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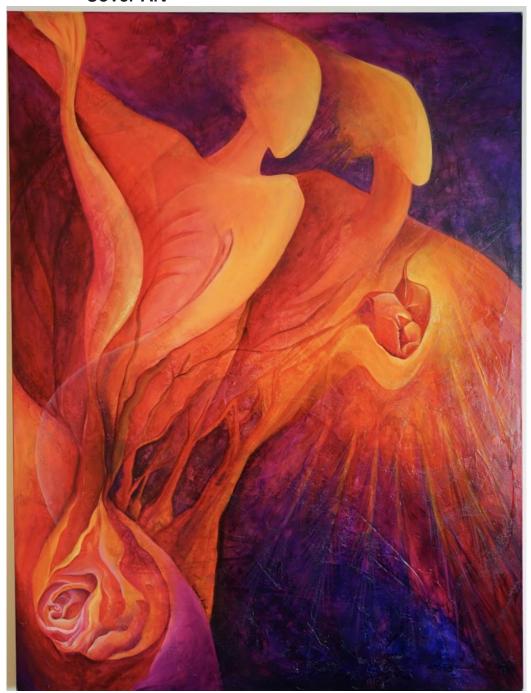
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Cover Art

Cover Art: *Flourish Together* by Rosana Azar

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From the Editors

Becoming an adult is never simple. Societal expectations can conflict with personal desires and goals. Obtaining protective coverage by imitating one's friends comes with a loss of personal identity, but nonconformity is frequently punished. Interacting with peers, progressing through rites of passage, and evaluating the society in which they will live have been rendered difficult and even impossible in the age of Covid.

For this issue, the YA speculative section was construed broadly to include traditional "hard sf," as well as speculative fiction, fantasy, horror, and magical realism. We expanded parameters that usually guide our selection process to account for the wide range of YA speculative fiction and to recognize aspects of this genre across diverse cultures and cultural constructions.

Anish Bhattacharyya's essay "The Construction of 'Limbo' as Resistance in Select Speculative YA Fiction: A Reading of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*" examines Murakami's juxtaposition of varied realities as a form of rebuke to authority. This essay explores the representation of education, rebellion, and student activism as one bridges the gap from adolescence to adulthood.

Gwen Rose brings together two works by Indigenous authors: Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun.* The trials and tribulations their protagonists undergo in transitioning to manhood lead them to an appreciation of their environment and their place in their communities.

Ambelin Kwaymullina and Ezekiel Kwaymullina are a brother and sister team who are descended from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The central figures in their book, *Catching Teller Crow*, as described by Lucas

Mattila and Bettina Burger, are the aboriginal, female protagonists whose current tragic circumstances have long shadows back to the repression by white supremacists in Australia. The book also makes clear the importance of family relationships in developing spiritual strength.

The repercussions of societal restrictions on who is accepted and who is considered "other" are also explored through the lens of race in a collection of essays by Meghan Gilbert-Hickey and Miranda A. Green-Barteet and reviewed by Juia Haba-Osca. While some of the essays confront shortcomings in the genre, the reviewer believes "all the essays point toward the potential of YA science fiction to both address and interrogate racial inequities in the West and beyond".

This genre has been useful for tracking and understanding cultural shifts; as our society becomes more accepting of queer and trans people, YA literature is increasingly responsible for offering representation to coming-of-age experiences of LGBTQIA+ folks. Arguing for the importance of transgender science fiction, Jaimee Cook examines April Daniels' *Dreadnought* for how it challenges contemporary anti-trans rhetoric.

YA speculative fiction routinely engages with many of life's most important questions: love, death, relationships, the future of the planet, identity, belonging, and our very future as human beings. Whether styled after the classical bildungsroman or otherwise, coming of age narratives in the speculative genre encourage readers to challenge existing power structures and advocate self-expression and self-confidence. They also return agency to those often divested of power by institutional and social structures that restrict freedoms based on age, and recenter the adolescent as a critical social figure.

