. The Floating Forest in *Spellhound* is so magical "from root to twig" (Tanner 5) that "the air sang with magic, and so did the rocks and earth and water" (Tanner 33). Inhabiting the Floating Forest, being-in-place and caring for their forest home, is sufficient for residents to assimilate the magic of the forest. Tanner writes that "everyone and everything who lives in the Floating Forest has a small amount of magic in them … They breathe it in with the air. They drink it with the water" (159). The relationship between inhabitant and forest is symbiotic: the forest relies on the inhabitants to care for it, and in return, the Floating Forest provides magic to those who belong there. They look after one another.

As Zoe Jaques observes: "the literary device of giving trees a voice 'grants them subject status,' thus making them worthy of protection" (in Uluru 4). By granting trees subject status in *Spellhound,* and placing them in a symbiotic relationship with the inhabitants of the Floating Forest, representations of self and home become indelibly intertwined. The elevation of forest to magical subject offers an image of home as an actively protective, nurturing subject. Carroll writes that "the relationship between location and identity reaches its climax in the representation of the home which becomes a logical extension and reflection of the self" (20).

Sometimes in middle-grade fantasy, however, sentient spaces complicate notions of home. They may refuse to participate in a reciprocal relationship, denying other characters the right to cohabitate comfortably, and instead demonstrate supernatural non-compliance. The witch's shack on the Rock-That-Doesn't-Exist in Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse* is haunted by ghosts and witches, and refuses to

cooperate with its inhabitants. The shack resists the transformation of space to place, refusing to conform to concepts of home, and deliberately maintaining its distance and individuality. Corpse explains:

> Back when I first woke up here as a ghost, it was a house, sturdy and strong. But then after a while the walls started bending. The beams started buckling. And even though the Witches patch it up with sticking spells, they never last long. It's like the shack *wants* to fall apart or something (Carter 33).

The rock and its shack resist being tamed by other characters, and refuse to enter a cooperative or reciprocal relationship with its magical inhabitants. This suggests that the Spellspring does not consent to having its magic used, instead attempting to drive away the colonising witches by exhibiting *unheimlich* tendencies.

The Rock-That-Doesn't-Exist is deliberately strange. Distant and wild, it expresses "the wildness which manifests itself when nature is no longer controlled," which Stefan Ekaman terms "feral nature" (132). The rock and shack retain their feral natures, resist coming under supernatural control, and maintain their strangeness, refusing to "behave in ways that fit our culture" (Ekaman 132). Human characters usually assume that *spaces* will passively submit to being transformed into *places*, but the resistance of the rock suggests a complex and resistant sentience. The rock and shack maintain their identity/ies as resistant Others; they are not alone in their magical efforts to resist being colonised or silenced by others. Trees and forests commonly also embody and express their own will in middle-grade fantasy.

The Strange Magic of Trees

As a common motif of fantasy fiction, trees represent multiplicity. Fantasy often subverts the "culturally predominant view of plants as passive, silent and pleasing" (Ryan in Guanio-Uluru 3). Instead, they exemplify strangeness, are liminal and

expansive, and may be spaces, places (habitats), sentient beings, concepts (of wisdom and divinity), and either individual (trees) or plural (forests). In middle-grade fantasy, individual trees are frequently represented as sacred with strongly demarcated boundaries. Forests, on the other hand, are powerful sites of collective magical energy that reflect humanity's often uneasy relationship with wild, wooded spaces. Religious philosopher and academic Mircea Eliade writes: "no tree was ever adored for itself only, but always for what was revealed through it, for what it implied and signified" (in Lasckiewicz 39). In Tanner's *Spellhound*, the sentience of the forest is gradually revealed to the reader.

The Floating Forest is much more than it appears, and it is not just a haven for unusual creatures like minch-wiggins. When the Lady, the most powerful witch of all the witches, begins to strip the magic from each tree, one at a time, Flaxseed reveals the Second Great Secret upon which the premise of the novel rests. The Floating Forest is important on a physical level for its inhabitants, but it also performs a numinous and emotional function within Hallow. Tanner writes:

> What would the Floating Forest be without its magic? Just a forest, like any other. That would be tragedy enough. But here is another question, just as important. What would Hallow be, without the Floating Forest? Some people would see no difference. No difference at all. But others would wonder why the stars shone less brightly. Why birdsong was not as sweet … This is the Second Great Secret: The Floating Forest is the very heart of Hallow. Without it, there is no joy (265-266).

The collective magic of the Floating Forest is directly tied to the emotional experience of every being who lives in Hallow. Its significance cannot be overstated. The forest represents connection to community and home, and all that is good and hopeful within the complex web of life in this fantasy realm. The intensity and uncommonness of the interweaving of these fates is also reflected in the physicality

of the forest. Forests are deeply rooted and, therefore, commonly associated with belonging in place, yet the Floating Forest exists in liminality—it literally floats in the sky. This opposition reflects the strange and expansive nature of tree magic in fantasy fiction. Interfering with tree magic will have dire consequences; a concept that is reflected in other works of middle-grade fantasy literature.

Trees and forests in middle-grade fantasy are otherworldly in their sentience and threatening in their mystery. Forests undergo large-scale transformations during their life cycles, as Weronika Lasckiewicz writes, arguing that, conceptually, forests "undergo transformations which elevate them from the domain of the natural into that of the supernatural" (39). McKenna's forest in *Hedgewitch* demonstrates the supernatural elevation of forests. The Hedge is a truly wild and untameable place, despite the name associating it with the boundary of a garden, tamed and strongly demarcating space that is shaped by humanity.

The forest's name–Hedge–ironically draws attention to the villager's lack of control over the wilderness of the old forest. It is an amalgamation of the magic of each ancient tree, and signifies danger and power. It is the boundary that keeps powerful dark magic out, yet it also contains untameable magic. Cassie is inexplicably drawn to it, unconsciously responding to its deep and ancient magic, and speaks of it in expansive terms. She describes it as "a great dark shadow that seemed to go on forever, like the sea … A true forest, thick with tall and ancient trees. It loomed over the village, threatening to swallow it up" (McKenna 85). It is wild and tumultuous, and she calls it "a storm cloud of tree shadow and dense leafy green" (McKenna 85). The forest is unknowable, as threatening as it is protective. It is an unstable boundary that resists familiarity.

The power of the Hedge is tied to its strangeness, sentience, and liminality. The forest is a space that can alter the subjective reality of other characters and enact transformation upon them. The Hedge represents the fantastic understanding that forests are the "last vestige of myth and faerie in the modern world" (Lasckiewicz 41), and as such are places of "testing, survival, and sacrifice" (Lasckiewicz 40). Those who "leave the forest do so stronger and wiser than they had been at the beginning of their stories because the wilderness is a place of growth and transformation" (Lasckiewicz 40-41). The Hedge does not bend to the will of travellers; they must transform to accommodate its magic or stay away.

Deeply inviting, while simultaneously terrifying for the characters of Hedgely, the Hedge represents Ekaman's concept of feral nature (132). It occupies a unique temporal and spatial reality that does not conform to the communal reality of Hedgely village. When Cassie asks how big the Hedge is, she is told:

> No one can be certain. The wood plays tricks on travelers; paths appear and vanish, or lead one in circles. There are no maps and ordinary compasses fail once one is inside. Why, you might walk for days or weeks and finally come out where you started. Some say that at night the trees pull up their roots and change places (McKenna 137).

The Hedge resists familiarity and knowability, enacting agency over travellers who enter it. It does this by challenging trespasser's perception of reality. The Hedge is reminiscent of Tolkien's Huorns, who are "dark, violent, revengeful, with a past history hinted at but never revealed" (Flieger 25). The nature of the Hedge is expressed through other character's impressions of it, like the Huorns (Flieger 27), which contributes to its mysterious, powerful appeal. It has an unknown past and an unknowable future, existing in an *entredeux* between the known and the seemingly impossible. This *entredeux* between the known and the unknown that encompasses

all notions of possibility is also explored using portal magic in middle-grade fantasy literature.

Space, Liminality, and Portal Magic

In middle-grade fantasy, spatial and temporal reality are undermined through the representation of multiple and liminal realities. Caroline Hamilton-McKenna demonstrates the power of *écriture féminine* in undermining rigid patriarchal thinking through concepts of space, embodiment, and identity. Hamilton-McKenna argues that "so often conceptualizations of place, identity, and the body are defined through the language of barriers, boundaries and binaries," (308) but that fantasy fiction offers a reprieve from this rigidity with an "increasingly fluid conceptualization of place and space" (310). Such fluidity in linguistic representations of space may be reflected through the exploration of liminality, and expressed through relationships with transgressive magical characters.

Liminal spaces interact with transgressive characters in a manner that demonstrates *écriture féminine's* rejection of phallogocentrism. The predominantly female, or gender-diverse, representatives that populate the role of magical protagonist in middle-grade fantasy, transgress patriarchal laws and norms by virtue of their supernatural identities. Sentient spaces further destabilise patriarchal expectations of reality and identity. Tom Shippey highlights the way that fantasy can privilege liminal expressions of subjectivity and materiality, arguing that blending the fantastic and the mundane stimulates "a continuing state of duality, or multiplicity" (in Doughty 157). The blending of mimesis with fantasy highlights, and simultaneously destabilises, patriarchal colonialist ideologies of space and time. Through the haze of possibility, middle-grade fantasy embraces *écriture féminine's* focus on multiplicity

and the exploration of fluidity between socio-culturally conservative binaries of space and time.

The unfixed nature of subjective temporal and spatial reality is explored in French's *A Phaery named Phredde and Other Stories to Eat with a Banana*. Magic is performed by phaeries in the novel, although it is a peculiar kind of magic. Prudence, a human without supernatural ability, acknowledges that the experience of magic is tangible, even if does not alter physical reality permanently. Reality is thus held loosely and with an extreme sense of fluidity. Time and space become irrelevant– mildly inconvenient at best. The phaeries can order space and time at their whim; wishing to relocate to another realm is sufficient to create an alternative reality.

Descriptions of this process of manipulating time and space are deliberately hazy to further highlight this transgression, with the only response to a demand for an explanation being "who understands magic?" (French 23). To find the Queen of the Phaeries in an alternative realm, French writes that Phredde's mother "looked vague. 'Oh, a hundred heartbeats and just past the golden grove,' she said. 'We'll know it when we get there'" (76). Upon returning from this adventure, the human protagonist discovers that six hours in Phaeryland is equivalent to seven years in 'reality'. Her anxiety about this is short lived because the phaeries easily reorganise time in order to return her to the moment that they left for the phaery realm (French 92-3). Resisting closure in this manner reflects open-endedness in both characterisation, and time and space, exposing all three as unfixed concepts.

Destabilising and confusing the boundaries of magic in A *Phaery Named Phredde and Other Stories to Eat with a Banana* suggests that the characters will likely continue to 'play' in liminal space and to embrace the potential of non-binarism

and change (Doughty 157). This is reminiscent of an act of Derridean *play in the world*. Phaeries, in French's novel, transgress binaries of time and space through play. They move through space and time as though the boundaries between times and places are non-existent. While this act of play *in* the world is occurring in the novel, the reader's attention is brought to the irregularity of this boundary transgression. This transforms the literary act of play *in* the world to play *of* the world.

Play of the world is demonstrated through an awareness of the socio-cultural deconstruction of binaries that occurs through play *in* the world. The understanding that commonly understood socio-cultural notions of temporal and spatial reality are questioned and transgressed draws attention to the function of the literary transgression itself. Cognisance that the reader is engaged in the act of questioning these boundaries around truth and subjective reality because of this convention is play *of* the world.

Another fantastic convention performs a similar narrative function in middle-grade fantasy. Portal magic transgresses mimetic representations of temporal and spatial reality, transforming characters through liminal experience.

Portal magic has a long tradition in fantasy and enacts transformative change upon characters that overrides their individual agency. Mendlesohn describes portal fantasy as a device whereby:

> a character moves from the mundane world into the fantastic otherworld and proceeds to describe what is witnessed ... and although his or her impact is ostensibly large, the fantasy world is often left relatively untouched (*Diana Wynne Jones* 114).

Even if the protagonist has little impact on the fantasy world, the use of portal magic has an enormous effect on the protagonist. Such transformations through liminal space frequently occur in fantasy literature. Terri Doughty argues that liminal,

transitional spaces offer insight into self and other (155). Similarly, Mendlesohn writes that portal magic is used to "shift perspective" (*Diana Wynne Jones* 115), and this is certainly true of the experience of magical protagonists in Australian middle-grade fantasy. Using portal magic to generate character transformations reflects the inevitability, in middle-grade fantasy, of growing up and leaving childhood behind.

Tulsi is forced into a speedy transformation through her encounters with portals in Armstrong's *Big Magic*. Tulsi already experiences liminal identity, which Hamilton-McKenna describes as "the feeling of existing in spaces and places without belonging in them" (319). Magic is a tangible part of Tulsi's reality, and though she has magical ancestry and exhibits supernatural ability, her mother refuses to provide the training she needs to manifest her magic. At the beginning of the narrative, Tulsi's subjective experience of magic is unstable, despite the extent of her power. She feels disconnected from her embodied experience of magic; learning to manipulate her magic is the key to enacting agency and becoming empowered. When Tulsi watches her mother disappear through a portal, and Tulsi's grandmother explains, "Merry has taken herself to a parallel universe—another version of her life, which is taking place at the same time as her life in this universe" (Armstrong 55), Tulsi does not have the magical knowledge or skill necessary to bring her back, yet she is the only character who could perform such a feat. Tulsi must summon powerful magic, more than she currently possesses, as portal magic requires significant magical experience and competency.

From that moment, Tulsi is forced into a transient space of intensive magical education to claim her mother from the alternate universe. As Armstrong writes, "magic crosses all boundaries—including those between universes" (292), but the

consequence of using magic to cross thresholds, to enter portals, to manipulate time and space, is to experience displacement. The necessary preparation for crossing the portal is physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially taxing for Tulsi. Portal magic enacts transformation upon Tulsi's subjective experiences and her physical being.

The recurring motif of portals in mundane spaces performs a similarly transformative function in Foxlee's *Dragon Skin,* even though the only portal a human accesses in the text is death. Mika experiences tension between trauma and childhood—he wants to stay in the kingdom of childhood, but his life experiences have prematurely provided him with adult knowledge. Similarly, trauma from an abusive home life has stunted Pip's emotional growth, including her ability to form connections. Mika responds to their shared experiences by wanting to hold Pip in the time and space of childhood, with him, for as long as possible. He does this through the language of portals, and by attempting to draw Pip into emotive states whereby she might experience portal magic. Foxlee writes:

> "Something's different here, Pip," he'd say at the waterhole, at the side of the highway, at the top of Gallipoli Park. "Can you feel it? Like there's a portal nearby … Like when you're in here, time is moving differently. Do you feel it, Pip?" he said. "It's definitely some kind of … portal" (Foxlee 132).

Mika's subjective reality of magical thinking has no common ground with Pip's, but he attempts to linguistically and emotionally entice Pip into his experience of supernatural time and space.

Then Mika dies, and Pip finds a baby dragon. In attempting to save its life, Pip sustains an injury that causes her to finally experience the portal magic Mika so often spoke of: a portal invisibly grows underneath the skin of Pip's hand. It aches, grows heavy, spreads, and stretches her skin until she feels it might burst, although from

the outside her body appears unchanged. Her subjective reality shifts exponentially away from the consensual reality of those around her as she is forced through temporal liminality, into transformation.

After Pip has saved the baby dragon from death, she raises him until he can leave her dimension. The portal magic expands and consumes them in a singular, heartbreaking experience of magic that defies mimetic laws of time and space. Foxlee writes:

> The dragon skin she'd grown had started to split. It had split at her wrists like a too-tight coat and it was cracking over her back … For a while, time didn't move forward in the cave. It *swelled*. It moved sideways and backwards and forwards and in circles … In her left hand, there was a sudden intense burning that snatched her breath away. Her heavy hand, her healing hand, grew bright and the pain was so sharp that she called out, she was sure of it. A light. A pure light poured from her hand, upwards. And she knew, it was part of herself … He [Little Fella] flew into the light, which he gathered up around him in a fraction of a second, in the blink of an eye, in a single heartbeat. It folded in on him, it collapsed him into a pinprick of light that winked once, as the last rays of the sun hit the creek and shone that place alight ... And he was gone (312-321).

Even though it is the dragon, Little Fella, who disappears through the portal, Pip is permanently transformed. This experience reflects the inevitability of leaving the kingdom of childhood. Pip is no longer a passive participant in her life, without agency or desire. She now self-identifies an expansive subjectivity through her numinous experiences with portal magic and reality transgression. She uses the insight gained through these experiences to encourage her mother to leave her abusive partner and escape to safety. The transformative effects of the portal magic in *Dragon Skin* are seemingly permanent. This is reflected in Pip's newfound adult maturity and in the closure of the portal behind Little Fella. Once the dragon passes through the portal, he cannot get back into Pip's dimension, just as Pip cannot return

to their childhood self-identity. In some narrative texts, however, portal magic and the boundary between childhood and adulthood are more unstable. The boundary is less like a line to cross, which then disappears, and more like an *entredeux* that may be entered into, and crossed, in multiple directions.

In McKenna's *Hedgewitch,* the manipulation of time and space through portal magic is unstable and sometimes bi-directional, meaning that the portal can be transgressed in multiple directions. *Hedgewitch* engages portal magic during seasonal solstices and equinoxes: a unique convention of portal magic in this dissertation's data set. Four times a year in Hedgely, a 24-hour portal is opened, and the entire village must remain on alert for maleficent magical threats. In the world of *Hedgewitch*, portal magic dictates that boundaries can be transgressed in both directions: undesirable characters can access the mundane world through portals and vice versa.

Midsummer night is a time of revelry and celebration, but the Hedgewitch knows the lore of portal magic and is not so light-hearted. She reminds the citizens she is bound to protect that, "there is no need to be afraid, but we must always be vigilant" (McKenna 70). As narrated by the Hedgewitch, McKenna writes:

> For all the ice cream and games, it must not be forgotten that this is one of the four nights of the year when the old roads are open and the border may be crossed. At sunset we will light the wakefire, which will burn through the night, protecting the village, but you should also keep candles lit in your windows and your children indoors (269-70).

The young witches feel the burden of helping to protect the village using their emerging magical abilities. These girls on the cusp of adolescence are already negotiating liminal space by virtue of their stage of life (Doughty 155). Their impending adolescence, combined with their status as trainee witches, complicates

the liminality of their identity. During the Midsummer night when the portal opens, their already transient self-definition is further muddied by the instability of space and time. The opening of the 'old roads' means they must join with the Hedgewitch in protecting the children of Hedgely, although they are still children themselves. The steady disappearance of mundane children into the Hedge results in heightened pressure on the young witches, who, though they are still learning magic, are called on to use their knowledge to protect those without supernatural ability. The consequences of midsummer portal magic, and the knowledge of its inherent bidirectionality, emphasise the need for immediate transient growth beyond their previous subjective experience.

In considering Cixous's work, I argue that one cannot live in a portal: it is by its very nature an *entredeux*. The persistent use of portals in middle-grade fantasy fiction engages the discourse of belonging through the creation of spaces that are uninhabitable, or not intended to be inhabited permanently. Aside from portals, middle-grade fantasy uses hotels—which are also transitory spaces, not commonly associated with home or belonging–to frame discussions of identity, complexity, and liminality.

Home, Hearth, Hotel

Concepts of home, identity, and complexity are made visible through the interplay of character with space. Notions of home are inextricably bound with questions of identity and complexity. According to Edward Relph, "home is the foundation of our identity" (in Reese and Spring 1). Home is depicted as sacred, although frequently problematised, in children's literature, because "it reflects, on a microcosmic level, the world as a whole" (Carrol 19). In narratological worlds, home is the place where

identities are dreamed up, formed, and tested, or it is the site of exile. Home is full of boundaries and thresholds—"walls, windows, doors, roofs, hearths, attics, basements, and stairwells" (Carroll 19), making it an ideal place for transgression.

Home is also idealised as a space where children can be wild, free to transgress boundaries and test fledgling identities, while relying on its safety, comfort, and forgiveness. Kimberlé Crenshaw applies an intersectional feminist lens that explains the appeal of home as a place of safety and a withdrawal from the socio-cultural pressures of the Symbolic. She writes "the home is not simply a man's castle in the patriarchal sense: it may also function as a safe haven from the indignities of life in a racist society" (Crenshaw 362). At its best, home provides a safe haven to retreat to, and a space for introspection. Complex selfhood requires the freedom to explore fluid subjectivity within such a safe space.

hooks writes of the privilege and safety to tell one's own story, of the ability to inspect the multitude of selves that make up an identity, and to question where one belongs in the community and the wider world. hooks contends that home is a place:

> to focus clearly and succinctly, to look at ourselves, at the world around us, critically—analytically—to see ourselves first and foremost as striving for wholeness, for unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit (49).

hooks speaks to the desire for belonging, and to be perceived as a complex being. Middle-grade fantasy fiction explores the impulse to be firmly situated in place, alongside the freedom to explore subjectivity and the opportunity to feel seen as a complicated individual with the potential for growth in many directions. Identity is often viewed as fixed in a patriarchal hierarchy, but supernatural protagonists are not often afforded the predictability of a comfortably-assigned place in the world. This is highlighted in middle-grade fantasy by situating protagonists in liminal contexts. By

giving sentience to liminal spaces such as hotels, associated concepts of liminal, dual identity is foregrounded.

Hotels are dualistic spaces that exist at the crossroads of home and liminality. Homely without being home, hotels provide temporary comfort and respite. From a socio-cultural perspective, they are governed by a unique set of social rules and norms and viewed as "a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural constraints" (Preston-Whyte in Eszter 374). In literary texts, hotels frequently represent separateness as liminality, imbued with complexity. Mohácsi Eszter argues:

> These spaces provide for 'spiritual rebirth, transformation, and recuperation', however, as transitory places, they are also associated with 'anxiety replete with darker images of threat and danger' (374).

Australian contemporary fantasy texts frequently grant sentience to hotels, and frame them as semi-permanent homes for burgeoning magical protagonists. This framing connects magical liminal spaces with magical liminal identities and creates an *entredeux* within which identity formation and belonging intersect.

The Grand Mirror Hotel in Miller's *The Hotel Witch* performs a dual function in the novel. It is a permanent home to Sibyl, apprentice Hotel Witch, and her grandmother, the appointed Hotel Witch of the facility. The role of the Hotel Witch is to provide spells to make the guests' life easier. The Hotel Witch performs whatever spells the guests require, from finding and returning lost items, to assisting the chef in perfecting dining experiences. No other staff members live permanently on site, and, during the off season, the hotel is deserted. The witches live in a cave beneath the Grand Mirror Hotel, where "Grandma's mother had lived here before her … through all the Hotel Witches, back to Sibyl's great-great-great-great-great

grandmother" (Miller 15). Sibyl and her grandma live according to matrilineal tradition, serving the hotel's needs since time immemorial.

Sibyl feels conflicted about her desire for belonging and adventure. Her largely-absent mother performs wild, exciting, and dangerous magic in the Black Mountains beyond the Grand Mirror Hotel. The sentient hotel reflects the unease of her soul as she struggles with the drudgery of performing simple magic from *The Book of Domestic Magic*. The Brandavians—a gloomy and morose people—tell Sibyl a saying from their country: "Home is where the heart is least miserable" (Miller 198), but Sibyl has a disrupted concept of home. She loves the Grand Mirror Hotel but is miserable in her assigned role. She, like the sentient hotel, demonstrates duality in her socio-cultural roles and associated expectations. Sibyl is a witch, and a child with enormous responsibility, just as the hotel is both home and hotel. Sibyl must learn to accept the duality of her identity, just as she accepts the duality of the hotel's identity.

The Hotel Deucalion in Townsend's *Morrigan Crow* also acts as a dual space: both hotel, and permanent home to Morrigan. While Sibyl was born at the Grand Mirror Hotel, Morrigan escapes to the Hotel Deucalion, where she experiences safety and a sense of homeliness for the first time. The hotel becomes the site where Morrigan comes to know her complex self. The Hotel Deucalion actively performs feats that defy the laws of time and space to create a home for Morrigan. Townsend writes:

> Room 85 on the fourth floor was slowly becoming Morrigan's bedroom. Every few days she noticed something new and brilliant, something she loved instantly. Like the mermaid bookends that showed up on her shelf one day, or the black leather armchair shaped like an octopus that curled its tentacles around her while she read. One night several weeks earlier, the bed had changed from a plain white headboard to an ornate wrought-iron frame while she slept in it. The Deucalion obviously thought it had made a mistake, though,

> because two days later she woke up swinging in a hammock … Strangest of all, the size and shape of the room was changing. Where once was a single square window, she now had three arched ones. One day her bathroom was the size of a ballroom and had a tub like a swimming pool. The next day it was no bigger than a closet … And for the first time ever, Morrigan Crow felt that she was in exactly the right place (Townsend 170-1).

The Hotel Deucalion uses its supernatural abilities to create a home for Morrigan that perfectly suits her shifting and complex subjectivity. Jennifer Miller posits that "the bedroom represents the youth's subjectivity" (1655); Morrigan's bedroom reflects the transitive nature of her burgeoning sense of self, responding to Morrigan's needs as she is challenged by new situations and comes to see that her identity is as liminal, and sometimes as conflicting, as the hotel.

Morrigan recognises that she can hold her identity loosely, and that her identity can, like the space and decor of the hotel, be fluctuating and open. As spaces that commonly house strangers who are passing through, sentient hotels highlight the shifting identities of the protagonists through the discourse of belonging. Magical characters experience belonging in these transient spaces, an expression that is rather strange in terms of patriarchal norms. From these fantastic conventions comes the concept that transience does not necessarily impede or counteract belonging. The Hotel Deucalion's identity as dual, expansive, and wondrous, echoes Morrigan's emerging sense of self. Despite being a stranger in Nevermoor, Morrigan finds belonging in sentient space, complicating discourses of strangeness and the stranger.

The Stranger

The concept of the stranger is fraught with unbelonging and unease, tending towards danger. Ashley Reese and Erin Spring argue that temporal and spatial transience, or

“outsideness”, is at the core of the stranger as a “product of reflective uninvolvement” (2). The figure of the stranger is “out of place” or “not at home” (Ahmed 8), by choice, or by virtue of being unwelcome. Sara Ahmed contends that strangeness is “a perception of some as being distant (from far away, not from here, not like us),” and that “the stranger is not somebody we do not recognize but rather that we recognize somebody as being a stranger” (9). There is an inherent choice in this model of stranger-hood; the choice to perceive somebody as a stranger includes a decision to remain distant from them. Ahmed argues that “strangers are created by the very appearance of being welcomed” (17). Strangers may be superficially, and tentatively, invited into ‘our’ space, with the assumption that they will eventually leave without disrupting the colonialist patriarchal status quo. Whether or not to host the stranger is a questionDerrida considers. The question of hospitality is:

> A way of theorising the relation between the same and the other, the self and the stranger ... Hospitality implies letting the other in to oneself, or to one’s own space—it is invasive of the integrity of the self, or the domain of the self (Still 12-13).

For Derrida, the tension between stranger and self is maintained through hospitality, tinged with the potential of danger and violence, as well as resource scarcity and the transgression or subversion of sustained cultural practices and norms (Still 13), particularly identity norms.

The tendencies of middle-grade fantasy towards *entredeux* and away from rigid binaries reflects the potential for holding the stranger and their difference loosely and in ambiguity. This helps to avoid an “overly cosy reading of ‘place’” (Morton in Clark 99) that glosses over difference to either assimilate the stranger into the hegemonic order, or exile them. Responding to difference in the matriarchal manner of *écriture féminine* promotes responsivity rather than judgement. An

entredeux allows difference that is neither a threat to, nor subsumed by larger monocultural expectations. Instead, the *entredeux* allows for the "uncanniness within intimacy, for empathy, humility, wonder and for Other beings to remain 'strange strangers'" (Morton in Clark 99). This ambiguity and rejection of binaries centres growth, multiplicity, and potentiality through curiosity. The acceptance of complex fluidity in the figure of the stranger rejects patriarchal hierarchies and is supported by fantastic narratorial devices, such as the supernatural anti-stranger.

Jupiter North in Townsend's *Morrigan Crow* is a supernatural anti-stranger. He travels often, and has made his home in a liminal space—the Hotel Deucalion—but he is comfortable in all spaces. This perpetual home-ness undermines the more limited security that other characters experience in relation to place. The first time Jupiter meets Morrigan, he is intruding upon a family dinner when "his eyes locked onto Morrigan's. He grinned. 'Hello, you.'" (Townsend 53). Following this:

> Morrigan wasn't sure whether to laugh or run away when [Jupiter] leaned in to plant a loud, wet kiss on her father's horror-struck face.
> 'That is quite enough!' spluttered Corvus, rising from his chair. It was one thing for a man to arrive unannounced at Crow Manor at Eventide, but quite another to bring the notion of physical affection with him (Townsend 55).

Jupiter exhibits the traits of the anti-stranger by transgressing accepted socio-cultural norms of belonging-in-place, with its associated gender-based behavioural expectations. He rejects the label of stranger by forcing physical intimacy on those around him.

Jupiter is characterised as a camp cad rather than a threat. Jupiter's rejection of hegemonic heteromasculinity is a prominent aspect of his role as anti-stranger. Importantly, the type of difference, and the way it is written about, matters. Being

white, Jupiter has no need to mitigate racial Otherness and, therefore, he is able to control the narrative around his point of physical difference. Townsend writes:

> ‘I’m still wearing my hat, aren’t I? Goodness me. How rude.’ He arched an eyebrow at his dumbfounded audience. ‘Don’t be alarmed; I’m ginger.’
> ‘Ginger’ was an understatement, Morrigan thought, trying to hide her astonishment as the hat came off. ‘Ginger of the year’ or ‘King Ginger’ or ‘Big Gingery President the Ginger Foundation for the Incurable Ginger’ would have been more accurate. His mane of bright copper waves could probably have won awards. He unravelled the scarf from his head to reveal a beard that was only slightly less shocking in hue (53-4).

Jupiter’s colourful Otherness is so fantastic that it is award-winning. Everything about him is an obscene, offensively colourful defiance of heteromasculinity. Jupiter represents the opposite of the stranger as a “dark shadowy figure” (Ahmed 11), with all of the racially-coded Otherness.

The character of Ko, in Matthew Reilly’s *Troll Mountain,* is Jupiter’s Other. He is an example of a racially Othered stranger. His foreignness is threatening, his age is abnormal, and his physical difference reinforces his lack of belonging. Reilly writes:

> Raf stared at the old man. He was, quite simply, the oldest person Raf had ever seen, far older than any of his tribe’s elders. This man had a long greying beard, oddly pointed eyes, and he wore a curious hat made of wicker. In his hands he held the now-reloaded crossbow, poised and ready … As a child, Raf had heard the older boys speak of a hermit who lived in the Badlands, a stranger from the East who worked magic and evil spells (Reilly 31-2).

Reilly’s treatment of racial difference demonstrates colonial conceptions of the stranger. Ko’s difference is treated as a justification for his marginalisation. He possesses ‘curious’ attire, and ‘oddly’ shaped eyes. He is armed with a weapon that is familiar to Raf, demonstrating some cultural competency, but this is alienating

because he does not belong to Raf's culture. Ko also has supernatural knowledge–his reputedly evil 'Eastern' magic–therefore, he is so threatening that he cannot be offered hospitality without significant perceived risk to the status quo of the community from which he is exiled (Still 12-13).

Ko is also menacing because he transgresses inside/outside boundaries through his knowledge of Raf's hidden activities. He tells Raf that, "sometimes you fight shadows using weapons of your own devise. I have watched you often" (Reilly 32). Unlike Jupiter, whose familiarity is charming, Ko's familiarity unnerves Raf. The physical differences that mark Ko as a racialised Other mean that Raf responds to Ko not as charming and disarming in his socio-cultural transgression, like Jupiter, but as a menacing stranger who must be removed from hegemonic power. He is an outsider who presents with "contaminating strangeness" (Hamilton-McKenna 320). He therefore cannot belong in the space that Raf inhabits. His strangeness is both reason for, and consequence of, his status as stranger.

Discourses of belonging and strangeness are inextricable from space and place in middle-grade fantastic literature. The interaction between space and characters speaks to contemporary geographic and literary understandings of space and place, while fantastic conventions of sentience complicate patriarchal expectations. Through fantasy, spaces are granted sentience that allows them to function as characters. This characterisation allows space to retain its wildness, despite being more intimately known. Rather than being passive recipients of action, sentient spaces generate and sustain relationships with other characters. As complex characters, sentient spaces resist domestication and subvert patriarchal constructs of time and space. Middle-grade fantasy fiction acknowledges that ideologies of space and place are informed by time, history, culture, and gender, and

seeks to destabilise these ideological restraints through fantastic conventions of supernatural sentience.

In this chapter I have argued that space in middle-grade fantasy manifests as complex, liminal, and mysterious, expressing an impulse towards building *entredeux* in which various stakeholders can explore expansive potentiality and reject phallogocentric singularity. Sentient spaces complicate what is knowable and what cannot be known, and prompt magical protagonists to do the same. Sentient spaces are deliberately strange; they disorder conceptions of patriarchal belonging, and engage in relationships with (other) magical characters through which the texts explore and subvert discourses of belonging, strangeness, and home. Space in fantastic fiction is extraordinarily complex and sometimes contradictory. The liminality of sentient space reflects the possibility for expansive identity, providing room to grow and change in many directions, away from limiting patriarchal notions of rigid binaries.

The expansive identities that flourish in sentient spaces challenge patriarchal rigidity through expressions of the embodied being. Subjectivity is often grounded in physical embodiment for magical protagonists, and interactions with sentient spaces do not necessarily prepare them for how their embodied being will be perceived by society. From finding belonging, or not, in sentient spaces, transgressive characters explore *entredeux* across other intersections. The next chapter, ‘Visibility and Embodiment,’ explores how middle-grade fantasy fiction responds to patriarchal hegemonic pressure on the embodied being through discourses of perception, illusion, and visibility.

VISIBILITY AND EMBODIMENT

‘Shadows are shadows, Miss Crow.’ His eyes reflected the moonlight.
‘They want to be dark’ (Townsend 220).

Middle-grade fantasy fiction uses discourses of specularity, embodiment, perception, illusion, and visibility to explore fluid subjectivity. Characters with magical abilities are frequently defined by perceptions of their embodiment as transgressive, strange, and dangerous because they possess powers that others do not. I observed a pattern in contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy in which magical protagonists are situated in worlds that do not value magical corporeality. They eventually stop trying to fit their embodiment and magic into conditions created through hegemonic power and, instead, choose empowerment through curiosity and wonder. In this chapter, I explore the intersections between specularity, embodiment, perception, visibility, and subjectivity in eight fantastic works: Shelley’s *The Monster Who Wasn’t,* McKenna’s *Hedgewitch,* Townsend’s *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow,* Plozza’s *A Reluctant Witch’s Guide to Magic,* Tanner’s *Spellhound,* Armstrong’s *Big Magic*, Foxlee’s *Dragonskin,* and Miller’s *The Hotel Witch.*

In these literary works of middle-grade fantasy, physical subjectivity is reframed as unavoidable, but analysis using *écriture féminine* de-hierarchises difference. According to Buys and Polatinsky, the horizontality that is constructed through Cixous’s work, “gestures towards a thinking in poetic overflow, that does not proceed in a restrictive manner” (82). Magical embodiment that results in Otherness does not necessarily equate to disempowerment or oppression. Instead, liminal identities are formed that value multiplicity and fluidity in specular reality, and embrace the undecidable through overflow into *entredeux.*

In this chapter I explore *entredeux* of moral ambiguity in middle-grade fantasy works, focusing in particular on the symbolism of shadows, enchantment, and light. The symbolic use of shadow and light frames the battle of good and evil, creating and complicating *entredeux* of chaos and possibility. Subjectivity is similarly complicated through fantastic visibility and specularity, explored through symbolic representations of seeing and the gaze. Finally, complexity and embodiment are examined through the expansive notion of *écriture féminine,* including the threat of boundary transgression presented by monstrosity. Elements of monstrosity, humanity, and divinity are explored through the representation of liminal, embodied subjectivity. Magic wielders may access *entredeux* to transgress patriarchal expectations and celebrate potential. The coalescence of the mundane and the cosmic reflects the potential for embodiment and for complicating rigidly structured notions of being.

Expressions of embodied magic are too complex, and ambiguous, to sit comfortably within patriarchal binaries of good/evil, and human/monstrous. These binaries are further complicated by the undecidable discrepancies of perception, which, as unique subjective experiences, are almost impossible to mediate. Middle-grade fantasy fiction responds to this challenge by revelling in the unknowable, using familiar imagery to complicate boundaries and binaries of subjectivity. Chaos is revealed as *entredeux.*

The *Entredeux* of Sorcery, and the Battle of Light and Dark

Middle-grade fantasy fiction engages the tropes of enchantment and illusion to manifest chaotic spaces of possibility. Characters with magical abilities deliberately confuse notions of the social appropriateness that consolidates socio-cultural norms.

I contend, based on Derrida and Cixous's works, that social appropriateness is transformed into cultural norms and expectations through proximity to hegemonic power. As Derrida wrote in relation to the hegemonic centre of power: "is not the center, the absence of play and difference, another name for death?" (in Jay 296). If adherence to socio-cultural norms results in the death of the self's potential, fantasy demonstrates that the death of potential is delayed through interaction with the supernatural, and that subjectivity may be empowered through marginalisation.

The margins may, thus, come to be perceived as a cosmos of potentiality, a creative space of play and difference. The expansive and subjective realities expressed through sorcery decentre expectations around aligning identity with rigid patriarchal systems. Instead, the hegemonic centre loses its power to enforce patriarchal law through policing and surveilling the creation and maintenance of subjectivity. Enchantments that confuse specular boundaries create instability, which exposes the potential for multiplicity beyond patriarchal norms and expectations. Roy argues:

> If there is a situation that confounds and alienates the modern mind it is the inclusive principle of both this *and* not this. We are used to the 'or,' that is, exclusion—either something is good *or* it is not good. The modern world's logic establishes itself through the principle of the 'excluded middle' and cannot bring itself to accept something that is simultaneously 'this' as well as 'not this' (153).

Contemporary middle-grade fantasy fiction explores the excluded middle and encourages the exploration of non-binarised thinking. This concept of the excluded middle complements Cixous's theory of *entredeux,* enriching its capacity to provide for freedom and fluidity in the expression of self. Characters with liminal identities sometimes use sorcery to create chaos and possibility, revelling in Otherness and expressing *différénce.* The enchanted *entredeux,* and the undecidability it expresses,

signal a path out of the hegemonic centre. Such undecidability embraces the chaos of the excluded middle.

By accepting the dualities of an enchanted existence, a magical character can aggregate knowledge of the fantastic, and the mundane, integrating these conflicting states in the move towards subjectivity. This is what Roy identifies as the twice-born. The twice-born understands that dualities and binaries are "not opposed but the two sides of a reality" (Roy 153). The specific use of the phrase '***a*** reality' denotes the potential multiplicity of subjective truths, as well as indicating the complexity of each individual perception of reality.

Roy destabilises socio-cultural norms of identity and reality when describing the experience of the twice-born as the "transformation of chaos into cosmos" (159). Supernatural subjectivity that rejects patriarchal norms may be perceived as chaos by the rules of the Symbolic. However, if supernatural chaos is embraced, the result is expansive. Magical beings dwell within this expansive space of heightened subjective reality: a space that transcends oppressive patriarchal systems. In performing enchantments of illusion, a magical character embodies the possibility, fluidity, and multiplicity of dualisms.

The character of Maggie in Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't* demonstrates Roy's theory of the twice-born and relishes her identity in the chaotic *entredeux,* using enchantments to enthral humans. She inhabits a fluid identity and uses invisibility and illusion to play with human perception of her embodiment. Her physical appearance shifts, and she can magically captivate humans with the illusion of beauty. Maggie also possesses the power of invisibility and can, therefore, mediate not just how but *if* she can be perceived at all. She tells a human boy that the reason he can see her is "because I wanted you to see me" (Shelley 124). She

controls perception of her enchantments and of the consequences of her identity in flux. Maggie rejects patriarchal norms and expectations but uses magic and chaos to empower herself, creating a hierarchical binary of her own that places monstrosity above humanity.

Maggie constructs a familial connection, through monstrosity, between herself and Sam, with the human Kavanagh family firmly Othered and below them. The Kavanagh family and their ancestors have been her playthings for hundreds of years, and she feels superior to them, using them at her whim for pleasure and amusement. When Sam becomes conscious that Maggie is using sorcery for manipulative purposes, he asks if she is 'magicking' the humans. Maggie confirms his suspicions and attempts to align Sam with his monstrous identity by encouraging him to join her in the fun.

Maggie's supernatural subjectivity is entwined with the monster/human hierarchy she has constructed, and she tries to convince Sam to engage with the same binarised thinking. Sam is unaware until this moment that he might be enchanting the Kavanagh family. Shelley narrates Maggie's attempts to persuade Sam to use his magic and align with her worldview:

> Oh, Samuel, of course I am. And so are you. You might not have a little tin of fairy dust, but you yourself enthral them all. Even that mother's feeling your otherworldliness, and she's frightened she cannot take another blow. I've come a-mourning lost Kavanaghs for centuries, and I've seen her broken almost beyond repair. You're going to have to spend a bit of time getting to know them before you use your playthings so cruelly. It'll be fun though. You could destroy the whole family, without a drop of blood spilt (125).

Maggie reveals her long, oppressive relationship with the family, delighting in their distress. Her monstrous sorcery marks her as ancient, dangerous, and multifaceted. Maggie's enchantments are chaotic, and sometimes playful, even as they contain

the threat of danger. Her use of mystical knowledge places her outside patriarchal control and values where she has created an empowered villainous identity framed by illusion and perception.

Illusion and visibility are also recurring themes in McKenna's *Hedgewitch,* in which the space between the supernatural and the mundane is infused with unease and instability. Glashtyn uses the enchantment of a fairy ring to trap Cassie, and shape-shifting illusions to cause confusion. McKenna describes Cassie's entrapment within the fairy ring, in which Cassie responds to Glashtyn's assertions that she should not fear him by telling him: "If you don't want me to be afraid, let me out" (McKenna 156). In response, Glashtyn attempts to use an enchantment to seduce Cassie into aiding his dark deeds:

> 'I'm here to help you, Cass-sandra. To help you find what you are seeking ... What you *truly* want, your heart's desire,' hissed the marten ... 'I know all about you, Cass-sandra Morgan. I have been watching you. I know what you fear and what you hope for, your nightmares and your dreams. I can make them come true.'
> 'The dreams or the nightmares?'
> 'That is up to you ... We do not have much time. Follow me Cass-sandra, I will take you to your mother.'
> 'My mother? What do you know about my mother?'
> 'I know where she is hiding, she is waiting for you. Come with me and I will show you.'
> 'I don't trust you' (McKenna 156-157).

Cassie demonstrates good sense in listening to her intuition, understanding that the way Glashtyn wishes to be perceived through sorcery is not genuine. He invokes the language of dreams, and omniscient knowledge of Cassie's deepest desires, to manipulate her into doing his bidding.

As a magic-wielder, and twice-born, Cassie is familiar with the language of magic, and well-versed in the symbolic rules of the mundane world. Cassie operates in the space between the magical and the banal and uses both sets of knowledge in

her interactions with Hedgely. She exists in an *entredeux* where possibility is more powerful than certainty, and her magical knowledge aids her in perceiving multiplicity and potential rather than singular reality. Faery glamour is the ability to influence the way a caster is perceived; by casting a glamour they become invisible, or change their appearance. Cassie knows of a cantrip that undoes faery glamour, the words engaging discourses of perception, illusion, and visibility through magical symbolism and language:

> Glamour glowing, glamour fading
> Through the veil of shifting mist.
> Shine the light of witching power,
> All enchantments are dismissed.
>
> By the candle of my art,
> With witching sight I see anew.
> Shades and phantoms must depart,
> Banish the false, reveal the true (McKenna 209).

McKenna invokes supernatural binaries of shadows and glow, light and darkness, truth and falsity. She also incites the Gothic through spectral and mystical word choices such as veils, mists, and phantoms in this spell. The discourse of supernatural enchantments conjures a dream-like haze through which reality can be manipulated, and fluid, mutable truths can be explored. In this space, magic wielders find themselves questioning their ethical alignment.

So far, I have focused on the use of sorcery to construct evil or, at best, morally questionable subjectivities seeking power over others. These characters may be empowered, but they are invested in hierarchical expressions of power rather than equitable expressions of difference that align with *écriture féminine*. With the supernatural capacity to exert their will over others and manipulate 'reality,' the consequences of choosing a side—or not—in the battle of good and evil can have catastrophic consequences.

Magical characters explore moral complexity through invocation of the duality of light and darkness, and the liminal space between. The battle between good and evil is a consistent preoccupation of middle-grade fantasy fiction, suggesting that "it is the task of all sentient beings to recognise and participate in it" (Roy 78). However, Marina Warner argues that the dramatic unpredictability of magical characters in fairy tales leads to the understanding that "not all powerful wielders of magic are irreversibly good or evil" (27). This is reflective of magic wielders in contemporary middle-grade fantasy.

The battle of good and evil is reflected in the binaries of light/darkness, and illumination/shadow. Like many fantasy authors, and those writers working in the fairy tale tradition, Yolen equates goodness with light, and evil with darkness in magical stories. However, she writes of the multiplicity of magic in fantasy, describing it and supernatural subjectivity, with complexity. Yolen argues that a tale of magic is:

> Not simply one thing or two, but a multitude. It is at once lucid and opaque, it accepts both dark and light, speaks to youth and old age … [It] should reflect both dark and light, both shadow and glare … A shadowless man is a monster, a devil, a thing of evil. A man without a shadow is soulless. A shadow without a man is a pitiable shred. Yet together, light, and dark, they make a whole (35-36).

Just as the battle for good and evil is ever-present within the genre of fantasy, Yolen argues that light and shadow are essential to a holistic and embodied character. Miller has constructed a character in her novel, *The Hotel Witch,* who demonstrates this concept perfectly.

Miller's Shadowmancer is a monstrous conglomeration of shadows without light or embodiment. It steals and absorbs the shadows of others, growing larger and more powerful with each shadow consumed. Once a shadow is taken, the person or

object is hollow: not entirely Yolen's thing of evil but certainly a soulless entity. Miller deconstructs the Shadowmancer, writing:

> A Shadowmancer forms when two lost or forgotten shadows tangle together. As everyone knows a shadow without a body—like a body without a shadow—is incomplete ... What of those whose shadows are stolen by a Shadowmancer? They become mere shadows of their former selves (187-188).

The Shadowmancer is insatiable: pure desire for the Other. Miller writes that it is "hungry to feel whole. This hunger is all it knows" (188). The Shadowmancer cannot be defeated *per se*, but it can be made to disappear, as shadows do when a light is switched on. If all the consumed shadows can be "untangled and restored to the place from which they came then the Shadowmancer simply ceases to be" (Miller 190). The Shadowmancer is insubstantial and, as a collection of shadows, has no subjectivity to speak of; it is constructed entirely of one side of the binary of light and dark. The twice-born, on the other hand, may develop subjectivity that incorporates knowledge of both light and darkness, complex, and dualistic.

Foxlee's *Dragonskin* uses what Wilkie-Stibbs terms, "the basis of *the feminine* poetics in children's literature" (xii), to explore the complexity of embodied childhood. "Themes like metaphor, metonymy and memory, dreaming, transformation and return" (Wilkie-Stibbs xii), are applied in *Dragonskin* to the supernatural and individual in turn. This complexity creates an atmosphere of undecidability and unknowability so complete that, in the end, establishing one provable truth is discarded as unimportant. Whether the characters are good or bad, according to socio-cultural rules and norms, becomes less important than their commitment to the work of raising the baby dragon. Whether the dragon is a metaphor for grief or a physical reality becomes less important than the growth and acceptance of subjective power by the child characters.

The tension between light and shadow is played out in *Dragonskin,* partly between the characters of Matt, Mika, and Pip. Both Matt and Mika are described in shadowy and dark language, yet they are ideologically opposed in the battle between good and evil. Stepfather figure, Matt, is the villain. He is described as dangerous; the metaphor of water is invoked in Pip's perception of him: "Dangerous like water. He could seem calm and glassy on top but underneath he was all dark silt and weed" (Foxlee 23). Matt's association with dark water, and its forceful unpredictability, is reinforced when Mika is killed by a flash flood. Matt could not possibly have been involved in the tragedy, but the connection between his dangerous masculinity and dark water ideologically ties him to Mika's death. The flood water that killed Mika and his mother echoes the danger that Matt represents to Pip and her mother.

Darkness is both dangerous and a source of solace in *Dragonskin*, reflecting the ambiguity and undecidability of *écriture féminine.* The intersection of darkness and embodiment represents danger. Matt's darkness is responsible for Pip feeling that negative energy lies over the home she shares with her mother. Foxlee writes that Pip felt "sorry for their house, which was exactly the same as all the others, yet somehow looked darker" (48-49). Matt exerts fear-inducing control over Pip and her mother, causing Pip to hide in her room at night, huddled in the darkness that hides her from Matt. Closing her door, Pip's mother cloaks her in darkness and silence:

> "'Love you,' her mother said, then, 'remember to turn out your night-light too.' Remember to disappear. Remember to stay quiet. Remember to not exist" (Foxlee 16-17).

Pip's subjectivity is under threat in the face of Matt's watery darkness, but in the quiet of the maternally-invoked protective shadows, the dragon-grief metaphor thrives and grows.

Shadows are where Pip dreams and remembers Mika, reflecting the way that *écriture féminine* functions, at times, through the language of dreaming and darkness. *Écriture féminine* supports fluidity and change, paving a nuanced subjective path of moral alignment for magical characters. Pip's best friend, Mika, is constructed from many of these devices. He is optimistic, open-hearted, and kindness personified. He is also associated with shadows through his marginalisation in the community, largely due to his socio-economic circumstances. His mother sent him to live with an elderly female relative to escape domestic violence, but he is not valued in his new community. He is a shadow; invisible or dismissed as a bad influence. Foxlee writes that to the community Mika is:

> A shadow they saw sometimes on the way home from picking up children from dance class or softball or boy scouts. They didn't know his million stories. They didn't know all his sixth sense feelings. They didn't know he carried the universe in his backpack (207-208).

Pip, however, sees the light, and the value, in Mika. Even after his death, when the community wants to move on and forget the shadows that haunted the peripheries of the community, Pip invokes Mika's goodness as her moral compass.

Mika is also Pip's connection to magic through the figure of the dragon. Pip invokes Mika through her grief, using his memory to guide her when the supernatural intrudes into her mundane reality. Mika was prematurely forced out of the kingdom of childhood, yet he chose to focus on goodness and light, to be directed by potential, and to embrace the possibility that magic is all around him. He used dual knowledge of the twice-born, in an *entredeux* of chaotic possibility, in the battle of good and evil. Chaotic because of his disregard of, and inability to, uphold hegemonic norms; good because he is kind and therefore represents the light to Matt's dark. Pip allows her subjectivity to expand in response to the example of potential that Mika gave her.