The Editors
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Coming of Age in Indigenous Science Fiction: Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun*

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the Bildungsroman narratives of two Indigenous works of young adult speculative fiction, D'Arcy McKnickle's *Runner in the Sun* and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, incorporating Indigenous theorist Glen Sean Coulthard's "grounded normativity". Grounded normativity stresses a connection to land and community and the two teenage protagonists in the novels cannot complete their coming of age from impetuous and headstrong youths into leaders and men until they develop this traditional connection. The novels do more than just chronicle journeys to manhood, but, in speculative settings, highlight that perhaps a uniquely Indigenous form of the Bildungsroman might exist. The teachings of elders, an appreciation for the land, and the importance of tradition are all vital to the health of Salt and French's communities, and they cannot come of age within this framework until they develop knowledge of, and respect for, these traditions, which collectively make up Coulthard's grounded normativity. Whereas the traditional Bildungsroman journey stresses the individualistic nature of coming of age, McNickle and Dimaline's novels suggest a different path to adulthood: the protagonists must adopt grounded normativity and connect to their community to complete their distinctly Indigenous Bildungsroman narratives.

Keywords*: Indigenous literature, Speculative Fiction, Young Adult Fiction, Bildungsroman*

In Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun*, young protagonists French and Salt attempt to find their way through changing worlds and come into their own. I posit that these texts, both Indigenous works of speculative fiction and centered on the journeys to adulthood of young protagonists, could be described as Bildungsroman narratives, but it will first be necessary to explore definitions of this term, as well as additional qualifications for what I describe as a distinctly Indigenous Bildungsroman form. A Bildungsroman is, most simply put, "a novel about a young person facing the challenges of growing up" (Graham, 2019, p. 1): Bildungsroman narratives typically explore a protagonist's "relationship between self and society" (Graham, 2019, p. 1). Yet this is an overly reductive definition that fails to consider the term's cultural and historical origins in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany. Todd Kontje (2019) highlights how the specifically German Bildungsroman, largely created during a time when the centuries-old Holy Roman Empire was fracturing, was originally "the genre that explore[d] individual development and national identity in a politically fragmented state" (p. 18). Citing Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795), Friedrich von Hardenberg's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800), Jean Paul's *Titan* (1800-3), and more, Kontje argues that authors of early German Bildungsromane, "seek to come to terms in their works with the emergence of modern individualism in a political context that had more in common with the hierarchical heterogeneity of the Holy Roman Empire than the Egalitarian homogeneity of the centralized nation state" (2019, p. 18-24). German Bildungsromane, then, engaged both with the distinctly European notion of individualism alongside political issues unique to the German states of that time. Kontje also highlights that the term "Bildungsroman" remains contentious in its contemporary applications, with a divide between those who would utilize the term solely in regards to "German novels that depict a young protagonist's development towards personal maturity and social integration," (2019, p. 10) and "others who extend the term to different national literatures" (2019, p. 10).

It is in this latter camp that my own formulation of a distinctly Indigenous Bildungsroman necessarily falls, but as Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most famous—and least rigid—proponents of the term argues, the Bildungsroman is in no way necessarily linked to one

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cultural moment in time or a single national identity. Rather, in a Bildungsroman, "man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence" (2002, p 23). The elements of the German Bildungsroman that Kontje describes are extrapolated from the setting of German states during the decline of the Holy Roman Empire–and explored instead by protagonists of other nations, from other cultures, as they navigate the unique challenges of their own societies over the course of a protagonist's journey to adulthood.

The Indigenous Bildungsroman I formulate contains uniquely Indigenous philosophies: and while an incredible diversity of individual nations and cultures exist on Turtle Island (North America) alone, some Indigenous scholars theorize certain elements that do define Indigenous worldviews. I argue that Indigenous Bildungsromane integrate a specifically Indigenous theory of ethics through which cultural values which stress the development of the collective, as opposed to the European emphasis on the individual, are integral to the journeys to adulthood that otherwise qualify certain narratives as Bildungsroman. In *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*, the two Indigenous protagonists come to manhood only when they gain a greater understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing: the land-based practices, knowledges, and traditions of their individual nations, collectively defined as integral to Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island by way of Glen Sean Coulthard's term "grounded normativity".

Grounded normativity is a theory of distinctly Indigenous "decolonial thought and practice" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13) established through and by connections to land. Coulthard (2014) argues that Indigenous relationships with land constitute the basis for other Indigenous ways of knowing. Traditional knowledges and practices, and ties of kinship and language are "deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way" (p. 60). Coulthard stresses that land is the basis for the other practices that make up important facets of Indigenous life, including kinship and community. Following this, grounded normativity

is a necessary component of the Indigenous Bildungsroman: it is what ties this version of the form to specifically Indigenous concerns, and what differentiates this form of the Bildungsroman from its traditional German, or even more broadly, European precedents. Just as the values that collectively make up grounded normativity set Indigenous societies distinctly apart from European society and values, as the protagonists of Indigenous Bildungsroman narratives grow into adulthood, the communal, land-based values that they must learn and come to exemplify as part of their journeys sets them, and their narratives, apart from the protagonists of other Bildungsromane.