Foxlee demonstrates this growth through the symbolism of light and darkness. This complex use of the symbolism of light and shadow is extended in Townsend's novel, *Morrigan Crow.*

Morrigan Crow is darkness by name, with a preference for the colour black, yet light is drawn to her. She is regarded as cursed in the mundane world from which she escapes, although in Nevermoor she discovers she is not cursed, but blessed; she is a Wundersmith. Her powers are perceived by others as evil and terrifying, yet Wunder is literally light particles and energy. Her supernatural abilities involve gathering light to her corporeal being, which she can then direct at her desire. Ezra Squall, a fellow Wundersmith, uses their knowledge and skill for evil; it is up to Morrigan to choose how she will use her ability to wield light. She walks the dual paths of light and shadow, which allows her to embrace the duality of her existence, and the fluidity and potentiality of her identity.

Adding to this complex symbolism of shadow and light in *Nevermoor*, Morrigan is stalked by the Hunt of Smoke and Shadow. The Hunt is a group of masculine spectral shadows who act as one being and are ordered to carry 'cursed' children to their deaths. Townsend writes:

> To Morrigan it looked like a swarm of locusts or a cloud of bats, but it was too low and loud to be either. The sounds of hooves became deafening as the dark mass grew closer. Amongst the black were hundreds of specks of fiery red light, getting brighter by the second. The amorphous figure began to take shape. Head and faces and legs grew out of the swarm, and Morrigan felt her stomach drop; the glowing red lights weren't lights at all. They were eyes. The eyes of men, the eyes of horses and the eyes of hounds. Not individuals made of flesh. More like a single living shadow. They were darkness—a pure absence of light. And they moved with purpose (63).

Ezra Squall orders the Hunt to kidnap Morrigan so that he can educate her in the evil arts with the goal of domination and total control. The Hunt is undeniably linked with

the family that Morrigan escaped, who feared and hated her in equal measure. The Crows know nothing of the magic that inhabits their world; they are not aware of the spectral, shadowy Hunt who stalk their prey with guns and hounds. Yet, when her stepmother births twins after Morrigan's 'death,' she and Morrigan's father name them Guntram and Wolfram (Townsend 350). This indisputable connection linking Morrigan's family with the Hunt signals the danger of both her biological family and the Hunt. As a consequence of the threats from both the Hunt, and her family, Morrigan is forced into an *entredeux* where she is removed from the family unit, and is truly liminal: both light and darkness, and neither light nor darkness**.**

Cixous writes that "all words are too loud, too rapid, too sure; I'm searching for the names of the shadows between the words" (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 153). This is precisely the opportunity that is offered by middle-grade fantasy novels: exploring the shadows, and *entredeux,* seeking finding meaning and multiplicity. Morrigan, Pip, and Mika are forced beyond the rigid expectations of their childhood's socio-cultural context to invent identities made of light in the shadows. All three use light and darkness to craft an understanding of how the world works, as well as their shifting place within it. Plozza writes that "no one could outrun their shadow" (161); magical characters come to this realisation in *entredeux*. They learn that they can use dual knowledge to embrace their own versions of truth in liminality, regardless of how they are perceived by others.

Specular Reality: Seeing and Being Gazed Upon

Magic is used to complicate and transgress boundaries of vision and knowing: both seeing and being gazed upon. Characters with supernatural vision use their powers to destabilise the boundaries of the specular and the knowable. The interpretative

act of looking and being seen is complex and subjective. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that gazing, “like an act of reading itself, is discursive,” and “involves not only *looking*, but also *being looked at* and, further, *looking at oneself being looked at*” (18). By necessity, then, specular reality is inherently embodied, comprised of gazing, perception, and, in most cases, reciprocity.

Gazing includes an undeniable acknowledgement of corporeality and some expectation of reciprocity, but is complicated by the fact that interpretation impacts what is seen. Lacanian psychoanalysis concludes that “true reciprocity is only an illusion” (Jay 212). Between the act of seeing and the interpretation of the image through the rules and values of the Symbolic, equal reciprocity, or agreement on a single version of truth, is unrealistic. Multiple meanings abound within this chasm, or *entredeux*, between embodied beings gazing upon one another.

Roy argues of the reciprocity of the gaze that “things happen to us only as we happen to them—my experience of you is really my experience of your experience of me, and so on, with an infinite regress” (88). This infinite regress is expressed by Lacan as “a trap” in which everything is “manifested to us as a labyrinth” (in Jay 213). Focusing on the value of possibility and subjective truths, rather than aiming for reciprocity or agreement upon one version of reality, creates an interesting encounter with the labyrinth. Adding magic to this labyrinth of multiplicity, embodiment, and connection deepens the discourse of seeing and the gaze in fantasy fiction.

The operation of the gaze in middle-grade fantasy is complicated by the presence of magic and the supernatural. When sight is heightened, a character’s experience of another being is intensified, creating an imbalance. Typically, one party gains more knowledge than the other. Tulsi from *Big Magic* has a complex relationship with the supernatural gaze. Sylvie, Tulsi’s grandmother, uses her

supernatural specular abilities to drain Tulsi's power. Even before Tulsi discovered the function of her grandmother's gaze, which caused her to feel physically ill, being looked upon by her grandmother was unpleasant at best: "It's unsettling, the way she looks at me. As if she's staring through my eye holes and right down inside me" (Armstrong 53). Tulsi's experience of being seen by her grandmother is multifaceted. Although she is uncomfortable and eventually comes to realise that she is in danger, she likes the powerful version of herself that Sylvie perceives. Armstrong describes this complexity through Tulsi's inner monologue:

> *She sees me*, I think to myself. She sees me for who I really am and the magician I'll become. Mum and Dad, on the other hand, are stuck with an idea of me as a little girl (Armstrong 95).

These inconsistencies of perception, particularly regarding subjectivity, are complicated by the supernatural gaze in *Big Magic.*

Tulsi and her grandmother's relationship involves a complex entanglement of power and subjectivity. Being gazed upon creates a temporal and spatial moment during which the looked upon is made subject or object. The specular relationship between Sylvie and Tulsi exemplifies the complexity of this process. Tulsi believes that she is being seen as a subject, powerful in her own right. While Sylvie does acknowledge Tulsi's power, she views her granddaughter as an object that can increase her own capacity for magic. The grandmother's supernatural vision provides her with a capacity for seeing Tulsi both clearly (as a reservoir of power), and through the muddled goggles of her own aspirations to power (as a source of power *for herself*). Tulsi, as the object who is gazed upon, mis-identifies herself as a subject of her grandmother's powerful, and supernatural, gaze; as a subject who is

capable of engaging in a reciprocal looking. Here, she engages, seeks–imagines–a confirmation of her own fantasy of herself as a magician in a state of becoming.

The magical child has a fantasy of themselves that is both unstable and socio-culturally situated. They must learn to use magic to make that fantasy an embodied reality, or discard this aspirational self-image. Ideologies of seeing and the gaze are irreducibly entwined with socio-cultural context, as is identity construction. Derrida's deconstruction problematises the "impurity of perception" which is partly due to "it's inevitable intertwining with language" (Jay 294), and, therefore, the laws of the Symbolic. There can be no singular or correct vision and therefore no singular or true interpretation of reality. Instead, both Derrida and Lacan point to the subject's state as one of a perpetual unknowing. Lacan writes "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" *(The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 92)*,* infusing notions of the Other as the locus of desire with perceptions of selfhood. Lacan paraphrased Sartre's emphasis on the inability to merge the eye and the gaze in the world, through the concept of *le regard.* He writes "the gaze I encounter … is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (in Jay 212). Perception is not reconcilable with another subject's version of reality, including one's perception of self, influenced as it is by so many socio-cultural and psychological factors. Wilkie-Stibbs argues:

> The gaze effectively textualizes the subject and is present in every act of seeing. So the gazing subject simultaneously is both subject and object, at once voyeur and exhibitionist seeking confirmation of its own imagined fantasies of itself in others, and in the Other (18).

A fantasy of identity, then, is constructed against the perceived differences of the Other. This perception of subjectivity is a carnival of liminality in which beings who gaze outward into the world construct their selfhoods partly in response to what is

reflected back at them through socio-cultural values. The same beings gaze at their own reflections and construct a fantasy of wholeness. This is a process in the formation of the ego.

The formation of the ego is an important psychoanalytic developmental period in which one identifies a version of selfhood based on a fantasy of idealised identity within the Symbolic (Wilkie-Stibbs 18-19). Desire is experienced at this moment, just as the character's sense of identity is forced into a liminal position, and a fantasy of their idealised subjectivity is projected into the world. This fantasy is impacted by the way the mundane world mirrors magical subjectivity back to magical characters. *Écriture féminine* in middle-grade fantasy fiction informs and directs this process.

French feminist Luce Irigaray suggests that we can, and perhaps should, break the feedback loop. She argues that "one solution would be to shatter the mirror, to go 'through the looking glass'" (Jay 308). Cixous writes of the feminine subject taking back the embodied being through writing and speaking, of taking back the body, "which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa* 880). Further, she argues that when we, "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa* 880). According to Cixous, if a character censors their bodies in order to conform to the expectations of those around them, they may lose the very thing that animates them. Thus, many magical characters reject the judgements of patriarchal perception. This is complicated, of course, and in a fantasy novel, more so. Shattering the looking glass or breaking the feedback loop that mirror that reflects fantasies of wholeness back towards the subject may be uncomfortable or lead to unintended consequences.

Rose of Tanner's *Spellhound,* lives a safe and comfortable life, framed by the idealised fantasy of royalty, literally reflected towards her in the many ancestral portraits that line the walls of the castle. Rose conforms to these standards of idealised wholeness, identifying with the image of painted grandeur even as she rebels in small, inconsequential ways. Then she discovers that her uncle is a dragon: the same uncle she believed was dead and whose portrait she has gazed at her whole life. She has trouble reconciling the idealised fantasy of her uncle's image, presented through the portrait, with the reality of his embodied subjectivity as a dragon. Further, Rose has drawn on these portraits of her ancestors in forming an idealised self-identity as a princess. Tanner expounds on Rose's confusion writing "I don't understand ... He's my uncle. His portrait hangs behind the throne, next to my parents. How can he be a dragon? How *can* he be?" (Tanner 232). Rose's uncle has several aspects to his identity that, once uncovered, Rose must learn to embrace, particularly as she is about to uncover a truth about her own magical reptilian identity. The reality of embodied subjectivity is exposed as multi-faceted, complicated by the porousness of inner self and corporeal existence. A fantasy of an *imago* is easily captured in immortality, in a painting, or photograph, but there is no life, subjectivity, or magic, in an *imago.* A character, particularly a supernatural character, is much wilder.

Wildness is a form of visibility that Willa, of Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* attempts to avoid by behaving in a controlled manner and abiding by the patriarchal, capitalist rules of her community. Maintaining invisibility means that Willa avoids becoming institutionalised, so she does her best to mediate others' perception of her. By averting her gaze from Ordinary children engaged in carefree childhood games, Willa sublimates her desire for an ideal childhood. In thus avoiding

childish wildness, she attempts to maintain the fantasy of her idealised self, which she has carefully constructed, and avoid being judged by the gaze of those with hegemonic power. Plozza writes:

> She was equally careful to avoid glancing at the children playing Ditch-a-Witch outside the school—stomping and shrieking and being terribly, horribly *wild*. Looking would lead to wanting—wanting to join in, wanting to be … Willa rolled back her shoulders and marched on. *I don't have time for silly games,* she scolded herself. *I have to get to the mill.* It wasn't unusual for Ordinary children as young as ten to leave school and work, but Willa needed her job more than most: to put food on the table *and* to escape being bundled off to the Home for Lonesome Children Who Have Lost or Temporarily Misplaced Their Guardians … Bad things happened when you were terribly, horribly wild (3).

A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic describes a world where mundane children have the freedom to engage in the rumpus of childhood, embracing their desire for play and self-expression, because the socio-cultural image of mundane childhood is congruent with freedom. Willa, on the other hand, orphaned by a spell gone awry, nurtures an image of herself as controlled, independent, lonely, and adaptable. She is an object of capitalism and must earn an income to avoid being institutionalised. Willa is adrift from her authentic and developing identity. She is perceived as Other by the community in which she lives due to her gender, her status as an orphan, and, later, the realisation that she is a witch.

Despite her attempts at invisibility, Willa feels painfully perceived by the community. Before her mother and father melted into clouds and floated away (Plozza 5), Willa experienced parental disapproval of her wildness (and explosive, as-yet-undiscovered magical abilities). Later, as an orphan, she encountered wider socio-cultural disapproval. Willa is perceived by society as strange, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable, and they attempt to punish her strangeness by locking her in the

rapscallion's cage (Plozza 15-17). The rapscallion's cage sits in the village square and is a very public form of social punishment. Society's gaze upon Willa is unkind, judgemental, and fearful. It impacts upon her ability to envision a complex identity and leaves her sad, unsatisfied, and without belonging.

Willa comes to see the world quite differently from the community, finding meaning through curiosity, and by attending to the knowledge she has gained through personal experience. Plozza presents Willa's growth in the form of an internal monologue:

> The truth was, when you stopped listening to the voices that crowed about *proper* and *right* and *should* and *shouldn't*, it was much easier to see that your choices were unlimited (Plozza 279-280).

Willa is finally able to block out the distorted image of selfhood reflected towards her. She breaks the mirror, and sees that her subjective truth is both liminal and filled with potential. Willa does not have supernatural specular gifts that allow her to peer into the future. She has no insight as to where her life may lead her. She must make her choice and deal with the consequences. Some characters in middle-grade fantasy do possess this temporal-spectoral gift, however, dealing in prophesy and transgressing limits of knowability.

The seer, a character who can 'see' the future, symbolises empowered Otherness, problematising notions of patriarchal reality. Accepted socio-cultural boundaries of reality and logic are breached by the specular gifts of these magical characters, whose very existence subverts patriarchal conventions of certainty and closure. This capacity to see the future (or possible futures) subverts the notion of a singular patriarchal version of reality and, instead, emphasises the fluidity of subjective experience. Wilkie-Stibbs defines the potential for multiplicity as

“circularity, fluidity, mutability, intertextuality, and specularity,” through which a novel becomes “resistant to readings in the mode of an either/or binary logic, in hierarchical structures, or as linear temporality” (xiv). Second sight can function to complicate notions of patriarchal control over consensual reality. Expectations of temporal and spatial certainty and stability are undermined as seers resist binary notions of knowability through the specular, and the seer is forever associated with liminality and uncontrollability.

Ancient Greek prophetess, Cassandra, has long been associated with the crossroads between femininity and supernatural power, yet she is “always displaced, no matter where she is” (Pillinger 2). Emily Pillinger writes about “Cassandra’s prophetic paradox,” noting that Cassandra was a gifted seer, yet the god Apollo stripped her of “the ability to persuade others” of the truth of her visions (2). She therefore experienced a reality betwixt and between that experienced by others, and was punished and marginalised for her breaches of temporal situatedness. Cassandra’s prophetic paradox is often reflected in the reluctance of mundane literary characters to accept the foresight of seers. Their subversion of a singular reality, including the unknowability of the future, is a challenging subversion of patriarchy’s consensual reality.

Aunt Colleen, from Shelley’s *The Monster Who Wasn’t,* is a powerful and unapologetic seer. She accepts her power of second sight as undisputed reality, accepts the complexity of gazing upon the purportedly invisible and is unafraid to be looked upon by the monstrous or undead. Further, as supernatural sight is hereditary in her world, she expects complete acceptance from her family and is sometimes frustrated by their commitment to closure and certainty. Where the rest of the family

assumes Sam's humanity based on collective patriarchal knowability, Colleen mistakes Sam for a ghost or a leprechaun:

> He's one of the little people and followed you here. That's why I took him for a ghost. The Kavanaghs are one of the grand old families, and many of us are gifted with second sight. I've got more than a touch of the taish in me, Richard, and so have you … I see things; things that shouldn't be there and sometimes people that shouldn't be there. I know what they mean. That wisp of a girl in green's been here today. She was with your father on our last visit, too, near scared the life out of me; I saw her put the shroud on his shoulders, and I knew I wouldn't be seeing him alive again. There's no lie in that. When a banshee's about, death's not far behind. She's been a-keening today. Someone will have seen her (Shelley 110-111).

Here, Collen invokes truth in openness and the interweaving of life and death. Death and what comes after is not a mystery for Colleen but a multi-sensory reality. Her engagement with the cycles of life leads her to experience sight as fluid, mutable, and sometimes prophetic. When another character attempts to deny her vision, claiming that she is getting unnecessarily emotional, she rebuts, "Don't patronize me, girl, I'm in charge of all of my faculties. I've seen what I've seen. Make of it what you will" (Shelley 111). Her second sight reveals the ghostly and monstrous, contextualising life cycles in space and time that is not concordant with colonialist patriarchal beliefs about life and death. She ignores linear temporality because her experience of time reveals that life, and death, are not stable. Aunt Colleen is comfortable with her identity as seer, and her self-empowerment is rooted in liminality.

Jupiter North, of *Morrigan Crow*, is also a seer whose gifts manifest as hyper-awareness of the present. He is "a little odd, Miss, but he's no fool. He sees people the way they really are" (Townsend 117). He does not see the dead or the monstrous; instead, he sees echoes of the past and its consequences on people, on

the world, and on objects. In his own words, he describes his gift as bearing witness, with a "knack for seeing things" that other people cannot (Townsend 136). Jupiter tells Morrigan, "I'm not a fortune teller. I'm a Witness. That's the name for it. I don't see the way things *will be,* I see the way things *are"* (Townsend 137). This interrelatedness of the past and present are visible to Jupiter, who sees emotions and moods, and the stamp of thoughts and dreams, on corporeal bodies.

Jupiter explains that his supernatural gift is a result of his ability to connect to the Gossamer, an invisible web of energy that connects all life:

> We're all part of the Gossamer, and the Gossamer is all around us. The things I can see—your bad dreams, for instance, or the history of a certain green teapot—they all exist on the Gossamer, like tiny invisible threads woven in a vast, hidden web connecting everything together (Townsend 347).

Jupiter experiences heightened and ahistorical vision. His sight, thus, interrupts notions of linear temporality, but only up to the present moment. His ability as a Witness does not provide him with knowledge of the future; it heightens his awareness of the connectedness of every facet of the universe through the Gossamer. He sees who a person *is*, and his gift is witnessing complexity as it is reflected on the corporeal body.

Complexity and Embodiment

Expansive notions of complex magical embodiment may be expressed through *écriture féminine* in middle-grade fantasy. Feminine writing embraces a sense of curiosity about subjectivity, including the corporeal body. The corporeal body is a medium for expressing possibility in identity, including through liminality. Physical, visible representations of bodies become an "alternative signifying system" (Wilkie-Stibbs 1). Wilkie-Stibbs argues that feminine writing "functions as a

consciously corporeal use of language that manifests itself in the physical, psychical, material and textual landscapes" (xi). Middle-grade fantasy uses this language of possibility and liminality to carve out space for the embodiment of marginal identity.

Wilkie-Stibbs argues that this mode of writing "speaks the body" in a "demonstration of embodiment" (xi). Consequently, *écriture féminine* results in an interesting chasm between the eye and the tongue. Jay argues:

> Women's relationships to language were frequently couched in antiocular terms, often pitting the temporal rhythms of the body against the mortifying spatialization of the eye. For as Alice Jardine has remarked … 'the feminine' has not only been a metaphor for a certain kind of reading and writing, but also 'a tool for declaring war on the Image' (Jay 307).

The war on the image may be conceived of as a rebellion against the gaze of the patriarchy. *Écriture féminine* subversively responds to the oppression that comes with having a gendered body whose primary function is reduced to serving hegemonic power. *Écriture féminine* uses language to reject these limitations on the body and its expression, and highlights empowerment through subjective embodiment.

Wilkie-Stibbs argues that *écriture féminine* in children's literature produces an "emphasis on the condition of corporeality, and the questions it raises about the status of the body as physical, ephemeral, or supernatural" (24). I contend that complex embodiment in middle-grade fantasy comes from embracing duality—being magical *and* human—and exploring multiplicity in *entredeux,* not binaries. In a nuanced representation of diversity, magical characters rebel against corporeal limitations through their habitation in magical bodies.

Sam in Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't* expresses the corporeal fluidity of *écriture féminine* through his embodied monster-being. Integrating canonical literary

knowledge adds depth to Shelley's binary of monsters and fairies. In doing so, Shelley crafts an *entredeux* that provides for the possibility of liminal identities. J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* constructs the now-canonical literary understanding that fairies are born from a baby's first laugh: "You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies" (Barrie 16). Shelley extrapolates from this concept, writing in the prologue to *The Monster Who Wasn't* that:

> All species of Monsterkind are born from a human's last sigh, and the vileness of the monster is in direct proportion to the depth of the sigher's regret … Once freed, the last sigh grows, turning in the air, solidifying into a dark, resentful shape: as tough as loneliness, hard enough to cut a diamond in two, but as supple as a lie (Shelley 1).

Shelley constructs this monster-fairy binary partly in order to deconstruct it through the character of Sam. Sam's monstrous being is complicated by the presence of a baby's first laugh at his human sigher's last moments:

> He sucked his tongue, feeling the air move from that bottomless place in his stomach. He held it back, but the sigh won, hissing out into the room. Regret and misery, pain and weariness, blended and solidified.
> The baby laughed, and her music burbled into the polluted air. She watched her laughter turn into a bead of light and circle the old man's head, dancing and casting sparks over his thin hair. The baby reached for it and the sparkle ducked between her fingers, teasing her. It shot upwards joyously and got caught in the toxic fog of the sigh. It hit against the sigh's insides and gleamed through the dark surface (Shelley 4).

This meeting of laughter and regret had never previously occurred in monster history, and the sigh and laugh competefor authority over the newly-created monster. The solidified regret would ordinarily sink into the depths of the earth to hatch into a monster, but the laugh intercedes. Sam's embodiment and subjectivity are informed in equal measure by the monstrous and the divine. The result is a liminal being with

a complex and multiple identity as human, fairy, and monster: he is the first of his kind.

The gargoyles and Archangel Daniel argue over what and, therefore, who Sam is. They list his traits and abilities, acknowledging that gender is a cultural construct. Daniel points out that Sam's soul and rich emotional experiences are undeniable, and the debate ends in confusion, unresolved. The circularity and open-endedness of this conversation is decidedly undecidable in the tradition of *écriture féminine.* Shelley writes:

> 'His head's as solid as concrete. His bones are troll weight. He could fall from this cathedral and get up without a scratch.'
> 'I wouldn't fall,' said the imp boy. 'I can climb walls.'
> 'Not exactly a human trait, is it?' Bladder chortled.
> 'He needs to eat,' Daniel said.
> 'Like an ogre.'
> 'He sleeps.'
> 'Like a troll.'
> 'He's a "he".'
> 'Like leprechauns and pixies and quite a few others.'
> 'No, they only appear male or female,' Wheedle said.
> 'You know they're not either.'
> Bladder glared at Wheedle.
> 'He has a heart,' Daniel said. 'He really feels. You've seen him cry.' (Shelley 72).

In this fast-paced interaction Daniel and the gargoyles explore various possible pre-existing models of subjectivity, including that of the the identity of the twice-born, and Cixous's undecidability, without landing on a clear categorisation. Sam remains indeterminate, both this *and* that. *Entredeux* is expansive enough to encompass all facets of identity, including the seemingly contradictory. The other beings in Sam's life are, similarly, determined to categorise him according to his visible embodiment. Sam himself is curious about his corporeal body, but not too concerned with claiming a fixed identity. Instead, he integrates knowledge from all facets of his being and

combines them in celebration of liminality and complexity. In the tradition of *écriture féminine*, Samuel embraces chaotic fluidity in chaos.

When Sam embraces the twice-born, liminal pathway of subjectivity, it creates a precedent for other characters in *The Monster Who Wasn't* to reconsider their identities. Sam establishes that fluidity is a viable expression of self, and so other characters find themselves free to engage similar curiosity about their possible ways of being. The gargoyles are marginalised among monsters because they have hearts: a secret they guard closely for fear of physical violence and even death. Monster kind does not tolerate such vestiges of humanity. The gargoyles embody a liminality that threatens the accepted bodies of monstrosity. The difference between the gargoyles and Sam is their rejection of shared experience with humanity. A conversation between archangel Daniel and Sam demonstrates this:

> 'It's astonishing how much it sounds like he loves you, Samuel,' Daniel said. 'What is it about gargoyles that they can do that?'
> 'Gargoyles have hearts.' Sam pressed his lips closed. He realised he wasn't supposed to tell ... The angel chuckled. 'Well, that makes sense. Absolutely.' He muttered something to himself before saying, 'What are their hearts like?' Sam smiled, remembering. 'Bladder's is beautiful, white like a star, and it glows like a soul. But it broke very easily. I bet Wheedle and Spigot's are the same' (Shelley 264).

Shelley constructs a whimsical connection between the magical and the mundane, and emotion and the corporeal in an excellent demonstration of the fluidity and undecidability of *écriture féminine*. There is a wistfulness in the ease with which gargoyles' hearts can break—both physically and metaphorically—that deepens their likeness to humanity, even as they reject the connection. Even with most of monster-kind destroyed, the gargoyles guard the secret of their hearts. Unlike Sam, the gargoyles deny the complexity of their full, embodied experience to maintain

distance from other beings: monsters, humans, or angels. Transgression of fantastic boundaries exposes the possibility for connection and belonging. Liminal spaces are often where characters experience connection and curiosity, but the gargoyles are ashamed of their liminal and multiple identities, and conspire to conceal the humanity nestled in their monstrosity.

The monstrous in humanity exposes social anxieties of boundary transgression. This is epitomised by Sulway's argument that "we are the creators and the embodiment of our own monstrosity. We are our own monsters. They are us" (*Pursuit, Willfulness, and the Strangeness of Strangers* 49). Monstrosity is closely identified with fears about un/control, embodiment, and boundaries of socio-cultural appropriateness. Roy engages Lacan's theory of *le regard* when positing that "the world which we experience is not simply 'out there;' it is 'in here' too. In fact, it is *in-between* the out-there and the in-here—a strange place" (70). Strangeness or monstrosity are not only expressed through the transgression of social codes and conventions, or inside those deemed monstrous. Monstrosity is enacted between embodied beings and through the violation of boundaries. Boundaries are exposed as porous, not fixed; this reveals the strangeness in humanity and the familiar in the supernatural. Thus, discourses of what constitutes 'humanity' may be problematised through entanglement with the monstrous.

McKenna draws on the lore of changelings to explore and express the monstrosity that runs close to the core of humanity. This is explored through a critique of the gaze, particularly through the trope of seeing or not seeing. McKenna writes:

> Those particular goblins were nabbers, they are in the business of stealing babies to sell to the gentry of Faerie. Sometimes they leave one of their own in its place, an ugly old goblin done up in a bib and bonnet; you'd be

> surprised how long it takes most parents to notice the difference (McKenna 64).

In failing to pay sufficient attention to their offspring, McKenna reveals the fallibility of human parenthood. The tradition of changelings reveals the vulnerability of the family unit to the unknowable and demonstrates how human society can function as a 'home' for monstrosity. Monstrosity can be embodied in monstrous creatures as well as in the actions of humans. This concept is reinforced by Renata, a human in league with the Erl King, when she scoffs, "Innocent? She's *human*, none of us are innocent" (McKenna 360). Renata reveals an uncomfortable anxiety that plays on the legal concept of presumption of innocence. The mundane and the cosmic challenge the boundaries of humanity through the monstrous potential in *Hedgewitch*. Interestingly, the permeability of the human and the more-than-human are further explored in *The Monster Who Wasn't.*

The mundane and the cosmic merge within certain characters in Shelley's novel, resulting in a divine light that represents the potential for angelic good in humanity. In Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't,* this light is visible only to monster kind and angel kind. It is the result of a soul that shines with force and symbolises the ability of that soul to be magnificent. Archangel Daniel and Sam discuss the potential for greatness and the duality of humanity in *The Monster Who Wasn't*:

> Actually, a soul is an amazing thing, and you'd think humans would always want to convey how amazing their souls are. So much power and light in such tiny vessels. They don't always show it. Sometimes they are barely nice, sometimes they are awful. Occasionally, they are magnificent (Shelley 45-46).

Goodness is expressed as powerful light in *The Monster Who Wasn't*—the brighter, the more benevolent.

When Sam is distracted from a chocolate-finding mission for the gargoyles, he enters a church and meets the statues who live there. These sentient statues cannot go outside where they might be seen, and destroyed, by humans. They tell Sam, “Sometimes the people in here—not often, mind—but sometimes they light up enough for us to not miss the sun” (Shelley 50). This shine is an interesting, and somewhat critical, perspective on religion and divine goodness, even though it is only a short comment made in passing.

The religious who go into the church are not necessarily possessed of brighter, more benevolent souls than secular humans. Baby Beatrice, whose laugh mingled with the sigh of regret that formed Sam, is one of the more angelic humans in the novel. Sam is besotted by her purity, though she is in no way represented as religious. Shelley writes: “the imp boy stared at the silvery light around the infant. It moved in shimmering waves. Light, sparkling light. It shone out of her. He wondered if it was her soul” (118). Fixated on humanity whose souls shine in this manner, Sam takes Archangel Daniel to a chocolate shop to show him the woman who works there. This exchange also links with McKenna’s theory of unseeing adulthood. Adults who are busy and distracted with the minutiae of daily life cannot give proper attention to what is important, according to the standards of children. Daniel admits:

> ‘You are right, she is powerful.’
> Sam nodded. ‘She’s the only adult I’ve seen that glows.’
> ‘You’ll meet quite a few of them. All the ones you’ve been around until now have been at funerals and worrying about work. Admittedly, she is on constant high beam.’
> (Shelley 269-270).

This propensity for divine goodness is rarely represented in middle-grade fantasy, just as a human/angel binary is not frequently explored in fantasy fiction, but it certainly adds value to questions of complexity and embodiment. Innate goodness

being perceived as angelic has interesting ramifications for the ways that being humanness is represented, with all its intricacies and multiplicity.

Middle-grade fantasy fiction uses the motif of magic to question the implications of corporeal embodiment, particularly as it intersects with visibility and perception. Having access to supernatural powers places pressure on young characters as they attempt to integrate all the knowledge they acquire in the process of navigating through, and out of, childhood. The way that an embodied being is perceived is not necessarily congruent with the idealised fantasy they have constructed of themselves, nor with the subjective truth of manifold knowledge (Lacan 76-8). Instead, the self's knowledge is consolidated by questioning their place in relation to hegemonic power. This process is driven by curiosity, and can lead to a shift away from accepting the world as knowable, stable, and singular.

Discursive explorations of casting enchantments, the symbolism of shadow and light as representations of good and evil, intuitive wildness, and subversive acts of monstrosity are connected through identity and embodiment. In destabilising the chasm between seeing and being gazed upon, potentiality, rather than fixedness, is foregrounded. This openness emboldens many fantasy characters in embracing *entredeux* through transgressive acts of magic and a rejection of the knowable and the expected (Cixous, *Rootprints* 9-13). The imagery of visibility, complexity, and embodiment inform the characters' movements from marginalisation to liminality, and from objectivity to subjectivity. This process looks different for each of the magical protagonists. However, each narrative offers an exploration into the nuanced diversity of embodied subjectivity, and a celebration of marginalised beings claiming power on their own chaotic, fluctuating terms.

However, the ability to affirm power suggests a degree of agency. While empowerment may be found in marginalised identities and rejection of the patriarchal status quo, fantasy sometimes uses the theme of fate to problematise questions of agency. The agentive capacity of magical characters is complicated by their desire and belief in superstition and curses: a theme I explore in the next chapter

FATED FOR MAGIC

"You've been made for a great destiny, little prince…" (Shelley 227)

Literary explorations of fate invoke discourses of agency, desire, Otherness,= empowerment, superstition, and curses. Characters with the ability to use magic are= frequently presented as both fated and marginalised. In this chapter, I explore the= role of fate in nine works of contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy: Foxlee's= *Dragon Skin,* Tanner's *Spellhound,* Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't,* Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* Armstrong's *Big Magic,* Miller's *The Hotel Witch,* Rodda's *The Shop at Hooper's Bend,* Townsend's *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow,* and Norton's *The Fortune Maker.* I contend that, in middle-grade= fantasy, fate dynamically interacts with agency, desire, Otherness, empowerment,= superstition, and curses. Through these intersections, magical protagonists are= presented with two choices: to be Othered within their communities but remain in the= socio-cultural systems where the norms and expectations are familiar, even if they= cannot appropriately perform them. Or to use magic to enact personal desire and= empowerment and thereby find wholeness and multitudes in *entredeux.*

Middle-grade fantasy protagonists who are touched by a magical fate= experience marginalisation due to their inability to conform to normative standards of= behaviour. In rejecting, or re-configuring, their relationship with the Symbolic, magical= protagonists demonstrate that empowerment through magic may lead to belonging,= even in marginalisation. Community is created, rather than conformed to, and,= through *entredeux,* fate is transformed into possibility. Disregarding the limitations of= patriarchal pressure empowers the use of magic as a way to embrace, or interpret,

fate in a way that affirms complex identity. Fate complicates a magical protagonist's relationship with society, and with themselves.

Fate and Agency

Discourses of magical fate, and the presence of the supernatural, highlight the tension between a lack of control and agency, complicating a magical protagonist's sense of self. Lacan argues that "what is hidden is never but what is *not in its place,*" (17) however, something can appear to be out of place if it does not look like what one is expecting (27). The inability to replicate hegemonic conventions situates a magical protagonist as out of place and, in some cases, may hide complex subjectivity. Magical fate, or destiny, merges with subjectivity and disrupts a performance of identity that adheres to patriarchal norms. The magic-wielder has a complicated relationship to agency, because they are out of place, removed from hegemonic power by virtue of being unable to meet socio-cultural expectations, but capable of magic.

Agentive capacity is, in some respects, reduced by a magical destiny, especially if the character believes that their fate is unavoidable. However, agentive capacity is enriched if a character chooses a magical fate, thereby enacting transformation. A third option is that a magical character can exercise agency by their fate, frequently aligning them with complex subjectivity. In intrusion fantasy, according to Mendlesohn, "the fantastic is the bringer of chaos ... it takes us out of safety without taking us from our place" (xxii) by entering the mimetic world and disrupting accepted conventions (xiv). Magical fate behaves in this manner in middle-grade fantasy. Magical fate–a fantastic element–brings chaos into the smooth

functioning of patriarchal society. It intrudes upon characters, interrupting the creation of complex subjectivity, and influencing agency.

Foxlee explores the impact of fate on her characters in *Dragon Skin* by placing a dragon in their path. When the narrative begins, Pip is adrift; the death of her best friend has destabilised her identity. She is sitting by a secluded creek in outback Australia when she finds a baby dragon, weak and almost dead. Pip exhibits agency in accepting her magical fate at this moment and experiences transformation as a result. Foxlee describes the moment that Pip demonstrates her capacity to embrace the impossible, in the expansive, circular terms associated with *écriture féminine*:

> 'Hey,' she said to herself and to the brand-new night... Later, she'd think about it over and over... She knew what it was before she stood up.....She'd *always* known it (Foxlee 5).

Pip immediately understands that this fantastic intrusion is meant for her; that it was her destiny to find the dragon, even though she sometimes feels insufficient for the task. Pip narrates:

> *I was chosen*. Chosen. It was such a huge word and she almost felt foolish thinking it. Maybe some other girl could have been sitting there at the creek, at dusk, and that other girl would have found him and saved him just as well. 'Chosen' was a weighty word. She'd never in her whole life felt the weight of that word (Foxlee 54-55).

Finding and nurturing the dragon reorients Pip's sense of self and purpose. While she does not develop permanent supernatural abilities, her entanglement with magic enacts profound change on her. A portal grows in her hand, spreads throughout her body, and becomes the vessel through which the dragon leaves Pip's dimension. She accepts all these events as necessary. Pip has no control over the embodied changes that occur to her body, but she embraces them, and the related emotional

effects. She accepts her fate and embraces a new-found confidence, which grounds her in the unpleasantness of her mundane reality, while providing her with a more fluid and expansive sense of self. After all, she did save a dragon. Pip demonstrates agency through her total acceptance of supernatural intrusion in the form of Little Fella, and she experiences a physical and emotional transformation that empowers her.

Tanner's *Spellhound* uses the topic of fate to enact a more permanent subjective transformation. *Spellhound* explores the discourse of fate through dramatic supernatural transformation and misinterpreted destiny. The premise of the book is built around the notion of secrets—what is hidden, and therefore out of place—and the ways that destiny can reveal the unknown. The Queen of Hallow is fated to a significant and secret blood-curse, although Queen Felicia is unaware of any family curses. She believes, instead, that she is destined to live an insignificant life of utter boredom. She demonstrates no agency, makes herself small, and accepts socio-cultural expectations of royalty, "because *she* was small and boring" (Tanner 16). However, the three great secrets of the novel reveal an irrepressible, unstoppable destiny that will enact enormous transformation upon her, psychologically, emotionally, and physically.

The First Great Secret is that "Felicia, our beloved Queen, is a dragon. As was Alyss, her mother" (Tanner 280). Felicia inherited the capacity to transform into a dragon through her matrilineal bloodline: a previously unknown destiny that reveals her dualist identity. Felicia realises that she is not small at all, physically or emotionally, so she begins to exhibit some agency. She changes her name and embraces a new identity that is expansive enough to hold many conflicting truths. Fate is expressed through the unknown in this instance. When the secrets are

revealed, Felicia embraces agency and accepts transformation. These transformative effects of fate are simple, particularly because Queen Felicia cannot *help* but turn into a dragon. However, another storyline in *Spellhound* reveals how notions of agency and fate may be complicated through misinterpretation.

Flaxseed, a tiny, fantastic creature called a minch-wiggin, is fated to become a Destroyer-of-Dragons, protecting her people, the forest, and all its inhabitants. Her agency is suppressed by this destiny, which is foisted on her by an almost-deceased Uncle on his deathbed. In fact, she desperately wishes to reject the magical fate that intruded upon her and comes with the official title: "Destroyer-of-Dragons-and-Protector-of-her-People" (Tanner 6). Flax's fate, and her friendship with Queen Felicia, is complicated when Queen Felicia's dragon-self is revealed, and the minch-wiggin's destiny is re-presented to her by Uncle Edwin:.

> You were never meant to be a Destroyer-of-Dragons, little one. You were meant to be a *Caller*-of-Dragons. That is what the magic was for; to call me if ever a witch appeared in the forest. But somewhere over the years, the original word was lost and changed (Tanner 338).

Flax felt out of place as a Destroyer-of-Dragons because her fate was misread, or misrepresented. The false destiny she was originally offered did not align with Flax's sense of self, leaving her feeling incapable of performing her duties. But fate, or destiny, has played a larger and less visible part in her path. Flax fulfills her true destiny without knowing what it is. She finds Queen Felicia when the witches loom, and the destiny of both characters intertwine to bring their magical fates, and the secrets that bound them, to fruition. This true destiny of co-existence, rather than the misinterpreted fate of being an agent of violence, aligns more properly and well with Flax's self-identity; it sits well in her heart, brings her connection and belonging, and is both satisfying and fulfilling.

Fate is rarely easy to interpret; in fact, it is notoriously difficult to understand for many magical protagonists. The veiled nature of fate is a frequent motif in middle-grade fantasy.

Shelley plays with the intersection of identity and fate in *The Monster Who Wasn't* by exploring the difficulties in deciphering a single path forward, or a rigid identity. Samuel is created by monsters to fulfil a destiny that benefits them and dooms humanity. He is repeatedly told of the illustrious nature of his fate, but always by those who would benefit from his acceptance of their stories. Thunderguts, King of Monsters, constructs the illusion of a grand identity, powerful in a way that echoes patriarchal norms. Thunderguts tells Sam:

> You're a prince among your own kind ... You've got grit, like us; you're a warrior, and you're going to help us monsters live again in the world above. You've been made for a great destiny, little prince (227).

He bestows traits such as 'warrior,' and 'grit' upon Sam like a blessing, but they strip him of agency and do not reflect the reality of Sam's existence or align with his sense of self. Such a monstrous and masculine persona, with the capacity and willingness to exercise power over others, is incongruous with Sam's internal sense of self.

Once Sam interacts with the Symbolic, experiencing belonging, marvelling at the wonders of the world, and connecting with its varied beings—monstrous, human, and angelic—he rejects the destiny the monsters have imposed on him. He takes agency over his own destiny by re-interpreting it in a way that aligns with the identity he is creating. He destroys the monsters rather than saving them, at great personal cost, although he worries that this new chosen destiny is too great for him to carry alone. He asks Archangel Daniel: "who will control the monsters now?" (Shelley 259). Daniel responds with kindness, telling him, "That is a problem for another night

and maybe another hero. You've done enough good for a little while. Let it be someone else's responsibility for now. It's time to rest.'" (Shelley 259). In rejecting the destiny for which he was created, Sam exhibits agency. Through coming to understand his destiny, and the impact of his fate on others, he must understand how desire influences both subjectivity and fate.

Desire heavily influences the way that magical protagonists engage with their destinies. Desire is a powerful motivator to dis/engage with fate and determines the way a magic-wielder uses their abilities.

Fate and Desire

Desire complicates discourses of fate, the acceptance of a magical destiny, and, in many cases, facilitates the rejection of disempowerment by socio-cultural expectation. Exposing, transgressing, and expressing desire is one of the functions of wonder tales (Gilead 284) and, I contend, middle-grade fantasy. Gilead argues that "magic represents the power and dangers of desire" (284). Desire is frequently expressed through the use of magic, intruding upon and disrupting the Symbolic. Desire and magic, as expressions of nuanced, expansive, subjective selfhood, are antithetical to universality or patriarchal law.

Discourses of desire in middle-grade fantasy are mediated by the chasm between self and Other within culturally encoded representational systems (Coats 3). Desire occurs both in the individual, expressed through a desire for wholeness, but also through desire for the Other located on the other side of an *entredeux*. Coats argues that even though the subject actively participates in the socio-cultural systems of the Symbolic upon their entry into language, "it is still the Other's system ... So the word 'subject' has resonances of both agency and subservience" (3).

Supernatural protagonists at the intersection of desire and fate must intuit a path towards empowerment. Magic becomes the path forward, and desire the compass. Magic becomes the medium through which a character may express their creativity and conjure a fluid identity directed by personal desire, not by the external influences of the Symbolic. Magic is the creative force that puts the unknown, the deepest desire of the magic-wielder, within reach. Magic also complicates desire by forcing it to confront hegemonic pressures and perceptions of fate.

Cixous argues that phallogocentrism must be cast aside and desire seized as a method of embodying expressions of subjectivity (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa)*. In the words of intersectional feminist Audre Lorde, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1). In middle-grade fantasy, oppressive patriarchal systems must be disregarded in favour of empowerment through desire and magic. Cixous engages the French word 'v*oler'*, which means both 'to fly' and 'to steal' (*Laugh of the Medusa* 887) to express the action of soaring above and freeing oneself from socio-cultural expectations. She writes of rejecting phallogocentrism:

> Nor is the point to appropriate their instruments, their concepts, their places, or to begrudge them their position of mastery … For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through the air and to 'fly.' Flying is a women's gesture—flying in language and making it fly … It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa* 887).

Feminine writing, that is, rejecting phallogocentrism and singular expression, expresses desire and embodiment.

Cixous rejects the notion that there is a sole source of truth or a singular valid experience. She contends that wholeness in multiplicity is possible, and that a rigid, patriarchally-approved identity is fated to be fractured due to desire for wholeness in

multitudes. She proposes embracing the desire for wholeness through subjective expressions of duality. Cixous argues:

> if she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that's any more of a star than the others (*Laugh of the Medusa* 889).

This wholeness-composed-of-many-wholes is conducive to fluid, dualistic identity, which desire need not lead astray. Indeed, embracing desire, seeking a limitless self, might lead a magical protagonist to embodied wholeness.

Willa Birdwhistle in Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic* experiences conflicting desires in accepting her magical fate. Her parents, aware of her supernatural abilities, enforce strict patriarchal socio-cultural norms upon her to suppress her supernatural gifts. She feels guilt about her inability to conform to their expectations. Then they become the victims of a wayward spell that turns them both into clouds. Willa is left orphaned, with only her own desire as inner compass. Her primary desire is survival, which leaves little if any room to attend to any other desires, especially her secret desire for magic. Eventually, however, Willa decides to allow her 'wild and untamed' desires loose::

> On the day her parents had been turned into clouds, Willa had cried. Heaving sobs that left her ribs aching, left her feeling lost, afraid, and heart-sore. But as the sun had set, she'd wiped the tear tracks from her cheeks and rolled back her shoulders. *No more*, she had said, and built herself a little Rapscallion's Cage deep in her heart. She'd poured all her grief into that cage and locked it. *Get in there and stay there*, she'd told it. Because her grief had been wild and untamed and it would have exploded too … What if, this time, she took her hurt and disappointment and her fear and her worries and let them grow wild? Let everything she felt fill the entire space of her, to see where she began and ended, to see what shape was possible? How could she know who she was—and what she was capable of—if she kept such

> large parts of herself hidden? Wasn't that what her parents had done? Tried to shape her into someone she wasn't by forcing her to hide parts of herself they didn't understand? Even the bruises on her heart were a part of who she was (Plozza 215).

This embodied language demonstrates Willa's desire for complexity and the pull of her magical destiny. Magic is the language that Willa uses to express her full and complete wholeness as a supernatural being. In doing so, she aligns desire with fate, and uses her new openness to possibility to motivate her to embrace her magical destiny. Using her desire as magic, Willa discovers she can throw away the tools that belong to the community that rejects her; that 'flying' means rejecting arbitrary norms and accepting all the parts of herself that are not strictly compatible with patriarchal society. Willa gives herself permission to follow her desires, becoming who she is fated to be: a witch of her own making.

A ghost known only as Old Man, who appears briefly in Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse,* sums up Willa's experience of selfhood and why it is so challenging to the Symbolic order. He says: "There is one thing I know to be absolutely true, and that is that there's nothing more powerful or terrifying than a kid acting with their whole heart" (Carter 27).

Children, in all their unpredictability, already challenge patriarchal norms of expressing subjectivity in favour of creating spaces of freedom and play. In learning the rules of the Symbolic, children challenge, and at times transgress, norms and expectations for appropriate ways of being. Magical child protagonists in middle-grade fantasy fiction throw away the master's tools and sharpen their own, flying into *entredeux* between rigid identities and embracing the fluidity of subjective selfhood. Their desire for wholeness and complexity of being is, however, often

perceived as a threat, which frequently leads to the magical child being Othered by their communities.

Fate and Otherness

A fated magic-wielder often experiences marginalisation because of their perceived destiny. Even in fantastic worlds, where the unusual is not-altogether-unexpected, those who deviate significantly from hegemonic norms are cast as Others. Fantastic worlds within children's literature rely upon mimetic representation for familiarity, and to build and maintain a sense of socio-cultural order. The magical protagonist in middle-grade fantasy almost always experiences marginalisation due to the threat they present to that established social order. Adrian Johnston provides a useful definition for Otherness in a socio-cultural context, which he links to children's literature. His discussion of expansive individual subjectivities is an excellent reiteration of the multiplicity and duality of identity that this research explores. Johnston argues:

> For Michel Foucault, otherness—alterity—refers to those who have been excluded from positions of power, marginalized, and denied voice. In the wider critical discourse, 'the others' has come to refer to the axis of relationship, discursively produced, between some sort of commonly accepted cultural norm and that which is not the norm; between self—subject—and that which is identified as non-self … Otherness in children's literature commonly pertains to an idea of an *internal* other, to dichotomies of another within … The release of this other within brings freedom and a type of subjective truth (45).

A supernatural fate may, therefore, bring separateness from the wider community, but it may simultaneously allow for a more expansive understanding of self. A magic-wielder comes to understand that they need not perform social acceptability based on a limited range of rigid identity markers. A magical protagonist's fate may

not look like ordinary life, but it might lead them closer to the expansive truth of themselves; to what Johnston calls the internal Other.

Tulsi, in Armstrong's *Big Magic*, is warned by her grandmother that the magic she craves as her birthright may have unexpected consequences. Her warning is an act of manipulation: an attempt to isolate Tulsi from her loved ones, so that she can drain Tulsi's magic. It is also an emotional warning that magic causes marginalisation, and that Otherness sometimes means loneliness. Sylvie tells Tulsi: "I'm afraid that this gift means that you must stand slightly apart from other people" (Armstrong 113). She continues, as if to justify the sacrifice of belonging to gain magic, "And when you are doing these magic tests, the last thing you need is a distraction" (Armstrong 113). Sylvie is motivated by her desire to steal Tulsi's power, but she also wants to warn Tulsi of the price of magic. She wants Tulsi to understand that non-magicians do not understand the toll of magic, though for Sylvie, marginalisation is a reasonable sacrifice for magic.

Tulsi's father has gentler advice: magic or not, Tulsi must embrace values that have a positive impact on herself, her community, and the planet. As members of a travelling circus, Tulsi's family exist on the margins. Their unfixed, liminal existence is supported by the cultural values of the circus, rather than wider society. Tulsi's father simplifies and focuses these values, telling Tulsi:

> All you can do is live your life and make your decisions based on what's best for yourself, for others, and for the planet … Just be kind, be honest, be true to who you really are (Armstrong 128).

Who Tulsi really is does not, however, fit easily or well within the circus community. Her magical fate isolates her. A protagonist fated to magic often finds that their subjectivity does not fit neatly within their family or community.

Great Aunt Colleen, in Shelley's *The Monster Who Wasn't,* understands the challenges of living with a supernatural gift in a patriarchal society. Sam's arrival creates turmoil within the family. They recognise in him a measure of shared ancestry, given that he was created from a last sigh, a first laugh, and the soul of a lost son, from their family tree. His human-monster liminality is immediately understood by Aunt Colleen as supernatural, even if she cannot quite locate the language to describe it. Speaking to Sam's father of the woman who is to become Sam's mother, Colleen says:

> She's a good girl you've got there, Richard, and she's lucky to walk in just one world. You and I know better though, or if you don't know, you used to. That boy upstairs has a touch of the other on him, no doubt about that. Whether he's a changeling or a grogoch or like, he's not all human (Shelley 112).

This not-belonging is not necessarily dangerous, but Aunt Colleen warns that Sam's supernatural-ness is an Otherness that cannot be ignored. She has experienced marginalisation in her life because of her fated supernatural abilities, and although she does not see them as a burden, she is realistic about what they mean for Sam. Aunt Colleen is not too concerned about socio-cultural acceptance. She seems to have made peace with her otherness and the dualistic identity that a supernatural ability necessitates. She is realistic about the duality of supernatural Otherness but is empowered in her subjectivity by her expansive identity.