My analysis of the coming-of-age stories of Salt and French focuses on the paths of these two young men towards attaining a respectful relationship with the people and natural world around them. This is where two very different novels about a pre-contact Pueblo boy and a Métis teenager in a futuristic dystopia converge. While *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves* deal with very different eras of history, both are speculative novels with teenage protagonists, intended for teenage readerships. Critically, the fact that both novels also both incorporate values in line with Coulthard's grounded normativity as necessary elements of Salt and French's maturity links them together as two examples of Indigenous Bildungsromane, despite their myriad other differences. As speculative works, they might also seem removed from the present-day setting of Coulthard's theory, or from the present-day concerns of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, but the opposite is true. If grounded normativity extends productively back into the speculative past of *Runner in the Sun* and equally productively into the speculative future of *The Marrow Thieves*, then these texts can serve as an authoritative baseline for the merit of the Indigenous Bildungsroman in any setting–speculative or otherwise. As the authors McNickle and Dimaline themselves navigate (or navigated, in the case of McNickle) the political realities of their own time, speculative fiction also provides a powerful tool through which to explore grounded normativity and the Indigenous Bildungsroman: as Daniel Heath Justice writes, "marginalized writers [can] challenge oppressive lived realities through the intentional employment of the fantastic to imagine otherwise" (2018, p. 143). Justice is describing the genre of Indigenous speculative fiction,

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which both of these novels represent, but crucially, not every text in this genre is an Indigenous Bildungsroman.

I bring these two texts together to highlight the vitality and necessity of grounded normativity to novels with similar generic concerns–works of Indigenous speculative fiction for teenagers–but with very different temporal applications. Just as Kontje argues that the form of the Bildungsroman specific to German culture extended into the twentieth century (2019, p. 24-32), I argue that the Indigenous Bildungsroman transcends eras, including the distinct historical eras of McNickle and Dimaline, but also Indigenous speculative pasts and futures. This is demonstrated through Salt, and French, who share textual roles as protagonists of a Bildungsroman, but are also Indigenous youths who achieve their journeys to maturity by specifically by gaining an understanding of the importance of grounded normativity in their communities and cultures.

At the beginning of *Runner in the Sun*, Salt is a precocious youth who has only just been initiated as a man into the Turquoise clan of his village; his Bildungsroman has just begun. He is described as capable and intelligent, but he possesses little in the way of wisdom or patience. Instead, his status as a man is presented as still being very close to childhood. He feels that "a boy of sixteen already knew many things" (McNickle, 1994, p. 5). He overhears a conversation in the midst of his village, and although the details of it are unclear to him, when the men realize they are being eavesdropped upon, Salt realizes that, "he [is] not playing a boy's game[, and] he [grows] afraid" (McNickle, 1994, p. 5). He does not yet have the cultural knowledge to discern why it is that what he has heard is dangerous (nor is it revealed in detail to the readers, but remains a mystery at this time). The men of the Turquoise people are then summoned to kiva, a private gathering laden with ceremony and rules, but when he relays this to a group of teenage girls shepherding small children who block his path, the girls, his age-peers, laugh and mock: "'See… he is a man.' then her eyes flashed mischief: 'It is hard to tell nowadays who are our elders'" (McNickle, 1994, p. 8). Though he has

formally been endowed with the symbol of manhood--"white shells strung on a buckskin thong with a central ornament of turquoise inlaid in bone" (McNickle, 1994, p. 6), a "turquoise badge"--it is telling that he is still referred to by the elders of his community as "boy" (McNickle, 1994, p. 16, 28, 32). Salt is a man in name only, not yet possessed of the maturity or knowledge to be seen or treated as one.

Salt's immaturity at this stage has further consequences. Despite realizing that he himself will be at the center of a developing conflict due to the conversation he overheard, Salt does not always pay careful attention to the proceedings around him or hold his tongue as he knows he should. At kiva, Salt is accused of a crime against his people by Flute Man, planting crops in the valley, which is forbidden. If he were paying attention, he would perhaps have realized that Flute Man was the man he overheard, who is now framing him. Salt, however, is not even listening: "To such an extent had Salt's thoughts strayed that he did not hear at once the words directed at him" (McNickle, 1994, p. 16). His friend urges him not to speak out in response: "Better not speak! Flute Man is watching you" (McNickle, 1994, p. 19), but the "cautioning words" (McNickle, 1994, p. 19) sting Salt's pride, and he responds.