Fate and Empowerment

Empowerment through magic may lead to belonging within a small, chosen community, even in marginalisation. The transgressive, transformative magic of fantasy lies in *entredeux,* between performing socio-cultural appropriateness and the complexity of a magical destiny. Tison Pugh argues:

> In literature, such is the double promise of disciplining perversions—teaching children what not to do, while simultaneously and irresistibly demonstrating the pleasures of transgression (8).

Magic-wielders must learn the rules, so that they may break them open on the path to complex subjectivity and belonging within a chosen community.

Cixous coined the term “unacknowledged sovereigns” (*Laugh of the Medusa* 876), and that is exactly what magic wielders in middle-grade fantasy represent. Cixous writes*:*

> I wished that women would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs (*Laugh of the Medusa* 876).

Desire overflows, spilling over the banked boundaries of patriarchal binaries. Unacknowledged sovereigns in Australian middle-grade fantasy create individual spaces of play in these *entredeux* of overflow. Magical protagonists who find themselves marginalised from their communities learn to construct new spaces, new kingdoms, in which they are safe and celebrated. They forgo the familiar, if oppressive, structures in which they were raised and learn to regulate the boundary between empowered interior and regulated exterior. Part of this process involves unlearning the Symbolic rules and associated language of the oppressor. Or, at least, reorganising the Symbolic so that it is accessible to, and functional for, a magical character’s needs.

The magical protagonist must undertake the task of creating a language, “(or a representational medium) that can adequately address the discordant—yet always dynamic—relationship between interiority and the social world” (Lewkowich 312). This interior/exterior relationship may also be understood as an expression of

subjective magical desire's relationship to socio-cultural pressure. Kaplan describes how literature attends to the binary of interiority and desire, and exteriority and social pressures:

> Communicating the inner world of feeling; transforming desire and emotional attachment to forms that can be heard by the outside world; and facing the fact that feelings can never be communicated in full … the problems of being in a world whose representational possibilities precede one's own existence, and in which 'language … exists in its own right beyond the contrivance of the individual psyche' (in Lewkowich 312).

In passing through the mirror-stage and identifying a divided self within the Symbolic, subjectivity must be mediated in the language of a representational system that has existed for much longer than the protagonist (Lacan 78). A developing supernatural identity that exists outside of, or in-between, patriarchal understandings of self-in-situ, complicates expected norms. A magical protagonist may come to discover that their inner psychological world does not interact comfortably with the dominant and seemingly monolithic socio-cultural system of language. So, the unacknowledged sovereign of middle-grade fantasy tears down the kingdom and begins anew.

Plozza's Willa Birdwhistle complicates the interior/exterior boundaries of performing appropriateness as a magical being, and is marginalised as a result. She expresses an inherently strange witchness, as well as a plethora of uncomfortable emotions. She struggles to mediate her identity as a magical, orphaned child living in a superstitious community under a patriarchal monarchy. She expends most of her energy working to keep herself out of institutions for orphans, cobbling together an outsider's existence on the margins.

Her eventual acceptance that she is a witch is indelibly intertwined with the emotions of the marginalised experience. Her sense of self is further displaced by

her magical destiny, which Willa articulates, but only to herself: “Willa added *you’re not who you thought you were and you never were* to the many bruises that littered her heart” (Plozza 73). She is not accepted within her community, but she yearns to belong. Eventually, she finds two friends who become her chosen family, and rejects the Symbolic order that oppresses her. She even redefines the patriarchal system of language to convey meaning that is relevant to her, as a character with a magical destiny, symbolising her empowerment. Eventually, Willa experiences empowerment in rejecting the norms and expectations that oppressed her, and accepting her magical fate. She embraces and celebrates her unacknowledged sovereignty:

> *Belong*. Willa liked that word. In fact, it was high on her list of favourite words, tied in first place with *friend*. She smiled. The truth was, when you stopped listening to the voices that crowed about *proper* and *right* and *should* and *shouldn’t,* it was much easier to see that your choices were unlimited. It was much easier to honk when everyone insisted you should quack. And Willa had plans to do quite a lot of honking (279-280).

Willa rejects all norms that label her supernatural gifts as weird, threatening, and the cause of her marginalisation. As a result, she experiences expansive, multiplicitous freedom of self. Mark Fisher defines weird as:

> something so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object *is* here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate (11).

He goes on to argue that “the sense of wrongness associated with the weird—the conviction that *this does not belong*—is often a sign that we are in the presence of the new” (13). In transgressing patriarchal conventions, magical protagonists are creating newness, weirdness, in *entredeux.* Unlimited new choices open to Willa when she accepts her alterity as empowerment and rejects the rules of the

patriarchal Symbolic. Her ability to control magic is central to her destiny, and she embraces it whole-heartedly. However, the attempt to thwart fate, or to side-step a supernatural destiny, which is what Willa attempted to do before her emancipation, is sometimes expressed in middle-grade fantasy as superstition.

Fate and Superstition

Superstition is sometimes used in an attempt to mitigate the outcomes of fate. Kevin R Foster and Hanna Kokko quote the Merriam-Webster dictionary in establishing a definition of superstition, writing that it is "a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation" (31). However, they add that while irrational, the tendency towards self-preservation inherent in embracing superstition may be helpful (Foster and Kokko 31). Superstition refers to what can be known about the world, and concerns the degree of agency a character has over preventing or encouraging supernatural events. According to Nadav Almog, "the secret impediment, revealed over and over again, seems to assert that the protagonist's sense of mastery over their own circumstances is an illusion" (29). When the supernatural undermines a protagonist's agency, superstition is the lore that informs some attempts to enact or regain control: to unveil the unknown. Superstition informs characters' engagement in irrational attempts to avoid or encourage a perceived outcome or fate.

There is a powerful sense of the *unheimlich* in discussions of superstition, which Sigmund Freud describes with a whimsical connection to the sacrosanct. He writes that *unheimlich* may be an attempt "to veil the divine" (Freud 872). Superstition has decidedly supernatural or mysterious overtones, and may be

described as the desire to uncover “all that needs to remain hidden if the world is to be comfortably ‘known’” (Jackson in Almog 29).

One character in *The Hotel Witch* has made superstition the foundation of her personality. A famed singer, the Golden Nightingale’s performances have the supernatural ability to influence the phenomenological experience of the audience. Displacing temporal and sensory norms, Miller writes: “it was said that when the Golden Nightingale sang a happy song, her audience didn’t just hear happiness—they could see it and taste it and touch it again” (19). This magical ability suggests that Fräulein Schoenblum is a supernatural, liminal being, even as she attempts to avoid any engagement with magic. This might explain her predisposition towards superstition as an attempt to gain some distance from the magic that she fears. When shadows start disappearing from objects and guests of the hotel:

> Fräulein Schoenblum, who is as superstitious as she is melodious, immediately cancelled the evening’s performance and all future engagements, indefinitely, citing ‘bad omens’ and ‘shattered nerves’ (Miller 19).

Superstition is a way of life at the Grand Mirror Hotel. Although Fräulein Schoenblum demonstrates a single-minded obsession with it, her intensity is not altogether misplaced.

The number thirteen is commonly and frequently invoked as an omen of bad luck, and Miller embraces this superstitious imagery in *The Hotel Witch*. There are no guest rooms on the thirteenth floor; instead, it is a site of powerful magic that the Hotel Witches use in support of the hotel’s needs. Miller writes:

> Thirteen, Sibyl knew, was often thought to be an unlucky number. Superstitious guests—guests like Fräulein Schoenblum, for example—got anxious at the thought of staying on a floor with such an unlucky number. At the

> Grand Mirror Hotel, there were no guest rooms on the thirteenth floor. The thirteenth floor was where the Hotel Witch worked her most powerful magic, away from distractions and guests' prying eyes (118).

The Hotel Witch eventually gets lost in time on the thirteenth floor when a spell goes awry, leaving Sibyl to take over the running of the hotel. This demonstrates the precarious nature of magic, suggesting that even the most adept magic-wielders are never completely in control. It also insinuates that superstition is not an extreme reaction to the supernatural in the world of *The Hotel Witch.* Danger of a magical inclination lurks in the Grand Mirror Hotel, connected with the number thirteen.

The concept of superstition is certainly not dismissed in middle-grade fantasy, though it does remain deliberately ambiguous and open. Fate, superstition, and magic intertwine within this ambiguity in service of possibility.

In *The Shop at Hooper's Bend,* Rodda engages the discourse of superstition to explore the potential of magical fate*.* Fate, acting through the sentient space of the store, mediates the events that draw the protagonists back to it, ending their cycles of displacement and allowing them to experience belonging. Keen to disparage any notions of supernatural intervention, Bailey initially negates the possibility of both superstition and fate::

> 'What a string of coincidences! If I were superstitious, I'd think it was fate. But of course it was just chance—lucky chance. Serendipity, they call it …'
> *Chance?* The little shop creaked affectionately. As the sky darkened, memories sifted through its walls like soft, glittering dust. Faces and hearts (Rodda 244).

Discourses of superstition and fate in *The Shop at Hooper's Bend* raise questions about subjective reality and the ability of characters to direct the course of destiny. Bailey is willing to accept her fate because she does not recognise the existence of magic, and laughs at the idea of superstition. The store, having orchestrated this

fated moment, ‘laughs’ too. There is only benevolence in this orchestration of supernatural fate. Sometimes, however, supernatural ability has malicious undertones or is perceived as a curse.

Fate and Curses

Supernatural fate is often mistaken for a curse, engaging discourses of monstrosity. There are tangible socio-cultural consequences of marginalisation for magical protagonists, and a magic wielder may, therefore, come to perceive their magical fate, or gift, as something more insidious. Supernatural beings are marginalised and are, metaphorically, and often physically, distanced from humanity and from the goodness in other people. A mundane human being responds to, and behaves according to, accepted socio-cultural expectations and norms; they are not subject to marginalisation on magical grounds. A character fated to magic possesses dangerous, or threatening, capacities that result in them being Othered. Magical or supernatural behaviours or capabilities are often perceived as monstrous (Meija 131).

Michael Meija invokes the fairy-tale character, Bluebeard, in discussions about monstrosity and the psychological process of perceiving difference as monstrous. As a serial killer, Bluebeard is indeed monstrous, however Meija argues:

> The transformation from human into legend, into a so-called sacred monster, a saint of excess, into Bluebeard. The metamorphosis is necessary, inevitable, because we cannot allow that such monstrosities could really be perpetrated by a human being (Mejia 131).

Again, there are numinous insinuations here—the veiled divine, as well as elements of fate. If there is a measure of un-control in the use of magic, the magical

protagonist has no choice but to be monstrous. The supernatural curse, which generates uncontrolled monstrosity, is something to be feared. This fear, or social anxiety, is transferred from curse to the Othered, fated character..

Norton's novel, *Fortune Maker,* explores curses through Maud's capacity to foretell the future, and the imbalance of power this generates between her and other characters. Questions of agency interact with the moral and factual ambiguity involved in interpreting a seeker's future. Maud, upon reaching a certain developmental stage, (which I infer as puberty, although this is not explicitly detailed), suddenly gains the ability to see snatches of the future. She struggles with the implications of her supernatural ability, trying to interpret and communicate what she sees. She finds a copy of a magazine, called *The Seer,* which provides her with the following information about foretelling:

> The Seer conjures a scene from the future and bears witness to it; should the Seer then interpret the scene for the Seeker as well? No, for that would require a great deal of knowledge about the particulars of the Seeker's life—the skill of mind-reading, perhaps, as well as Seeing (Norton 211).

Maud is horrified by the inaccuracy of her ability, and the low level of accountability for Seers. She tells her new friend, Eleanor, "I should warn you. I can't control what I see." To which Eleanor replies, "I should imagine not... Unless you can control the future as well as See it." (Norton 196). This statement precisely exhibits Maud's issues with foretelling: she questions whether, in potentially misinterpreting a foretelling, she is removing the Seeker's agency and capacity to direct their own lives.

Nevertheless, when they are in desperate need, Maud and Eleanor attempt to use Maud's foretelling to make money. Maud generates customers with the slogan, "Forewarned is forearmed" (Norton 233). However, Maud does not believe there is any truth to this statement and her inability to accept the ambiguity of her foretelling

sees her frame it as a curse, rather than a gift. She struggles with the instability of her imprecise art, and the way it destabilises notions of agency. She wonders if a foretold future can be changed and tells Davinia, who can also foretell the future: "There's hardly a point to a foretelling if you can change it" (Norton 306). Davinia has learnt to deny the ability to foretell, telling Maud: "I'm not sure there's much point to it if you can't" (Norton 306). This causes Maud to reflect on the consequences of foretelling for agency, and for hopefulness. She asks:

> Where was the end to them, the things she could foretell? It would drive her mad. Make her scared of doing anything without knowing … No, she didn't want to See what would happen next. She wanted to hope (Norton 288).

Maud rejects the curse of foretelling, framing it as monstrosity, and chooses, instead, to embrace a mundane life. She declines the power that foretelling gave her over others, with its confusion and inconsistencies.

These concerns about uncontrol, fate, and power are frequently explored in contemporary Gothic and fantastic children's literature. McGillis argues that contemporary literature responds to prevailing cultural fears:

> The dark aspects in recent works of the sub-genre is not just a despairing reflection of our time and our anxieties. Instead, it may suggest that we find the real monsters in positions of influence and power. And it may also suggest that we are not helpless in the face of such influence and power (in Almog 31).

Monstrosity may be exhibited, although eventually nullified, in 'good' supernatural protagonists. However, explorations of monstrosity may enable a socio-cultural critique of the uses of power when it is exercised by 'evil' supernatural protagonists.

Morrigan Crow, in Townsend's *Nevermoor* series, has a supernatural fate. Initially, she believed she was fated to die at Eventide, as all cursed children do. However, she learns that she is not cursed to die at all when she cheats death by

escaping to Nevermoor. Later, she learns that she possesses a supernatural gift, which reignites her belief that her magical abilities are, indeed, a curse. Her understanding of curses expands to the belief that she is plagued by a different curse than the one she initially believed controlled her fate. She is a Wundersmith, and the only other known Wundersmith is powerful, dangerous, and evil. Ezra Squall represents a critique of the dangers of an excess of unchecked power.

Squall explains the fallacy of the Eventide-curse to Morrigan, telling her that he kills all Wundersmith children before they become powerful enough to constitute a threat to him:

> 'The 'curse' was nothing more than a convenient way to explain why all you Eventide-born have such a nasty habit of kicking the bucket before you come of a troublesome age. Before you start attracting and absorbing too much of *my* precious Wunder, like the greedy little lightning rods some of you have the potential to become. I couldn't have anyone diluting the source of energy that's made me obscenely wealthy and powerful, could I? If I am the only conductor of Wunder, its power resides with me. Of course, I had to eliminate any potential threats. You can't blame me for that. It's good business sense.'
> 'There's no such thing as the curse,' Morrigan said. She finally understood. Jupiter had told her, but she hadn't believed him. Not really. '*You're* the curse' (Townsend 430).

Squall stalks Morrigan, intending to manipulate her into contributing to his evil agenda. He believes he can colonise her in service of his attempts to control Nevermoor. She resists, maintaining that, unlike him, she is inherently good. She believes she can overcome the curse of the Wundersmith by ignoring it. Squall laughingly tells her: "you were born this way, Miss Crow. You are set on a path from which you cannot diverge" (Townsend 428).

It is true that Morrigan cannot escape her fate as Wundersmith, and she cannot ignore it, or it will overwhelm her and result in her death. But she has agency

in the way she frames her understanding of her abilities. If it is a curse she is without agency and must perform evil, or die. If it is part of her fate she has agency in its interpretation, and may manipulate her gifts in service of her desires for complex supernatural empowerment. Explorations of magical fate, agency, and curses are intertwined, and recur throughout the journeys of magical protagonists.

Discourses of fate are complex and nuanced in middle-grade fantasy. Fate intersects with identity at the level of agency, and can provide the opportunity to reject socio-cultural pressures in favour of personal empowerment. Empowerment through magic comes through embracing alterity as valid, allowing the supernatural child to find and choose their own small community that rejects the hegemonic rules of the Symbolic. The magical protagonist finds that discerning their desires, and acting upon them, creates space in *entredeux*. Occupying *entredeux*, between destiny and hegemonic expectations, allows for a more expansive sense of self.

Further, this complex identity creation is linked with, but not wholly governed by, destiny. Embracing a fluid and complex subjectivity becomes more important than acceptance from a patriarchal community. A character fated to magic often rejects the community that rejected them and, in doing so, refuses to perform a ‘valid’, singular and stable, identity. Supernatural protagonists exhibit a desire for complex identities over which they exercise a measure of agency, and this is achieved through magic. They accept the knowledge that, even if they are fated to magic, they have agency over how they use it, an insight that is more valuable and affirming than conservative socio-cultural accusations of monstrosity.

Middle-grade fantasy literature also explores the consequences of a lack of agency in significant areas of subjectivity. The orphaned child and the queer child are so significantly Othered as to be irreconcilably removed from hegemonic power.

In their inability to be absorbed into the patriarchy, orphaned and queer characters make visible the vulnerability of the family unit as the core of patriarchal rule.

RADICAL OTHERNESS: ORPHANHOOD AND THE QUEER CHILD

"If you find a dragon, you need a friend" (Foxlee 165).

"The thing is, Maud, people don't give up power if you ask for it politely" (Norton 117)

Radical Otherness reaches its zenith in expressions of the magical orphan and the queer child. Like all other characters who challenge patriarchal control, orphans and queer children experience marginalisation. However, I contend that there are two significant differences between magical orphans and queer children and the markers of other Others I have discussed in preceding chapters. The first is that these two expressions of Otherness are so far removed from the hegemonic centre that they represent the death of the core of patriarchal power: the family unit. The second is that they are not expressions of Otherness that can be mediated by the subject; instead they are permanently and irredeemably Othered. These characters are defined by unchangeable characteristics that challenge hierarchical rule: the orphaned child will always have dead parents, and the queer child will always be queer. These expressions of Otherness are so radicalised because they cannot exist in empowerment without making visible the ways they destabilise hierarchical rule. In this chapter, I examine the following five works of contemporary middle-grade fantasy for their treatment of radical otherness: Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* Carter's *A Girl Called Corpse,* Townsend's *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow,* Sulway's *Winter's Tale,* and Rodda's *The Shop at Hooper's Bend.*

This chapter examines the magical orphan as social exile, sovereign escapee, and sacred scapegoat. It also explores the magical orphan through their connection with the queer convention of the chosen family, before interrogating the

connection between gender ambiguity, queerness, and the magical orphan. First, however, I briefly explore how literature understands the condition of orphanhood and the place of the queer child as Other.

Hawthorn articulates the act of Othering as a socio-cultural process that distances the orphan not only from hegemonic power but from the place where one has situated 'self': "To Other characters is to 'place them outside the system of normality or convention to which one belongs oneself'" (in Crain 1). The orphaned child is recognised primarily through their orphanhood, which is a mark of negation. The orphan represents liminality in a particularly uncomfortable way, stemming from their duality of experience.

Elizabeth A Crain argues that this duality is ironic because the state of orphanhood "encompasses an odd combination of bereavement and freedom" (in Reece and Spring 3). The orphan represents a particular kind of Othering because they are removed from other adults, as well as other children. They are radically alone. Crain describes the radical nature of othering the orphan as:

> Strange characterisation—the orphan is so strongly othered that he or she becomes mysterious, strange, animalistic, or supernatural—and that is the heart of the stock orphan character (3).

The supernatural nature of the orphan is emphasised in fantasy literature because of this duality and strangeness. The orphan has already experienced death, and it structures their way of being in the world. Crain argues:

> Orphan children in literature often occupy the spaces of reality and fantasy simultaneously because they have had an early encounter with another world—the afterlife. This endows them with supernatural abilities (implied or explicit) that compensate for the loss of a parent and help them to overcome this traumatizing beginning … Supernatural ability is an almost universal characteristic of the orphan character (ii).

The magical orphan is so closely associated with death that they become liminal beings by association. There is no space in hegemonic patriarchal order for such a challenging being, therefore, their marginalisation is always-already complete. Another perspective that unites orphans and queer children might be that both queer the hegemonic experience of childhood.

Orphaned children, and homosexual or genderqueer children, destabilise the patriarchal order of innocence to such a radical degree as to embody permanent Otherness. The literary queer child is so marginalised as to cease to exist (Pugh 11). All children are assigned a cisnormative heterosexuality that is deeply entwined with the celebrated innocence of the child. However, Bond Stockton argues that through binarised understandings of childhood and adulthood, the child always queers the social norms that they have not yet attained from the perspective of adults with hegemonic power. In not having reached the logical destination of heterosexual coupling, the child queers human experience (in Pugh 9). The question, and representation, of sexual difference, or gender diversity, is thus a vitally important one.

Irigaray draws from Heidegger in arguing that, if every age has a central question, then sexual difference is the defining question of this age of human evolution and "could be our salvation if we thought it through" (in Walton 15). I contend, incorporating the work of Cixous, that sexual difference is a point of alterity that creates the opportunity to de-hierarchise sexual identity (Cixous, *Rootprints* 15). Sexual and gender diversity as the markers of a queer identity are created through their relationship to hegemonic power, according to Pugh's writing on queerness:

> Queerness refers to '*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant … 'Queer,' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-á-vis the normative (Halperin in Pugh 8).

The marginalisation of queer characters provides them with the opportunity to explore dual knowledge, like the orphan. Contemporary queer literature plays a vital role in these explorations. Conveying the traits of *écriture féminine,* Jennifer Miller writes that new queer literature plays "an important world-making function, aiming to teach possibility by rejecting the inherited world of gender norms" (1654), as well as a range of other norms. However, to convey the possibilities of empowerment through the rejection of social norms we must first consider why the orphan and the queer child are so challenging to the patriarchal order.

The Magical Orphan as Social Exile

The magical orphan is a social exile whose existence destabilises dualistic notions of selfhood. Orphans exist on the fringes of communities due to the challenge they pose to the centrality of the patriarchal family as a means of social control. Pamela Sue Anderson argues that children require a guiding parental figure to ensure smooth integration into the Symbolic, writing that "there is violence in the loss of a loving, maternal/paternal figure who could make possible the successful assimilation of individual subjects into society and language" (108). Without this guide, the magical orphan cannot be trained to conform to their anticipated roles.

Unable to assimilate into the family, and thereby the community, the literary orphan is shunned, and sometimes institutionalised. That is, they are excised from the community and transformed into an object of de-personalised control. Cixous describes the "literary compulsion to transform unspeakable things into poetry" (Walton 11), and parental abandonment is a core fear of the child state. As a genre of transgression, fantasy takes that fear of abandonment and transmogrifies it into the opportunity for growth, and poetry. Thus, the price of being gifted with magical

powers is often a permanent state of orphanhood, with its implied “marginality and continual journeying” (Ganuly 75). Without adult protection and guidance, the child must move quickly out of the state of childhood. The liminal state of the magical orphan thus represents the tension between “the otherness of knowing adulthood” and "the sweet receptiveness associated with childhood” (R. Johnston 52).

Occasionally, the magical orphan is recuperated to some semblance of a patriarchal family (Curtis 358), but more often in contemporary middle-grade fantasy, they remain aloof from adults in a concentrated rejection of adultism. The magical orphan rejects “the unflinching belief in adult authority,” and “decentres authority” (Jennifer Miller 1653). Consequently, their status as a child is compromised. James M Curtis argues “his or her ‘innocence’ is subverted through encounters with a fantastic ‘evil,’ and the child is left in what Maria Nikolajeva terms an ‘aetonormative’ state in which the age gap between child and adult is closed in one way or another” (Curtis 358). The magical orphan gains knowledge beyond age-based norms; they exist in their communities in an empowered state that is incongruent with normative understandings of childhood.

In Western patriarchal cultures, growing up is a linear and permanent one-way process (Wilson and Short 132). Without adult guidance to prolong the state of childhood, the magical orphan must move swiftly into adulthood. According to Melissa B Wilson and Kathy G Short:

> Culturally, growing up is conceptualized as moving from point A to point B in a regulated manner. Point A is fanciful, silly, emotional, and childish while point B is rational, serious, and, in the end, grown up (132).

However, I contend that in middle-grade fantasy, magic presents the opportunity to travel *entredeux* back and forth between childhood and adulthood, experiencing whimsy and child-like joy while simultaneously embracing the adult responsibilities

that beset magical children. The duality of this state of being is presented as fearful yet intriguing, as, according to Crain "the more the orphan is othered because of fear, the more anxiety surrounds understandings of the orphan, and we come to see this child as enigmatic" (ii-iii). In refusing to honour the permanence of the adult state, even if adulthood is enacted prematurely, the magical orphan threatens the unidirectional process of growing up. Instead, the enigmatic magical orphan enacts a liminal, dualistic selfhood that is congruent with exile.

Said argues that the exile lives a liminal existence "beset with half-involvements, half-attachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on the other" (in Ganguly 69). This experience of halves may be construed not through negation, but as dualities—as existing across a range of identities, each valid and authentic, even if they appear to conflict. The exile embraces "confusion and possibilities" (Ganguly 70), rather than rigidity and singularity; there is "no singular experience of exile" (Ganguly 69). Theodor Adorno, Said's mentor, argues that exile is a state of mind, or a "modality of thought," in which one may "embrace the openings it makes possible" to "think exile" (Adorno in Ganguly 70). To make sense of the many possibilities of 'thinking exile,' the magical orphan develops a dualistic socio-cultural knowledge.

Said refers to this dualistic state of the exile as "contrapuntal", which involves knowing the rules and codes of the Symbolic order, as well as possessing intuitive knowledge (Ganguly 70). This dual knowledge is reminiscent of Roy's theory of the twice-born and allows the magical orphan to perceive possibility. Said argues:

> Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that is contrapuntal (in L. Anderson 176).

Indeed, Cixous refers to one who refuses to be confined within singular expressions of phallogocentric self, not as an exile but as an "escapee" (*Laugh of the Medusa* 879). The state of exile, then, whether chosen or enforced, represents an opportunity as much as a forced disconnection. A lack of guidance in negotiating socio-cultural norms allows the magical orphan to expand in many directions that exceed the standards and expectations of the Symbolic patriarchal order.

The intuitive awareness that comes from this dualistic knowledge is described by Kristeva as excess. An excess of knowledge, of emotion, and of experience, grants the exile a modicum of power, or rather, empowerment through marginalisation. Kristeva's theory of excess and exile posits that exiles may experience:

> [a] privileged perspective from which they can recognize the trace of otherness, while excess is that trace which exiles can discover beyond identity, that is, as the otherness which has been repressed and marginalised (L. Anderson 106).

Kristeva further writes that excess is the natural result of exile, including "excess in love and passion" (P. Anderson 108). Ways of being, according to Kristeva's theory of excess and exile, remain in flux, adapting and growing, revealed through language that "exceeds the categories of social-symbolic identity" (P. Anderson 108). The language of excess frames the fluctuating identities of the exile.

Pamela Sue Anderson argues that Kristeva's language of excess and exile is where meaning may be constructed for the individual. She details the repercussions of this undoing and repositioning of language on identity formation:

> Kristeva discovers the right to speak excess as the language of the exile. This is language which ceaselessly produces and destroys meaning in spatial and linguistic transformations; in speaking excess, meaning exists. Unless those who are marginalized by culture can speak their marginalization, they remain trapped in narcissism.

> Instead of regressing to childhood or retreating in silence, the marginalized must claim their autonomy as subjects-in-process; but this choice necessarily leads to a journey of excess; and this journey involves going back to the passions which have been excessive, and going forward to the expression of these passions in a new language, with new laws (P. Anderson 122).

Through the rejection of patriarchal singularity, the magical-orphan-as-exile claims the right to speak the language of excess and represents complexity in subjective experience. Living the language of excess opens up new ways of being for the magical-orphan-as-exile, with the freedom to speak the excess of experience that disregards the laws of phallogocentrism.

The excesses and subjectivity of the exile are dangerous to patriarchal rule because the exile has a clearer view of its deficiencies from the margins of society. Anderson argues:

> Evil will be linked with excess … There appears to be significance in (imagining) the marginality of exiles. Exiles have a privileged perspective from the margins insofar as they remain on the edge of speech, of community, of consciousness. Exiles can possess an epistemic view which sheds light upon the banality of evil that is eating away at the centre of a social-symbolic order (P. Anderson 114-115).

The magical orphan has a heightened understanding of the damaging practices of their community for two reasons. First, from the margins, the exile may perceive the damage of patriarchal power over. Second: they have dual vision/understanding and thus can imagine more possibilities than the current systems. This clarity around potentiality is reflected in Kristeva and Cixous's theories of excess.

Said, who is a marginal figure himself, understood the implications of being forced into liminality as exile or escapee, but he also understood the freedom that this afforded him. He demonstrates multiplicity in identity, and the potential that comes when one stops attempting to fit into rigid socio-cultural roles. Said writes:

> I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing (in L. Anderson 168).

Within this dream-like state, Said finds confirmation of his complex feelings about identity. He experiences freedom of being without needing to fit into roles with intricate expectations. All expressions of multiple identities are valid, even if they appear to be irreconcilable, because his understanding of identity is expansive enough to encompass all parts of his being.

Plozza's Willa Birdwhistle exhibits a similar ability to hold conflicting identities with ease. In Plozza's *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* Willa's parents are no longer able to fulfill their parental roles after they are magicked into clouds and float away, disembodied. Willa is immediately exiled. The villagers fear her Otherness, even as they cause it through marginalising her. Cast off from family and community, Willa experiences intense feelings of loneliness. Plozza writes that "it was the loneliest of all to be feared" (85). Her sense of self becomes confused and conflicted as she is claimed by competing factions of witches. The Silverclaw witch uses one word that ought to offer security and comfort but has the opposite effect on Willa: "*Mine*." (Plozza 25). Plozza describes Willa's embodied response to the word 'mine,' indicating that she has not yet claimed herself: "There it was again, that awful word that made Willa's knees knock and her teeth chatter and her heart go *ka-boom*!" (25). This explosive use of language links embodied identity, intuitive knowing, and a rejection of being claimed by an unfamiliar and colonising community. Willa perceives the danger of being claimed by corrupt communities, and decides she must follow the path that feels most true to who she understands herself to be. Her expressions of self do not fit within the patriarchal order, or that of the Silverclaw

witch. She chooses to reject all forms of hierarchical society, as does Carter's ghostly protagonist, Corpse.

In *A Girl Called Corpse,* Corpse is exiled from her living body and experiences displacement of identity due to the loss of all her memories. She is also exiled in the afterlife, as seemingly the only ghost on Earth who cannot pass from the plane of humanity through the portal of 'death proper'. Corpse possesses a body that she has cobbled together from magic, wax, and detritus from the sea. She describes the confusion of existing within a self-derived body that mirrors patriarchal standards of appearance without being anchored by memories of living experience. This has a profound effect on Corpse's identity:

> I couldn't bring my name with me when I died, just like I couldn't bring any of my memories. When you become a ghost, every trace of your life vanishes. The faces of your family. The house where you lived. You even forget how it is that you died … Every single memory from your life disappears … and all you're left with is questions. That's why I call myself Corpse, I guess (Carter 5-6).

Where Said finds freedom in imagining his self as a current, Corpse feels unmoored and lost. Eventually, Corpse stops identifying with the role of exiled, 'lonely ghost kid' and rejects the implied Otherness of her situation. She discovers that she can empower herself through magic, speaking the language of excess through sorcery, finally expressing her experience, and discovering that she is more than just a ghost. Her sense of self expands, and she begins to find some joy and belonging in her new state of being. She claims exile as empowerment and finds release in the language of excess. All these experiences lead Corpse and, indeed, most of the magical protagonists who experience orphanhood, to a level of self-guidance conducive to sovereignty.

The Magical Orphan as Sovereign Escapee

The empowered and self-directed magical orphan, as an expression of the sovereign escapee, has some overlap and overflow with the exile. Both engage the common narratological convention in children's literature of adults being put aside for the story to progress. This demonstrates the fear that perhaps children are more capable than patriarchal cultures would indicate, strengthening the adult-child divide. As Bates observes, "children in children's literature are themselves agents of their own separation" (Bates in Almog 82). Almog goes on to describe how contemporary stories differ from traditional fairy tales due primarily to socio-cultural changes:

> Parents in the late twentieth century and the early twenty first, it seems, do not need to die, or go off to war, or in any other way make themselves absent, for the supernatural adventure to commence behind their backs. They just need to be ordinary working parents (Almog 80).

The orphan-state in contemporary fantasy does not require deceased parents as an orphan can also be "an abandoned or neglected child" (Crain 13). An absent parent may also produce a neglected child who is wild enough to inhabit the space of sovereign escapee. In most cases, however, the magical protagonist is genuinely orphaned and, thus, moves without choice into Cixous's space of the unacknowledged sovereign.

Mbembe writes of the "romance of sovereignty" as the dual condition of self-mastery and self-limitation (13). This duality is expressed frequently in the magical orphan, as they test the limits of their powers and the consequences of their supernatural abilities. Through his work on necropolitics, Mbembe exposes the more insidious side of sovereignty. Mbembe's necropolitics centres on the sovereign power to bestow life or death (11-12), including the quality of the life lived. He calls this the state of exception (12), and it describes the ability of the sovereign power to

degrade the quality of life of the disempowered person. The state of exception refers specifically to the Holocaust and the animalistic state that Jewish prisoners were subjected to: alive but not living. Theoretically, sovereign power encapsulates the patriarchal concept of power over, and the construction of a hierarchy of value.

Further, "sovereignty meant occupations, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood" (Mbembe 26). My research does not deal explicitly with third-zone spaces, as it focuses on liminal spaces as *entredeux.* Additionally, the literature that I analyse here does not have nearly the same sense of historical tragedy attached to it as Mbembe's work on the state of exception. However, the ideology of patriarchal power over, as represented through hierarchies and the violence of colonised power, echoes throughout the middle-grade fantasy novels I examine. Mbembe writes that "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not" (27). We see that colonial occupation, as it pertains to contemporary middle-grade fantasy, is concerned with this question of *who matters*, and *who decides*, as well as the "writing of new spatial relations" that is "tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies" (Mbembe 256). The habitation or transgression of the socio-cultural boundaries of Mbembe's theory of sovereignty interacts with Freud's concept of *Wo Es war, Soll Ich warden,* which I discuss through Lacan's analysis.

Lacan describes the concept of *Wo Es war, Soll Ich warden* as being "the subject's duty to come to operate where the 'it' was'" (Klein 131). The process of becoming is at the core of this concept and exists in a third, sovereign space. The self is created in place and space, informed heavily by the rules and norms of the Symbolic. Lacan questions the possibility of creating meaning between self and language as well as the influence of socio-cultural norms on this linguistic process:

> Is the place that I occupy as subject of the signifier
> concentric or eccentric in relation to the place I occupy as

> subject of the signified? The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak (Lacan 430).

This passage highlights the difficulties of conforming to rigid roles and expectations, and the challenges it poses to complex subjectivity. Lacan may be questioning whether it is more important to occupy the meaning of the descriptor—child, orphan, witch, queer—or to move towards accepting the experience of being. Put another way, is it more important to conform to the social expectations of the name or word as an identity marker, or to move in spaces of possibility?

Of the translation—*where it was, I must come into being*—Lacan references the ecstasy of experiencing joy through play, through destruction, and through transgression of boundaries and binaries:

> The translation 'it' prepares our ears to hear the Thing. They are not opposites when it comes to signifying something foreboding ... Lacan alights on the concept of the Thing and uses it in his own thinking on the death drive. The Thing is a will to destruction and that's the death drive. A will to destruction is often observable in children at play (Klein 132).

If one must move towards inhabiting the place of the Thing, this process of becoming is similarly a process of unlearning. Lacan argues that "this goal is one of reintegration and harmony, I might even say of reconciliation" (Lacan 435). The Thing, as reconciliation with self, and with possibility "becomes, in one of Lacan's translations of it, *jouissance*" (Klein 133). The joy and ecstasy of becoming is important for discussions of children's literature because, like possibility or wonder, it is not a fixed concept.

The state of becoming is ongoing, in flux, and holds a multitude of possibilities. The magical orphan as sovereign subject holds duality lightly and is more concerned with empowerment of self than power over. The sovereign escapee,

thus, holds sovereignty over self and the liminal spaces they create. The magical orphan is not interested in participating in the patriarchal processes that oppressed them, or in exerting their will over others. They move into the space occupied by Freud's 'Thing,' and use joy and magic to express this state of becoming. There are many examples of the magical orphan as sovereign escapee in contemporary middle-grade fantasy. Many stories in which the child uses their magic to create self-actualised space in *entredeux*, where they may exercise control over their embodied selves.

Willa Birdwhistle, from *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic,* remains in her family home even after her parents' death. She maintains the façade of socio-cultural normalcy, attempting to mimic adulthood by getting a job and avoiding the child-like activities that bring her joy. When she is held in the castle under suspicion of being a witch, she yearns for the third space of sovereignty that she enjoys when alone in her home. Plozza writes: "I, for one, can't *wait* to get home and see all my cats and the spiders and … and … well, that's it really" (62). This passage reveals that Willa has turned her family home into a safe space in which she is sovereign. Her rules are law, and she chooses to live alone with her army of cats and spiders—both classic indicators of the witch. These conditions reflect her third-space sovereignty. In her home, she has control over her choices and existence, which is decidedly adult. But she also lives with a hundred cats and is unconcerned by spiders, which is decidedly childlike. Willa exists in the unknown *entredeux* between childhood and adulthood where her whims are sovereign law.

Corpse, in *A Girl Called Corpse*, finds power as a sovereign escapee. Her identity, as well as her living situation, is liminal and marginalised in relation to both 'fleshies' (live people) and other ghosts. She lives on the Rock-That-Doesn't-Exist,

which, in fact, does exist but has been hexed by witches so that it cannot be remembered or perceived by humans. She also lives alone because, among ghosts, she is singular due to her ability to remain in this dimension:

> I'm different to other ghosts. I can do something most others can't. In fact, there have been heaps of other ghost kids who have come and gone from the rock-that-doesn't-exist, but I've never met any who were able to pour themselves into a body like I can. Not a single one. And being able to Possess this body … Well, it's about as close to being alive as a ghost can be … It helps keep me out of Death Proper's clutches (Carter 8).

Corpse speaks about her self-created embodied being in a very detached manner. She created her 'body' out of melted wax and scavenged vestiges of the ocean. She describes it as a space or place to be inhabited: a space over which she displays sovereignty. Her body serves the purpose of keeping Death Proper away, but she would still exist without it. She claims ownership over her embodied space, and determines what it looks like and how it functions. She chooses to dress the body in clothes—an unnecessary adherence to the laws of the living–since Corpse has been so deeply socialised into the Symbolic that she continues to impose its socio-cultural rules upon her death, even as she does transgress the margins slightly.

One of the socio-cultural conventions that is skewed in *Corpse* is naming. The two ghostly protagonists are called Corpse and Girl, both of which are nouns that also serve a metonymic function. Interestingly, they both chose their names, only later realising they exercise sovereignty over their names and may change them. Carter writes:

> 'If we're going to stay here, I was thinking maybe it's time you chose a new name. I've been calling you "Girl" since you arrived, but I was thinking that since we *are* going to be here for the rest of our deaths and all ... you should probably pick your own name.'
> Girl thinks on it. Her face scrunches up.
> 'I like Girl,' she says finally (320).

The protagonists exercise their sovereign right to be known and to exist through the power of their choices. They are undoing the patriarchal order with this act, even though they still impose some socio-cultural rules on their afterlives. They destabilise patriarchy as they undo the hierarchy in favour of empowerment rather than power over, demonstrating sovereignty in their ability to choose what serves their afterlife, disregarding what does not.

Sulway's Winter, in *Winter's Tale,* is literally and metonymically sovereign—an orphan who is heir to a mystical blue hare from the Otherworld. Winter, who is not cognisant of this supernatural ancestry, struggles to find a family who fully accepts them for their orphaned and gender queered liminality. They travel through four families before finding belonging, symbolising their displacement from the patriarchal family unit. First, they are placed with the wild, chaotic hunters, who roared, and "when the hunting season began, they put on their hunting boots. When the horn sounded, they ran" (Sulway 4). Then, Winter was placed with a family that were "quiet as mice," who took things apart, and nibbled at food, and never visited the park they lived near (Sulway 5). Ultimately, this quiet family abandoned them: "they left Winter on the table with a note wrapped around a jar of peanut butter" (Sulway 5). The third family "lived at sea. That is, they were fisherfolk. The women hauled in the nets and drank strong tea. The men grew beards as long as their bodies" (Sulway 6). They regretfully gave Winter away when "the tide turned" (Sulway 7), but they left them with gifts that they treasured. The fourth family–Bo, and Fox–live at the top of a mountain, in a city painted with magical murals.

Fox and Bo are immediately coded as queer, exhibiting material clues to their Otherness. Sulway writes that "Winter smiles at the new parents. One of them, Winter notices, has one green eye and one brown. The other is wearing odd socks"

(12). Winter, as a gender non-binary child, must find a family that similarly embraces liminality and empowerment in third spaces. As an orphan with a supernatural birthright of sovereignty, Winter does not fit neatly into any preconceived roles, and although they are not dangerous, they are 'different.' The mouse-quiet family wrote this note and left it with the abandoned Winter: "This child is very different to others. Winter has special needs. We can't look after them anymore" (Sulway 37). Winter represents the death of expected gender roles, and they demonstrate that alterity is not necessarily a negative trait. Crain posits that "any child who can survive the loss of what we as humans consider to be essential—the parent—must be more special, more talented, more powerful than the average child" (49). In Winter's case, they are so different and special that they are barely of this world. Winter is one of the few cases in this set of fantastic literature that restores the orphaned child to a family unit, but the queerness of this chosen family destabilises patriarchal conventions of familial control. Winter is too 'Other' to be integrated satisfactorily into patriarchal order; they still represent social anxieties surrounding the dissolution of the family unit.

The Deathly Orphan as the Sacred Scapegoat

The magical orphan exposes social anxieties surrounding death, including the dissolution of the patriarchal family, and represent the sacred scapegoat in middle-grade fantasy fiction. The magical orphan is closely associated with death, not just physically through the death of their parents, but through their representation of the death of hegemonic rules and norms. Consequently, the magical orphan finds themself marginalised and disempowered. Crain argues that "they are often considered threatening to society's family structure. People fear what the orphan represents (death, loss, and exile) and this turns into othering" (12). The orphan's

link with mortality and their experience with death becomes an association that is difficult for the community to ignore. According to Crain “death hangs about the orphan figure in an ironic way—he or she is continuously associated with death, but does not die” (8-9). The living orphan is irredeemably marked by death and this stain becomes the cause of their marginalisation.

Mbembe links this fear of death with extreme Othering, describing the threat of the death-marked orphan. He argues that the perception of the existence of the Other is a genuine threat to mortal life (Mbembe 18). Thus, the solitary child, symbolically linked with parental death, becomes an ideological threat to the lives of those around them. The community fears the marginalisation that they embody and represent. Shunned, or worse, “the orphan signifies the fearsome realities of death and the possibilities of isolation and abjection” (Crain ii). The cycle is self-perpetuating and significantly alters the subjective development of the magical orphan.

Early experiences with death have genuine repercussions for the formation of identity, which, according to Johnston, follows a prescribed order. The orphan, with their premature exposure to loss, progresses quickly through these phases, impacting their developing subjectivity. Johnson argues:

> Ironically, as children grow into knowledge of self and subjectivity, and accumulate memory and experience of ontological beingness, they develop a concomitant knowledge of non-beingness—first, of non-being a child by growing up and out of childhood, second of the potential non-beingness of loved ones, and third, and most deeply and profoundly, of the inevitable non-beingness of *self* (R. Johnston 46).

The first and second phases of non-beingness are simultaneously thrust upon the orphan. They prematurely leave the realm of childhood due to the death of the parent, and come to embody the threat, and impending reality, of non-being. The

magical orphan's capacity for the supernatural cannot prevent them from an awareness of death, or the reality of life without a family. This duality of knowledge, coupled with the orphan's permanent relationship with death, makes them an ideal candidate to fulfill the role of Gerard's sacred scapegoat.

The sacred scapegoat and mimetic theory of desire were created by religious philosopher Girard. He argues that the sacrifice of an innocent victim symbolically restores a community to peace and creates a myth that encourages reflection upon human connection and belonging. When anger threatens to erupt in a community, "communal violence is all of a sudden projected upon a single victim" (Andrade). The community unite against the scapegoat, through whose sacrifice tension is released. The sacred scapegoat must never be recognised as innocent, and must instead be constructed as a monstrous being who deserves their punishment due to some perceived transgression (Andrade). Gabriel Andrade writes "in such a manner, the community deceives itself into believing that the victim is the culprit of the communal crisis, and that the elimination of the victim will eventually restore peace" (Andrade).

This process is generated by what Girard termed a mimetic theory of desire. The mimetic theory of desire proposes that emotion is contagious and driven by socio-cultural pressures associated with communal longing. Humans look to others for information about what they should desire, and how they should aspire to exist in a community. He argues that religion, and Catholicism in particular, allow:

> Biblical accounts of the innocent victim [to] … break apart the scapegoat mechanism, enabling humans to see the history of sacrifice as loathsome and to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Reineke 143).

Sanctified or villainised, the magical orphan is a logical candidate for becoming the sacred scapegoat, because they have no familial ties to complicate their sacrifice or make claims regarding their innocence. Already marked by death, the orphan

represents a vessel that the community can fill with their fears and desires. Justification for the eradication of the orphan-as-scapegoat is contagious until eventually, the community becomes united in their persecution of the scapegoat. Finally, the scapegoat is sacrificed and the community is restored to peace. The orphan passes into myth: proof of the necessity of connection and belonging. The sacred scapegoat is denied the same needs for community, as their life and death, is a lesson in sacrifice.

Corpse, of Carter's *A Ghost Called Corpse* is dead, and her name ensures that the reader is constantly aware of this fact. She represents the sacrifice of the sacred scapegoat in being snatched from her parents as a baby and raised by the Merchant for the purpose of being killed in a magical trade. Her heart was removed and preserved inside a locket as a spellspring. Her existence revolves around non-being. Her death and the transformation of her heart into a magical weapon are what keep the uneasy peace between wicked forces in the town of Elston-Fright. Girl, another ghost and Corpse's only friend, converses with the Merchant as she attempts to learn more about Corpse's life:

> 'Then you must know what her real name is!'
> The merchant looks confused. 'I am quite sure that I never gave her one.'
> 'No *name*?' Girl says. 'No name in the twelve whole years? No name in the entire time she lived here? No name at all before ... before she was snatched by the witches?'
> At that, the merchant laughs.
> 'Snatched by Witches?' she repeats. 'Do not be ridiculous, child. I have never heard anything so absurd. The Witches cannot even set foot inside the houses of Elston-Fright. How would they snatch a child? ... I suppose what I am telling you is that your friend was never snatched by Witches, because the only person who does any snatchings around here is me (Carter 232).

Alive, but entirely Othered, Corpse is denied subjectivity and exists as a pre-emptive scapegoat, transacted to a (second) death. In life, according to Merchant, was unloved and, therefore, unlovable. When she became an orphan, the Merchant states, “she turned into a horrible child” (Carter 228):

> Have you seen what happens to a child when they live a life without love? There is no hunger quite like loneliness. They become *starved*. Hunched shoulders. Empty eyes—eyes that eventually turn mean … Corpse was a horrible child who nobody loved … I of all people should know that … given that I raised her (Carter 228-229).

Corpse was denied the belonging of family, raised to fulfil the desires of those with power and then sacrificed. She represents death, all three states of non-being, and the social anxieties of the destruction of the family. Corpse occupies an *entredeux* as a ghost who cannot cross over into Death Proper, or return to a family. Therefore, she must find, or create, her own family.

The Magical Orphan and the Chosen Family

The magical orphan and the queer child find belonging through the creation of a chosen family, reflecting their desire for the comfort and order of home, even as they reject the rigidity of heteropatriarchal family structures. Crain describes the figure of the orphan as destined to be solitary, noting that they are often written with “an emphasis on isolation and disassociation” (51). Crain argues that “they are loners, often even after they have found a family ... They desire a sense of ‘belonging’ that often seems elusive, despite their best efforts” (51). Similarly, Wilson and Short describe the voyage of the neglected or abandoned child:

> By not providing their children with comfort, parents in postmodern metaplots fail to give children a home. This failure of home at the beginning of the story changes the rules about the journey. If there is nowhere to return, the journey’s aim must be the acquisition of a home, rather than making peace with the home left in a metaplot. This

> new journey requires not only bravery and wit on the child's part, but taking on adult roles for good, even though the child is still young (137-138).

The journey of the magical orphan, then, is concerned with carving out a space of belonging that is not confined by patriarchal models of home. Gaiman describes the queering of this search for home in contemporary children's fantasy. He writes:

> Most of the child-protagonists end up setting up a home for themselves, independent of regular adult authority figures. If they do have adult supervision, it nearly never appears in the form of traditional family roles, or the adult authority is (temporarily) accepted rather than enforced (in Almog 20).

The magical orphan and queer child replace adult authority figures with peers of a similar age or stage of life. This child-authored family is referred to in queer culture as a chosen family. The chosen family in middle-grade fantasy connects the magical orphan and the queer child.

The chosen family is an ideological formation that is central to queer theory and queer lived experience. The magical orphan and the queer child construct their own version of family, within which they feel a sense of belonging free from adult surveillance or guidance. The friendship circle becomes family, standing in for the absentee parent and providing unconditional love. "In the new queer children's literature," writes Miller, "networks of chosen family members are often represented as just as important in the lives of queer children" (Jennifer Miller 1656). This rejection of adult authority as central to the family destroys the hierarchy of the heteropatriarchal family and replaces it with acceptance of alterity in which difference is celebrated. For this to happen, I argue that two psychological processes come into play: Freud's psychological process of sublimation and Winnicott's mirror-stage, in which the drive for parental figures is redirected onto the chosen family.

The magical orphan and the queer child must redefine their understanding of family through the language of the Symbolic and begin to create a space for family that looks different to what they expected. Cixous writes of the ease of loving, and difficulties of being loved, in a way that speaks to the loneliness, and the chronic alone-ness, of the supernatural protagonist in *The Book of Promethea:*

> It is easy to love and sing one's love ... But to be loved, that is true greatness. Being loved, letting oneself be loved, entering the magic and dreadful circle of generosity, receiving gifts, finding the right thank-you's, that is love's real work (Cixous and Sellers 127).

Letting themselves be seen and known is challenging work for both the queer child and the magical orphan, who have been exposed to death and loss at an early stage of life, sometimes during the mirror stage. Winnicott's theory of the mirror stage is more appropriate than Freud's in considerations of the chosen family, as it demonstrates the possibility for sublimation onto friends. Deborah Anna Luepnitz describes Winnicott's mirror stage:

> Winnicott's mirror stage is straightforward and full of promise. The True Self of every individual is called into being in the mirroring gaze of the good-enough mother. Absent such a mother, the individual has a second chance with a good-enough analyst who can foster the self's coherence and experience of wholeness (961).

The magical orphan in fantasy fiction does not access a psychological analyst, instead the role of good-enough mother/good-enough analyst is filled by chosen family. The family-of-friends mirrors wholeness and compassionate flexibility to the magical orphan. They help the magical orphan to embrace their liminal identities. Most importantly, they do not provide guidance in the form of irrational rules and judgement, but are a source of love that is sublimated in the orphan's mind as the family unit. This love provides the stability and comfort that would traditionally come from parental figures.

Sublimation is an actively social process and refers to the tendency to displace instinctual urges into alternative avenues. Anna Freud describes it as the "refinement of an impulse" and as "the experience of playing in and with the world" (in Lewkowich 312). It occurs through connection with others and is, thus, subject to social and cultural systems. Sublimation also involves the socio-cultural linguistic system into which one is socialised, and which performs a regulatory function (Lewkowich 312-314). Lewkowich argues that sublimation is a way to consider the "uses and failures of language and human expression—not as a marker of ineptitude or detriment, but as a normal (if also uncertain) function of human growth" (314). Sublimating familial urges onto chosen family is, therefore, not psychologically unhealthy. On the contrary, it may be a way of moving towards complex subjectivity, particularly for the child who has experienced early loss and has consequently moved into a prematurely adult identity.

Sublimation onto the chosen family is especially relevant in middle-grade fantasy because the magical orphan, while often lonely, is rarely alone. The magical orphan and the queer child require a family-of-friends around them as they explore the world through play. Richard Klein provides a tidy summation of the importance of play in connection when arguing that "we must include the mutual belief principle, as it were, in the definition of play. Its construction requires other bodies to be present in the play. No play without bodies!" (132). The magical orphan requires other bodies—a family of friends—to play with as they figure out what being in the world looks like for them. A rejection of adult guides results in peer groups primarily becoming the chosen family, though at times, sympathetic adults may be integrated.

Expressions of the chosen family that involve adults in middle-grade fantasy are largely healthy examples of connection and belonging. This version of family

maintains de-hierachised conditions of the chosen family, conveying belonging based on acceptance of difference. Sulway and Rodda provide examples of the beauty and success of the chosen family that includes adults, creating space for home and belonging in places outside of the idealised patriarchal family.

Sulway explores the validity of queer chosen family and the supernatural orphan through Winter's final placement with a family. From the beginning, Fox and Bo are openly loving and accepting of all Winter's eccentricities and the myriad of intersections of identity that they inhabit. This culminates on the very last page of the book with Winter displaying vulnerability and providing the opportunity for their chosen family to support them. Sulway writes:

> 'Who's there?' Winter says, waking from a dream of sunlight falling through a forest, of a crowned hare who leaps through worlds, and of a family all of Winter's own. A real family, formed of love. 'We are,' they say—the crowned hare, and Bo and Fox and Wren— 'we're always here' (74).

This queer family does not represent patriarchal family. Alterity is not cause for hierarchy, and all members of the chosen family participate equally. The adults in this family hold no more power than a hare from the Otherworld or a non-binary supernatural orphan.

Rodda similarly demonstrates this de-hierarchisation and rejection of adultism in modelling the possibilities of child-adult relationships. In *The Shop at Hooper's Bend,* both characters, Quil, the child, and Bailey, the adult, are learning to coexist. They are biologically unrelated but fated to a shared destiny in the magic store. Quil is relieved to find a friend, not a parent, in Bailey. Rodda writes:

> She [Bailey] just nodded, taking Quil at her word, and went on with the inspections of the yard. This mightn't have suited some people, but it suited Quil. She knew that Bailey was behaving as she would want Quil to behave if their positions were reversed. Bailey was giving

> her room to breathe. It was a huge relief. It meant that instead of feeling weird and troublesome, Quil felt respected and understood. It meant that instead of feeling besieged, so that all she could think of was her need to escape and find a place to hide, she could stay where she was and recover in her own way. And it made her realise that whatever niggling doubts the warning email might have roused, Bailey knew, deep down, that she and Quil were two of a kind (157-158).

Quil and Bailey embrace chosen family through the possibilities of connection in expressions of home.

In these two examples, middle-grade fantasy explores ways of being in non-traditional family structures that include adults. However, in most representations of chosen family in the novels that I analyse, the chosen family consists of peers only.

Carter's Corpse, in *A Girl Called Corpse,* romanticises notions of patriarchal family. She had her memories of life stripped when she died, as happens for all ghosts in Carter's world. Corpse finds herself outside a house with a blue kitchen, watching the family inside. The family is queer, with two 'mothers' and a son, but they are performing Corpse's idealised concept of family. This expression of family is performed in the kitchen where the body as well as familial connections are nourished. Corpse realises that the dark magic surrounding the house cannot enter it and seems to withdraw from the obvious signs of love in the home. Carter narrates how this moment influences Corpse's expectations around family:

> Whenever I imagine fleshie families, they all looked like the one in the house with the little blue kitchen. They were happy and full and untouched by dark magic. I'd never really stopped to think that there might be kids living with dead parents. It reminds me of something Girl said to me, right before she slipped away into Death Proper. She told me that things don't always look the way you imagined them. She said *family* doesn't always look the way you imagined it (144-145).

As it turns out, Girl did not pass into Death Proper but was banished by magic from the shack they inhabited, together with Corpse's friend Simon, a huntsman spider.

Their reunion and its impact on Corpse's ability to wield magic forces Corpse to sublimate her parental fixation onto her family of friends. Her strange assortment of friends–another ghost child and a spider–looks nothing like the family in the blue kitchen. Corpse realises that the family that she has, not the idealised family, creates a charge of love that intensifies her magic. Corpse no longer needs the spellspring because her chosen family is a more reliable source of magic:

> Part of me wants to tell her [Girl] about the house with the little blue kitchen, and about how the family that lived inside it seemed able to make magic out of nothing. Part of me wants to say that I think I might have been using that *same* kind of magic for a while now, without even realising it. Part of me wants to explain to Girl that I'm pretty sure I stopped drawing magic from underneath the rock-that-doesn't-exist ages ago—but that I didn't know it. I mean if I'm right about all that … it would explain a *lot*. It would explain why, up in the roof I share with Simon, I never felt my magic fading, even though down below the Witches were growing weaker by the day. It would explain why last night, even *before* I was reunited with my heart, my spells worked just fine. And it would explain why the Witches and the Merchant needed a Spellspring so desperately—because none of them have magic like the family in the little blue kitchen have. Like *I* have (316-318).

In Corpse's world, adults are dangerous, so there is no room for them in her chosen family. However, her family of friends is a portable protection from the shadows of dark magic. They are her little blue kitchen. This family of friends requires nothing from Corpse, just that she love them and that she let herself be loved. This condition of reciprocity and obligation in family is interrogated in *Nevermoor.*

The Wundrous Society in Townsend's *Nevermoor* series presents the false promise of the patriarchal family: one that is contingent on supernatural ability and the willingness to participate in exercising power over others. Morrigan is lonely and

marginalised when she learns about the Wundrous Society; she immediately sublimates her desire for a family onto this institutional organisation. She is starved for love, and does not question whether a hegemonic institution can function as a family. Morrigan's potentially dangerous abilities as a Wundersmith outstrip the powers of the leaders of the Wundrous Society, therefore, her desires for connection and belonging sit uneasily with the institution. Morrigan, however, only sees her great desire for family realised in being admitted to the Society. Townsend writes:

> It made sense to her now. Jupiter carried himself like a king, like he was surrounded by an invisible bubble that protected him from all the bad things in life. He knew there were people in the world—somewhere out there—who loved him. Who would always love him. No matter what. *That* was what he was offering her. Like a bowl of hot, meaty stew to a hungry pauper, he held in his hands the thing she most craved. And suddenly Morrigan's hunger burned. She wanted to join the Society. She wanted brothers and sisters. She wanted it more than she'd ever wanted *anything* (159).

The promise of brothers and sisters is so enticing to Morrigan because, as an only child, she has no frame of reference for such relationships. She imagines that a patriarchal expression of family, with its notions of possession, and clearly defined roles, will provide her with the stability she craves. As Morrigan explores her subjectivity, and undertakes the trials for entry into the Wundrous Society, it becomes clear to her that she does not fit. Her sense of self is incongruent with her identity markers, particularly the threatening ambiguities of orphanhood and queering of hegemonic femininity. These irredeemably reveal her Otherness and complicate her sense of home and belonging.

Gender Ambiguity and the Magical Orphan

Gender ambiguity or transgression is used to disrupt many patriarchal norms and re-frame identity conventions. Academic consensus in gender and queer studies is that gender is a performance, and that the performance of gender is arbitrary (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). There is a marked difference between sex and gender, which Marinucci describes succinctly when arguing that, “gender refers to the mind, while sex refers to the body” (Marinucci 92). Butler writes that “psychoanalysis poses the difficult question of how ‘the subject is not the same as the body from which it emerges’” (in Lewkowich 313-4). The body from which the self enacts being does not necessarily constrain the performance of gender. The intersections of identity are complex and large in number, but gender is one of the most visible and, therefore, the most socio-culturally regulated.

Any performance of self or identity that falls outside of the narrow normative expectations for the alignment of sex and gender is marked as queer. Pugh defines queerness as transgression when positing that queer is not a synonym for homosexual (6), but rather functions as a “descriptor of disruptions to prevailing cultural codes of sexual and gender normativity” (6). William Turner argues that the term queer “indicates a failure to fit not only into categories of sexual identity but also categories of gender identity” (in Pugh 6). Gender identity is more likely to be queered than sexual identity in middle-grade fantasy, as eight-to-twelve-year-olds are still firmly relegated to the realm of childhood. Due to patriarchal conditions of presumed heterosexuality, literature aimed at this group largely avoids any suggestion of sexuality in children, even as it predominantly models heterosexual normativity in adult relationships .

The most persistent narrative about childhood sexuality is that "children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions. At the same time, however, children are also officially, tacitly, assumed to be heterosexual" (Bruhm and Hurley in Pugh 11). However, contemporary children's literature does contain seeds of queering heterosocial norms, and Kenneth Kidd suggests that this occurs predominantly through character. Kidd argues:

> Literary queerness—which may or may not be expressed in terms of sexuality or gender identification—manifests itself at the level of character, in the form of singular or eccentric kids like Jo March, or Harriet the Spy, or Pippi Longstocking. Resisting growing up or marriage, some such characters are rehabilitated through heteronormative plots … while others manage to hold on to queerness indefinitely (185).

Small, independent acts of defiance such as refusing to marry, or determinedly avoiding adult responsibilities, transgress cis-normative and heteronormative expectations and create space to consider other ways of being. Coats continues this argument by dissecting the way Pippi Longstocking queers gender roles. She argues that as a female-gendered person existing in the phallogocentric Symbolic, there are behavioural expectations placed upon Pippi that she ignores. Coats writes:

> In truth, a person cannot walk any way she wants to in the Symbolic. Bodies, postures, attitudes, behaviours are all prescribed in the male-order Symbolic, and yet until someone comes along to challenge them, these prescriptions generally do not reveal themselves as such. The female in the Symbolic may offer that challenge; the queer subject certainly does (Coats 111).

Any body which queers and makes visible the nuances of gender expression is doing the work of challenging the phallogocentric predispositions of patriarchy.

I contend that middle-grade fantasy is a subgenre in which gender conventions are not merely transgressed, but in which the *entredeux* between the gender binary is celebrated. Writing is a powerful tool for exploring the performativity

of gender and questioning the normative notions about gender expression. Cixous's *écriture féminine* serves a revolutionary social function with the potential to enact real change, with Cixous arguing that "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change,* the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (*Laugh of the Medusa* 879). She perceives this transformation as potentially explosive to the oppressive patriarchal conventions of language and social convention. Thus, feminine writing "has two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* 875). Cixous goes on to explore how this rejection of phallogocentrism celebrates the subtleties in *entredeux* between the gender binaries:

> A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic … There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter. For once she blazes *her* trail in the symbolic, she cannot fail to make of it the chaosmos of the 'personal'—in her pronouns, her nouns, and her clique of referents (*Laugh of the Medusa* 888).

These processes of making the chaosmos of the personal visible through feminine writing are explored through subtle diversity. Magical orphans and queer children learn the rules of the Symbolic, then they reject them. They 'shatter the framework of the institutions' that oppress and contain their magic, or that attempt to control or wield it in service of hierarchies. In these worlds of magic, magical children can become whatever they narrate themselves to be, and this can be used as a tool for negotiating challenges (Fleishbein 234). The ability to celebrate alterity and potentiality are undoubtedly expressions of the new queer literature and are evident in many examples of contemporary fantasy.

According to Jennifer Miller “new queer children’s literature constructs children as decision makers, aware of their desire and deserving of respect and support” (1663). I have demonstrated the way that these texts reject adultism in favour of the chosen family, and this empowerment continues in discourses of gender expression. There is an awareness of the socio-cultural implications of queer gender expression, but it does not define the way that magical children exist. Miller argues that, instead, “norms are constantly negotiated and renegotiated” (1647). This contemporary exploration normalises many expressions of gender as valid (except toxic masculinity—see the section on the Monstrous Male Witch in the chapter *Witches: Gender and the Patriarchy*). Despite many aspects of gender normativity being challenged, gender diversity is often stabilised by the presence of patriarchally-endorsed gender identities. Jennifer Mitchell argues that this is because “gender ambiguity must be framed by easily identifiable, stable gender identity to be ‘appropriate’ for children” (36). This serves the dual purpose of normalising a range of gender performances, and providing a point of alterity from which to celebrate difference.

The grift of biological sex and gender expression overlapping perfectly is disregarded in the exploration of complex subjectivity. Miller argues:

> I differentiate transgender and gender creative identities and performativities to account for the variations in representations that comprise new queer children’s literature … many characters who populate the emerging subgenre do not reject their birth sex assignment but instead seek to complicate dominant gender constructions by suggesting that there are many ways to be a boy (or girl) (1662).

I would extend this statement by suggesting that there are many ways to be a boy, a girl, both, or neither. Liminal gender expression is as valid as binarised expressions. One may express gender along a broad spectrum of possibilities that is entirely

separate from biological sex. One such expression of queer gender performativity in children's literature is camp masculinity.

Masculinity may be queered in children's literature without being threatening through expressions of campness. Miller describes camp as a rejection of hegemonic performances of masculinity, arguing that campness is a "flamboyant performance of gender that engages a camp aesthetic frequently associated with gay men" (1664). Susan Sontag describes camp as a "love of the unnatural: or artifice and exaggeration. Camp is inappropriate because it is excessive" (in Miller 1664). Camp may be perceived as inappropriate due to its transgression of normalised masculinity, but it shares some characteristics with wonder, and magic, particularly in terms of its capacity to connect subjectivity with playfulness. Miller continues:

> Homosexuals are at the forefront of creating camp as a sensibility and aesthetic that centers playfulness and pleasure. I suggest that camp is a device used in new queer children's literature to present homosexuality while desexualising it (1664).

Camp, then, is a device for exploring the intersections of gender and sexuality, challenging cis-gender heteronormativity in a way that is useful and understandable to children. Camp creates space for joy within the oppressive gender systems of the Symbolic, celebrating play as a means of empowerment that is not threatening, but expansive, colourful, full of wonder, and possibility.

Townsend has created a character of camp joy in Jupiter North. Her *Nevermoor* series rejects many gender norms and subtly questions socio-cultural assumptions through complex characterisation. The first time Jupiter appears on the page, he is described with vividness and colour that immediately rejects patriarchal masculinity. Townsend writes:

> All six-plus feet of him were decked out in a long blue coat over a slim suit with mother-of-pearl buttons—stylish but slightly askew, as if he'd just come from a formal event and was in the process of undressing on his way home. Pinned to the lapel of his coat was a small golden W (52).

Jupiter's entire being speaks of joy and possibility, with an irreverence that insinuates that he does not take himself too seriously, though he does take play very seriously. He tells Morrigan: "Death is boring. Life is much more fun. Things happen in life all the time. Unexpected things. Things you couldn't possibly expect because they're so very ... unexpected" (Townsend 59). Camp, as the pursuit of playfulness and pleasure, is at the core of this philosophy.

Camp, as both an aesthetic and a way of life, also influences Jupiter's use of magic. To whisk Morrigan away from her oppressive patriarchal family and into a life of possibility and transgression in Nevermoor, Jupiter confounds her family with sparkle and sorcery:

> In a rush of sudden movement Jupiter pulled a handful of silver dust from his pocket and blew it towards Corvus, Ivy and Grandmother like a cloudy, starry kiss, then leapt up to the window and ripped down the curtain, dropping it in a crumpled, messy pile in the middle of the floor. He stood back to gaze at his handiwork and shook his head slowly, mournfully. 'I am *so* sorry. How tragic to have lost her so young' (Townsend 60).

Jupiter is unconcerned with all manner of patriarchal norms, and he also encourages Morrigan to embrace camp. Their personalities are diametrically opposed, but his celebration of individual subjectivity gives Morrigan permission to explore her identity in a way that rejects socio-cultural pressures and norms.

This is not to say that fantasy fiction does not also represent more conservative gender roles. Patriarchal expectations for gender performance are often articulated if only to be broken. Abela's protagonist experiences self-doubt due

to his inability to perform hegemonic masculinity. Arlo tells Lisette that he cannot perform the role of masculine hero:

> ‘I’m no hero, look at me.’ He pulled up his sleeve to show his puny arm.
> ‘You are!’ Lisette said, as if he was missing the point.
> ‘Your mum told me! *And* you’ve read enough books to be an expert’ (Abela 85).

Lisette affirms for Arlo that there is more than one way to perform masculinity, and that a small, bookish boy can be a hero.

Likewise, Tanner constructs an image of patriarchal femininity. She takes pains to describe the image of queenly perfection. Throughout the novel, Tanner asserts that a queen does not sigh (18) or roll her eyes (21); she is always grateful (79), does not ask pointless questions, or sulk (83). She is always obedient, and she must never behave like a burglar (170). Then, Tanner subverts all these norms by exploring complex femininities that are valid and variable.

Then there is Winter, Sulway’s non-binary protagonist, who needs a little help in feeling confident in their gender non-specificity. When Winter arrives to live with Bo and Fox, the waiting bedroom has clearly been created for a person who conforms to patriarchal femininity. They immediately internalise these expectations and conclude that Winter themself is lacking or wrong. Sulway writes that “everything is crisp and clean and pretty. Winter feels very, very small. And very, very dirty” (13). Rather than attempt to change Winter to fit the space, their new parents recognise that this is not a space where Winter will feel belonging. “’It still needs a little work,’ they say together” (Sulway 13), immediately validating Winter’s gender identity and their right to exist in a space that reflects their gender expression.

Therein lies the core of radical Otherness. Marginalised identities are valid and worthy. The radical Otherness that is represented by the magical orphan and the

queer child cannot be mediated entirely by the characters themselves. Radical Otherness reflects the permanence of some identity markers: orphaned children have dead parents, and queer children do not represent or perform cis-gendered heterosexuality. Contemporary middle-grade fantasy responds to these permanent conditions of identity and presents the marginalisation of these characters as an opportunity. Magical orphans and queer characters do not generally attempt to find belonging or affirmation within patriarchal communities or contexts. Instead, as exiles, or unacknowledged sovereigns, they speak the language of excess through magic in a critique of hegemonic power. They use the dual knowledge gained from these challenges, transmogrifying barriers and boundaries into thresholds to the camp margins of society, where they can experience growth, belonging, and empowerment. This process demonstrates the potential of identity to be nuanced, and the possibility of creating and maintaining strong socio-cultural connections outside of hegemonic power. Representations of the orphaned child and the queer child expose the ways that transgressing patriarchal norms reframes identity conventions and ways of being in the world.

CONCLUSION: CHAOSMOS

‘Step boldly,’ Morrigan whispered.
Then she closed her eyes.
And jumped (Townsend 97).

In conversation with my children and their friends, I discovered that duality, nuance, and possibility may be held loosely and with little conflict. Many things can be true about a person, even if they appear to be contradictory. A person may be this *and* this: both or neither. Fluid subjectivity may also change from moment to moment. My interaction with diverse identities, through and with my children fuelled my explorations into contemporary Australian middle-grade fantasy fiction. I discovered that they may be onto something.

I argue that this notion that identity can be fluid, and can be held loosely, is congruent with Cixous’s Haunted-I (Cixous and Sellers xiiiv). The ‘I’ who faces the world at any given moment is the spokesperson, in that temporal moment, for the chaos of complex identity. The I-who-speaks is not reflective of wholeness or entirely representative of the being in question. Cixous writes “to rise above the interior chaosmos each one of us gives ourselves a spokesperson I, the social I who votes, who represents me” (Cixous and Sellers xviii). The I-who-speaks is one aspect of an intricate but united being. In abjuring standards of patriarchal appropriateness, the chaosmos of fluid identity need not be perceived as disarray. The complex self is not dangerous and does not need to be controlled. The chaosmos of self is legitimate and whole. This loosely held, complex identity is what I found represented in contemporary fantastic literature.

Finally, I came to understand the complexity of the question at the heart of this project, and how important this work is for modern conceptions of being-in-the-world.

Magic and identity interact and inform one another to challenge traditional ways of constructing identities in society. The overlapping processes of magic and self-creation reflect the challenges faced by Australian children with nuanced and diverse identities in. Herein lies the value of my research in extending and challenging traditional heteronormative and patriarchal representations of the process of identity formation.

Questioning and transgressing patriarchal boundaries and binaries creates space for the unknown and for an expanding field of possibilities. The linguistic process of de-hierarchisation is celebrated through the potential of transgression, and by characters who are empowered by their experiences of marginalisation to choose an unknown path of magic. *Écriture féminine* facilitates the undoing of phallogocentric processes, and frames the re-structuring of unprecedented liminal identities that can thrive in empowerment, despite marginalisation. Cixous describes the complexity of the unknown with both depth and simplicity: “Loving not knowing. Loving: not knowing” (*Rootprints* 17). This is a succinct summation of stories about contemporary, empowered, literary magic-wielders. The role of magic in fantasy is to explore not knowing and to suggest that *something else* is not just possible, but might be wonderful.

Attebery writes of magic, and Tolkien’s process of recovery through the fantastic that:

> The illusion is that the world has become trite or stale. To dispel (or dis-spell) it, it is necessary to see things in new ways, but rather than making familiar objects seem disconcerting or alien, he [Tolkien] thought fantasy could restore them to the vividness with which we first saw them. He called the process ‘recovery’ (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 16).

To my mind, recovery does not involve regression to a conservative past that would dominate growth or stifle progress, but is, instead, a process through which we gain renewed energy for exploring the world, and self-in-the-world, with curious eyes. Recovery is an anticipation of wonder, a re-thinking and re-visioning of possibilities.

Throughout this dissertation, I have applied insights gained from contemporary scholarship about Australian children's literature, and theories of intersectional feminism, deconstruction, and psychoanalytic linguistics, to a wide range of middle-grade fantasy novels written for children. Using close reading and thematic analysis, I interrogated representations of identity and magic, paying close attention to how they intersect with ideas about gender; belonging in space, place, and community; perception and embodiment; fate; and, finally, the Radical Otherness of orphanhood and queerness. Critically, I have explored the ways that *écriture féminine* can inform and extend critical analysis of identity in children's fantastic literature, which, to my knowledge, has not been done before. Reading these works through the lens of Cixous's theoretical work affirms the complexity, sensitivity, and relevance of fantastic literature for young readers, particularly in terms of its engagement with contemporary experiences of identity formation and belonging. Put simply, the application of *écriture féminine* to Australian middle-grade fantasy literature exposes the possibility for nuanced, valid, and diverse identities.

I do concede that the representation of diverse empowerment of characters in the data set is relatively narrow. This has provided me with the opportunity to provide close analysis across a range of texts, but the text selection is limited in terms of the range of diverse characters it explores and represents. Diversity of disability, ethnicity, and gender are still reasonably central to hegemonic power as it is presented in Australian culture, and there remains plenty of room to showcase a

greater number of richly diverse characters. However, my research has demonstrated that individual empowerment is possible and that empowerment, and belonging, can be found outside the patriarchal locus of control. One might examine these underrepresented identities more closely in other literary works using my framework as a methodology, as the empowerment, normalisation, and celebration of diverse individuality represented in the texts examined here can be extrapolated onto a great number of diverse identities. When magic and identity intersect with thematic discourses of belonging, corporeality, and Otherness, the resulting empowerment can be applied to identities outside of those specifically mentioned in this dissertation. Further, the critical framework I have applied to analysing children's fantastic literature may be applied to alternative sets of texts in order to explore representations of diversity in an infinite number of socio-cultural contexts.

Cixous writes: "words are our doors to all the other worlds" (Cixous and Sellers xxvii), and, indeed, this project has demonstrated how literature creates liminal spaces within and through which we can travel. These explorations of other ways of being-in-the-world expose a multitude of possibilities that reveal traditional patriarchal roles and expectations to be, not merely arbitrary, but irrelevant for the nuanced diversity of the future. For individuals like my children and their peers, this is powerful magic.

WORKS CITED

Abela, Deborah. *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*. Puffin, 2022.

Ahmed, Sara. “Travelling with Strangers.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2021, pp. 8-23. *EBSCOhost E-Journals*, doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1859204.

Almog, Nadav. *Home and the Unheimlich in Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century.* 2021. University of Haifa, PhD Dissertation. *ProQuest*, proquest.com/dissertations-theses/home-unheimlich-childrens-fantasy-literature/docview/2723855864/se-2.

Anderson, Linda. “Autobiography and Exile: Edward Said’s *Out of Place.” Edward Said and the Literary, Social, and Political World*. Edited by Ranjan Ghosh, *Routledge,* 2009. *ProQuest Academic Complete*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy-usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/.detail?docID=425503.

Anderson, Nicole. “Derrida’s Language: Play, *Différance* and (Con)text.” *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, edited by Benoît Dillet et al, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 249-69. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?DOCID=1962214.

Anderson, Pamela Sue. “Writing on Exiles and Excess: Toward a New Form of Subjectivity.” *Self/Same/Other: Re-Visioning the Subject in Literature and Theology*, edited by Heather Walton and Andrew W. Hass, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1644322.

Andrade, Gabriel. “René Girard (1923-2015).” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden. iep.utm.edu/girard/#SH3c.

Anstey, Michéle, and Bull, Geoff. *Reading the Visual: Written and Illustrated Children’s Literature*. Harcourt, 2000.

Armstrong, Sarah. *Big Magic.* Hardie Grant, 2022.

Attebery, Brian. “Reinventing Masculinity in Fairy Tales by Men.” *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2018, pp. 314-36. *ProQuest Central*, DOI: 10.16110/marvelstales.32.2.0314.

--- *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth.* Oxford UP, 2014. *ProQuest EBook Central*, DOI: 1561208.

--- *Strategies of Fantasy*. Indiana UP, 1992.

Bacchilega, Cristina. *Fairy Tales Transformed: Twenty-First-Century Adaptation & the Politics of Wonder*. Wayne State UP, 2013.

Barrie, J. M., *Peter Pan [Peter Pan and Wendy]*. Project Gutenberg, 1991. *EBSCOHost, search*.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1002100&site=ehost-live.

Booth, Emily, and Narayan, Bhuva. “Identifying Inclusion: Publishing Industry Trends and the Lack of #OwnVoives Australian Young Adult Fiction.” *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2021, pp. 1-38. *SOPHIA*, sophia.stkate.edu.rdyl/vol3/iss1/12.

---, Kwaymullina, Ambelin, and Lim, Rebecca. “Investigating the Publication of OwnVoices Australian Picture Books in 20018.” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 37, 2021, pp. 27-40. *SpringerLink,* doi.org/10.100/s12109-020-09777-3.

Bottigheimer, Ruth. B. “An Important System of Its Own: Defining Children’s Literature.” *The Princeton University Library Catalogue*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1998, pp. 191-210, jstor.org/stable/10.25290/prinunivlibrchro.59.2.0191.

Bould, Mark, and Vint, Sherryl. “Political Readings.” *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 102-112. *Cambridge University Press*, doi.org.10.1017.CCOL9780521429597.010.

Bradford, Clare. “Instilling Postcolonial Nostalgias: Ned Kelly Narratives for Children.” *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 191-206, 2012. *Routledge*, DOI: 10.1080/14443058.2012.674545.

--- “The Return of the Fairy: Australian Medievalist Fantasy for the Young.” *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 314, pp. 115-32, 2011. *EBSCOHost*, DOI: 0049697.

--- “The Stolen Generations of Australia: Narratives of Loss and Survival.” *International Research in Children’s Literature,* Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 242-58, 2020. *Edinburgh University Press*, DOI: 10.3366/ircl.2020.0356.

Braun, Virginia, and Clarke, Victoria. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77-101, 2008. *Taylor and Francis Online*, DOI: 10.1191/147808876qp063oa.

Brekhus, Wayne H. “Marked and Unmarked: A Semiotic Distinction for Concept-driven Interpretive Sociology.” *Interpretive Sociology and the Semiotic Imagination*, Bristol UP, 2023, pp. 31-51. *Cambridge EBA ebooks Complete Collection,* doi.org/10.51952/9781529211764.ch001.

Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, 2nd Edition. Blackwell, 1996.

Buys, Anthea and Polatinsky, Stefan. “The Provocation of Hélène Cixous: Philosophy in Poetic Overflow.” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2009, pp. 79-93. *ProQuest Central*, proquest.com/scholarly-journals/provocation-hélène-cixous-philosophy-poetic/docview/205370823/se-2.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990.

Carey, John. “Time, Space, and the Otherworld.” *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium,* Vol. 7, 1987, pp.1-27. *JSTOR,* jstor.org/stable/20557183.

Carroll, Jane Suzanne. *Landscape in Children’s Literature*, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?docID=995666.

Carter, Reece. *A Girl Called Corpse*. Allen and Unwin, 2022.

Cashdan, Sheldon. *The Witch Must Die: How Fairy Tales Shape Our Lives*. Basic Books, 1999.

Cave, Terence. “Unsettling Thresholds: Mignon and her Afterlives.” Edited by Subha Mukherji. *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive* Spaces. Anthem Press, 2001.

Cixous, Héléne. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Translated by Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1997, pp. 875-93. *JSTOR*,.jstor.org/stable/3173239.

---. and Calle-Gruber, Mireille. *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing.* Routledge, 1997.

--- and Sellers. *The Hélène Cixous Reader*. 1st ed., Routledge, 1995, doi.org/10.4324/9780203408483.

Clark, Samantha. "Strange Strangers and Uncanny Hammers: Morton's *The Ecological Thought* and the Phenomenological Tradition." *Green Letters*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2013, pp. 98-108. *EBSCOHost E-Journals*, DOI: 10.1080/14688417.2013.800330.

Coats, Karen. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire and Subjectivity in Children's* Literature. University of Iowa Press, 2004.

Connell, R.W., and Messerschmidt, James W. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 2005, pp. 829-59. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/27640853.

Crain, Elizabeth A. *The Power of the Other: A Character Analysis of the Orphan Figure in Children's Literature.* 2016. The University of Memphis, PhD Dissertation. *ProQuest*, proquest.com/dissertations-theses/power-other-character-analysis-orphan-figure/docview/1885068987/se-2.

Crenshaw, Kimberle W. "The Intersection of Race and Gender Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Kimberle Crenshaw et al., The New Press, 1995, pp. 357-383.

--- et al. "The Search for an Oppositional Voice." *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Kimberle Crenshaw et al., The New Press, 1995, p. 314.

Curtis, James. M. "*In Absentia Parentis*: Confronting the Uncanny Orphan in Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4. 2015, pp. 355-70. *ProQuest*, proquest.com.scholarly-journals/absentia-parentis-confronting-uncanny-orphan/docview/1752112329/se-2.

Derrida, Jacques. "From Dissemination From Plato's Pharmacy." *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1697-1727.

---. *Limited Inc*. Northwestern University Press, 1997.

---. “Of Grammatology.” *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1688-90.

---. *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

---. *The Ear of the Other*: *Otobiography, Transference, Translation.* Edited by Christie McDonald, Translated by Peggy Kamuf, Bison Books, 1988.

---. “The Exorbitant Question of Method.” *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1691-7.

---. *Writing and Difference*. Translated Alan Bass, Routledge, 1967.

Doecke, Brenton. “What Kind of ‘Knowledge’ is English? (Re-Reading the Newbolt Report).” *Changing English*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2017, pp. 230-45. *Routledge*, 10.1080/1358684x.2017.1351228.

Doughty, Terri. “Dreaming Into Being: Liminal Spaces in Charles De Lint’s Young Adult Mythic Fiction.” *Knowing Their Place? Identity and Space in Children’s Literature*, edited by Terri Doughty, and Dawn Thompson, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib.usq/detail.action?docID=1106975.

Dudek, Debra. “Dogboys and Lost Things; or Anchoring a Floating Signifier: Race and Critical Multiculturalism.” *A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 1-20, 2006. *Google Scholar,* DOI: 10.21153/pecl2007vol17no2art1189.

---. “Seeing the Human Face: Refugee and Asylum Seeker Narratives and An Ethics of Care in Recent Australian Picture Books.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 363-76, 2018. *ProQuest One Academic*, DOI: 10.1353/chq.2018.0044.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and English, Deirdre. *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. Feminist Press, 1973.

Ekman, Stefan. *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Maps and Settings,* Wesleyan UP, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?docID=1138146.

Mohácsi, Eszter. "Littoral Space and Self-Discovery: Stanley Middleton's *Holiday*, Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*, and Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*."

HJEAS: Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2021, pp. 371-389*. ProQuest Academic Complete*, proquest.com/scholarly-journals/littoral-space-self-discovery-stanley-middletons/docview/2630321119/se-2.

Fienberg, Anna, Fienberg, Barbara, and Gamble, Kim. *Tashi and the Baba Yaga*. Allen and Unwin, 2006.

Fisher, Mark. *The Weird and the Eerie*. Repeater Books, 2016.

Flanagan, Victoria. "A Similarity or Difference: The Problem of Race in Australian Picture Books." *A Journal of International Children's Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2013, pp. 13-22. *EBSCOHost E-Journals*, 10.1353/bkb.2013.0032.

Fleischbein, Rene. "New Hero: Metafictive Female Heroism in *Fire and Hemlock*." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2010, pp. 233-45. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/24352207.

Flieger, Verlyn. "How Trees Behave—Or Do They?" *Mythlore*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2013, pp. 19-31. *EBSCOHost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=his&AN=91652092&site=ehost-live.

Forrester, Sibelan et al. *Baba Yaga: Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales*, University Press of Mississippi, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.exproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?docID=1113458.

Foster, Kevin R. and Kokko, Hanna. "The Evolution of Superstitious and Superstition-Like Behaviour." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, Vol.276, No. 1654, 2009, pp. 31-37. *PubMed Central*, doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2008.0981.

Foxlee, Karen. *Dragon Skin*. Allen and Unwin, 2021.

Frank, Arthur. "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2002, pp. 109-117. *Sage Journals*, DOI: 10.1177/160940690200100102.

French, Jackie. *A Phaery Named Phredde and Other Stories to Eat With a Banana*. HarperCollins, 1999.

Freud, Sigmund. "From the Interpretation of Dreams." *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 814-18.

---. “From The Uncanny.” *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 824-841.

Ganguly, Keya. “Exile as a Political Aesthetic.” *After Said: Post-Colonial Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century,* Edited by Bashir Abu-Manneh, Cambridge UP*,* 2018*.* Cambridge *EBA Ebooks Complete Collection*, doi.org/10.1017/9781108554251.005.

Gilead, Sarah. “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction.” *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No. 2, 1991, pp. 277-93. *JSTOR*, jstor.com/stable/462663.

Griesinger, Emily. “Harry Potter and the ‘Deeper Magic’: Narrating Hope in Children’s Literature.” *Christianity and Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Spring 2002, pp. 455-80. *JSTOR*, jstor.com/stable/44313128.3.

Guanio-Uluru, Lykke. “Vegetable Violence: The Agency, Personhood and Rhetorical Role of Vegetables in Andy Griffiths’ and Terry Denton’s *The 52-Storey Treehouse.” Plants in Children's and Young Adult Literature,* Edited by Melanie Duckworth and Lykke Guanio-Uluru, Routledge, 2021. *ResearchGate,* doi.org/10.4324/9781032066356.

Hamer, Naomi. “The City as a Liminal Site in Children’s Literature: Enchanted Realism with an Urban Twist.” *The Looking Glass*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2002. *Latrobe University*, ojs.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index,php/tlg/article/view/217.

Hamilton-McKenna, Caroline. “Beyond the Boundaries: Negotiations of Space, Place, Body, and Subjectivity in YA Fiction.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 2021, pp. 307-325. *EBSCOHost*, doi.org/10.1007/s10583-020-09419-4.

Harji, Maija-Liisa, and Rouse, Dawn. “Keeping Some Wildness Always Alive: Posthumanism and the Animality of Children’s Literature and Play.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, Vol. 49, No. 4, December 2018, pp. 447-66. *EBSCOhost*, doi-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.10071310583-017-93293.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black*. South End Press, 1989.

Hourigan, Daniel. “Literary Criticism as a Methodology.” *Research Methodology*, compiled by Martin Kerby, 2021, University of Southern Queensland.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Taylor and Francis Group, 2003, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1460970.

Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1993. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/edtail.action?docID=223794.

Jockers, Matthew. *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*. University of Illinois Press, 2013.

Johnston, Adrian. "Jacques Lacan." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018, plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/Lacan.

Johnston, Rosemary Ross. "In and Out of Otherness: Being and Not-Being in Children's Literature." *Neoheticon (Budapest),* Vol. 36, No. 1, 2009, pp. 45-54. *ProQuest Central*, 10.1007/S11059-009-1005-1.

Kidd, Kenneth. "Queer Theory's Child and Children's Literature Studies." *PMLA*, Vol. 126, No. 1, 2011, pp. 182-188. *JSTOR*, jstor.com/stable/41414090, accessed 10th September 2020.

Klein, Richard. "The Playful Thing." *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 131-6. *Routledge*, DOI: 10.1080/13642530802076177.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Blackwell, 1982.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*: *First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink, WW Norton and Company, 2006.

---. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis.* Translated by Alan Sheridan, Penguin, 1979.

Lamond, Margrete. "The Healing Magic of Joy: Understanding Magic as a Metaphor for Positive Emotion in *The Secret Garden*." *International Research in Children's Literature*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2015, pp. 127-41. *USQ Interlibrary Loan*, DOI: 10.3366/ircl.2015.0163.

Lasckiewicz, Weronika. "Into the Wild Woods: On the Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction." *Mythlore*, Vol. 36, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2017, pp. 39-58. *EBSCOHost,* search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=126046753&site=ehost-live.

Lewkowich, David. “The Nest of Sublimation: Creative Regression, Intolerable Loss, and Forbidden Desire in Dale Peck’s *Scout.” Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2016, pp. 312-30. *ProQuest*, proquest.com/scholarly-journals/nest-sublimation-creative-regression-intolerable/docview/1822614281/se-2.

Lipman, Martin A. “On Relativist Approaches to Many-One Identity.” *Synthese (Dordrecht)*, Vol. 198, No. 18, 2021, pp. 4453–65. *ProQuest Central,* doi.org/10.1007/s11229-018-01916-w.

Lock, Normal. “The Fairy Tale as X-Ray of the World Out of Joint.” *Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales*. Edited by Kate Bernheimer, Wayne State UP, 2007, pp. 93-6.

Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*,, Penguin Random House, 2018, pp. 19-24.

Lucey, Michael. “A Literary Object’s Contextual Life.” *Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture: A Companion to Comparative Literature*, First Edition. Edited by Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas, John Wiley and Sons, 2011, *ProQuest Ebook Central,* pp. 120-35, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=697789.

Luepnitz, Deborah Anna. “Thinking in the Space Between Winnicott and Lacan.” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 90, No. 5, 2009, pp. 957-81. *ProQuest*, proquest.com/scholarly-journals/thinking-space-between-winnicott-lacan/docview/203943634/se-2.

Maldonado, Jorge Luis. “The Effects of Negation on the Analyst-Analysand Relationship: the Paradoxes of Narcissism.” *On Freud’s Negation,* edited by Salman Akhtar and Mary Kay O’Neil, *Taylor and Francis*, 2011, pp. 180-95. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, *ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/edtail.action?docID=737841.*

Mallan, Kerry. “Picturing the Male: Representations of Masculinity in Picture Books.” *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children’s Literature*, edited by John Stephens and John A. Stephens. Taylor and

Francis, 2002. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1487098.

--- “Secret Spaces: Creating an Aesthetic of Imaginative Play in Australian Picture Books.” *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Vol. 29, pp. 167-84, 2003. *ProQuest One Academic*, DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1353/uni.2003.0019.

Manuel, Jacquelin and Carter, Don. “Resonant Continuities: the Influence of the Newbolt Report on the Formation of English Curriculum in New South Wales, Australia.” *English in Education*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2019, pp. 223-39. *Routledge*, 10.1080/04250494.2019.1625709.

Marinucci, Mimi. *The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory.* Zed Books, 2016. *EBSCOhost,* ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?docID=625225.

Maxwell, Joseph. A. and Chmiel, Margaret. “Notes Toward a Theory of Qualitative Data Analysis.” *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2003, pp. 21-34. *Research Methodology*, dx-doi-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.4135/978/446282243.n2.

Mbembé, Achille. “Necropolitics.” *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, pp. 11-40. *Project Muse,* doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

McKenna, Skye. *Hedgewitch*. Welbeck Flame, 2022.

Mejia, Michael. “Nobeard.” *Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales*. Edited by Kate Bernheimer, Wayne State UP, 2007, pp. 123-33.

Mendelsohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan UP, 2008. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, DOI: 1110030.

--- “Diana Wynne Jones and the Portal-Quest Fantasy.” *Diana Wynne Jones: The Fantastic Tradition and Children's Literature*, Taylor & Francis, 2005, pp. 79-100. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1397335..

Merriam, Sharan B et al. “Power and Positionality: Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status Within and Across Cultures.” *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vo. 20, No. 5, 2004, pp. 405-416. *Taylor and Francis Journals Complete,* DOI: 0.1080/02601370110059537.

Millard, Glenda. *Kingdom of Silk 1: The Naming of Tishkin Silk.* ABC Books, 2003.

Miller, Jennifer. “For the Little Queers: Imagining Queerness in ‘New’ Queer Children’s Literature.” *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 66, No. 12, 2019, pp. 1634-70. *Taylor and Francis*, doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1514204.

Miller, Jessica. *The Hotel Witch*, Text Publishing, 2023.

Mitchell, Jennifer. “A Sort of Mouse-Person:” Radicalizing Gender in *The Witches*.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 23. No. 1, 2012, pp. 24-39. *EBSCOhost*, jstor.org/stable/i24353143.

Moon, Katie, and Blackman, Deborah. “A Guide to Understanding Social Science Research for Natural Scientists.” *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2014, pp. 1167-1177. *Wiley Online Library,* DOI: 10.1111/cobi.12326.

Moya, Paula L. *The Social Imperative: Race, Close Reading, and Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Stanford UP, 2015. *Ebook Central,* ebookcentral-proquest-com-ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=4414760

Mukherji, Subha (editor). *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces*. Anthem Press, 2001.

Nodelman, Perry. “Making Boys Appear: The Masculinity of Children’s Fiction.” *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children’s Literature*, edited by John Stephens, Taylor and Francis, 2002. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.actioin?docID=1487098.

--- *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children’s Picture Books*, The University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Paur, Jasbir. K. and Rai, Amrit. “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots.” *Social Text*, Vol. 20, Bo. 3, 2002, pp. 117-48. *Project MUSE*, must.jhu.edu/article/31948.

Norton, Catherine. *The Fortune Maker*, Angus and Robertson, 2023.

Phillips, John W. “Derrida, Deconstruction and Method.” *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, edited by Benoît Dillet et al, Edinburgh UP, 2013, pp. 122-42. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?DOCID=1962214.

Pillinger, Emily. *Cassandra and the Poetics of Prophecy in Greek and Latin Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2019. *Cambridge EBA ebooks Complete Collection,* https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108564007.

Plozza, Shivaun. *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*. Puffin, 2022.

Pugh, Tison. *Innocence, Heterosexuality, and the Queerness of Children's Literature.* Taylor and Francis, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=668162.

Puri, Tara. "Hélène Cixous and the Play of Language." *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, edited by Benoît Dillet et al, Edinburgh UP, 2013, pp. 270-90. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?DOCID=1962214.

Reese, Ashley. N., and Spring, Erin. "'I've Never Belonged to Anybody—Not Really': Space, Place, and the Bildungsroman in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908)." *Nordic Journal of Children's Literature Aesthetics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1-10. *Idunn*, doi.org.10.18261/blft.13.1.5.

Reilly, Matthew. *Troll Mountain*. Pan Macmillan, 2014.

Reineke, Martha J. "After the Scapegoat: René Girard's Apocalyptic Vision and the Legacy of Mimetic Theory." *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2012, pp. 41-53. *ProQuest Central*, doi.org/10.5840/philtoday201256233.

Reynolds, Kimberley. "Come Lads and Ladettes: Gendering Bodies and Gendering Behaviors." *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature*, edited by John Stephens and John A. Stephens. *Taylor and Francis*, 2002. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1487098.

Richardson, Brian. "Singular Text, Multiple Implied Readers." *Style*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2007, pp. 259-74, 379-81. *ProQuest*, proquest.com/scholarly-journals/singular-text-multiple-implied-readers/docview/231192071/se-2.

Rodda, Emily. *The Shop at Hoopers Bend*. HarperCollins, 2017.

Roy, Kaustuv. *A Pedagogy of the Twice-Born*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. *Springerlink*, htt://doi.org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.1007/978-3-030-53548-3.

Said, Edward.W. "Culture and Imperialism." *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1888-1904.

---. “Orientalism.” *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1866-88.

Shelley, T.C. *The Monster Who Wasn’t*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Simon, Peter. “Jacques Lacan 1901-1981.” *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed., edited by Peter Simon, WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp. 1156-63.

Spufford, Francis. *The Child That Books Built.* Faber and Faber, 2002.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. “What Was ‘Close Reading’?: A Century of Method in Literary Studies.” *Minnesota Review*, No. 87, 2016, pp. 57-75. *Project Muse*, DOI: 0026-5667.

Sreenivas, Deepa. “Telling Different Tales: Possible Childhoods in Children’s Literature.” *Childhood*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Aug. 2011, pp. 316-22,DOI: 10.1177/0907568211407531.

Stephens, John. “Children’s Literature, Interdisciplinarity and Cultural Studies.” *Writing the Australian Child.* Edited by Clare Bradford. *University of Western Australia Press,* 1996.

--- “Editor’s Introduction: Always Facing the Issues – Preoccupations in Australian Children’s Literature.” *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Vol. 29, No. 2, April 2003, pp. v-xvii. *Project Muse and John Hopkins University Press*, doi.org/10.1353/uni.2003.0026.

--- “Preface.” *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children’s Literature*, edited by John Stephens, Taylor and Francis, 2002. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.actioin?docID=1487098.

Still, Judith. *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh UP, 2010. *Cambridge EBA ebooks Complete Collection,* cambridge-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/core/books/derrida-and-hospitality/901324F5CC68AD0511623A5D431CE29E.

Sulway, Nike. *Winter’s Tale*. Titania, 2019.

Swann Jones, Steven. *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*, Taylor and Francis, 2002.

Tanner, Lian. *Spellhound: A Dragons of Hallow Book*. Allen and Unwin, 2023.

Thornham, Sue. “Postmodernism and Feminism.” *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, edited by Benoît Dillet et al, Edinburgh UP, 2013, pp.

37-49. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib/USQ/detail.action?DOCID=716511.

Townsend, Jessica. *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow*. Hachette, 2017.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 81, No. 4, December 1991, pp. 684-96. *EBSCOHost*, doi-org.ezproxy.usq.eu.au/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1991.tb01715.x.

VanSickle, Vikki, “Daughters of the Land: An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Relationships Between Female Adolescent Protagonists and Landscape in Three Verse Novels for Children.” *Knowing Their Place? Identity and Space in Children’s Literature*, edited by Terri Doughty, and Dawn Thompson, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/lib.usq/detail.action?docID=1106975.

Walton, Heather. “Re-visioning the Subject in Literature and Theology.” *Self/Same/Other: Re-Visioning the Subject in Literature and Theology*, edited by Heather Walton, and Andrew W. Hass, Bloomsbury, 2000. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1644322.

Wang, Gabrielle, *Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon*, Penguin Random House, 2022.

Warner, Marina. *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*, Oxford UP, 2014. *ProQuest Academic Complete*, DOI: 10.1093/0191028762.001.0001.

Welch, Brynn .F. “The Pervasive Whiteness of Children’s Literature: Collective Harms and Consumer Obligations.” *Social Theory and Practice*. Vol. 42, No. 2, 2016, pp. 367-88, *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/24871348.

Wilkie-Stibbs, Christine. *The Feminine Subject in Children’s literature*, Taylor and Francis, 2002. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1581786.

Williams, James. *Understanding Poststructuralism*. Taylor and Francis, 2014. *Proquest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usq/detail.action?docID=1900170.

Wilson, Melissa B., and Short, Kathy G. “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road: Challenging the Mythology of Home in Children’s Literature.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, Vol. 43, 2012, pp. 129-44. *EBSCOHost Academic Search Ultimate*, 10.1007/S10583-11.9138-z.

Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic*. Philomel Books, 1981.

Young, Penelope. *Witch Images in Australian Children’s Literature,* 2001. University of Southern Queensland

Zipes, Jack. "Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 1987 Proceedings, 1987. pp. 107-110. *Project Muse,* doi.org/10.1353/chq.1987.0014.

---. *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*. Routledge, 2002.

---. *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. Routledge,

APPENDIX

Table of Titles in Data Set

	Title	Author	Year of Publication
1	*Tashi and the Baba Yaga*	Anna Fienberg, Barbara Fienberg, and Kim Gamble	1998
2	*Kingdom of Silk: The Naming of Tishkin Silk*	Glenda Millard	2003
3	*A Phaery Named Phredde and Other Stories to Eat With a Banana*	Jackie French	2004
4	*The Shop at Hoopers Bend*	Emily Rodda	2017
5	*Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow*	Jessica Townsend	2017
6	*The Monster Who Wasn't*	T.C. Shelley	2019
7	*Winter's Tale*	Nike Sulway	2019
8	*Dragon Skin*	Karen Foxlee	2021
9	*A Girl Called Corpse*	Reece Carter	2022
10	*A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*	Shivaun Plozza	2022
11	*Big Magic*	Sarah Armstrong	2022
12	*The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*	Deborah Abela	2022
13	*Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon*	Gabrielle Wang	2022
14	*Hedgewitch*	Skye McKenna	2022
15	*The Hotel Witch*	Jessica Miller	2023
16	*Spellhound: A Dragons of Hallow Book*	Lian Tanner	2023
17	*The Fortune Maker*	Catherine Norton	2023