This leads him to an audience with Eldest Woman, one of his village's most respected leaders. Here, realizing at last the connection between Flute Man's voice and the voices he heard speaking, and recognizing the second speaker as well, Salt accuses Flute Man of conversing with "the one we call Dark Dealer" (McNickle, 1994, p. 33). Eldest Woman must rebuke Salt for this shortly after, not for what he has said but for when and in front of whom he has chosen to say it: "If Flute Man has been talking to Dark Dealer, it was wrong of you, child, to speak of it when Flute Man was here among us" (McNickle, 1994, p. 35). Eldest Woman's solution for the danger Salt is now in--danger of his own making, in speaking out so rashly--is one that sting's Salt's burgeoning pride still further. Eldest Woman elects to take Salt's "manhood badge away" (McNickle, 1994, p. 35) and return him to childhood in the eyes of his village. Salt's pride rears up, and he protests: "surely this cannot be. Let me remain a man, my Grandmother,

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and I will show you how I can protect us all!" (McNickle, 1994, p. 36). He is sternly rebuked, and his rash words confirm Eldest Woman's opinion of his readiness for manhood: "Now you are showing us that you are indeed a child!" (McNickle, 1994, p. 36). Salt lets his pride choose his path for him, and not the traditions of his people, and in response he moves backwards, not forwards, on his journey to manhood.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, the young protagonist, French, begins as a pre-teen in the company and protection of various family members. At the opening of the novel, he is with his older brother Mitch, and their mom has "been gone a few months" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 1). Largely in the care of others, his own Bildungsroman narrative has barely begun. The brothers are on the run from the Recruiters--state officials who kidnap Indigenous peoples in the novel to take them to "Schools" where their bone marrow is drained, ostensibly for the dreams that are contained within--and when they are discovered, Mitch quickly pivots to protect his younger brother. He sends French out into the trees and sacrifices himself to the Recruiters to save French (Dimaline, 2017, p. 2-4). Flashback scenes then elucidate the manner in which French and Mitch lost their parents. First their dad, a leader in a Métis community the "old people" call "the New Road Allowance" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 6) attempts to convince the colonial government to stop hunting Indigenous peoples, but never returns (Dimaline, 2017, p. 4-6). Then their mother, who went to find supplies for the fleeing family, also fails to return to them (Dimaline, 2017, p. 4-5). French knows that "Mitch had sacrificed himself so I could live, so I had to live" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 7). French heads north, following the last advice of his father: "up north is where we'll find home" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 6). French doesn't yet understand the history of colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples, or the present situation for his family and the Indigenous people like them in the world of *The Marrow Thieves*. At this stage of his Bildungsroman, French is just a child, who though he lives in a vastly different world and society, like Salt, has much to learn.

After French is saved by and incorporated into Miigwans' group of Indigenous survivors, which they

call a family, time flashes forward to his late teens. He is now approximately Salt's age, sixteen, and, like his peers in the family, pines for old ways: traditions, language, ceremonies, and storytelling. They try as best they can: "Us kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges out of broken branches dug back into the earth, covered over with our shirts tied together" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 22). Yet French doesn't appreciate the subtleties of these traditions; he hasn't yet come to appreciate the element of grounded normativity that Coulthard (2014) describes as "our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (p. 13). The boys of the group, like French, "[puff] out their chests" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 23) when Miigwans describes Indigenous warriors and their prowess. French is obsessed with the manly preoccupations granted to group members, which distracts him from paying attention to the traditional knowledge, the grounded normativity, that the elders of his small group are trying to teach the youths in their charge, the next generation. "I feel bad for you guys" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 37), he tells Rose, because Rose and the others, termed "Homesteaders", "are stuck with that" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 38), using "that" to refer to Minerva, their group's oldest member. French disrespects Minerva and fails to establish an equitable relationship with him. Consequently, he fails to bond with Rose, his love interest, who more fully appreciates what Minerva has to offer. Minerva has taught the Homesteaders "a little of the language" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 38), in this case Anishinaabe, the Indigenous language of Minerva and Miigwans, the group's elders. French will remember what he's missed out on later and comes to reassess his opinion of Minerva.

For Salt, the transition to manhood through a connection to land is gradual but builds on a particular component of his village's life: corn. Corn is the lifeblood of the village, but Salt relates, first to the kiva and later to Eldest Woman, what they already know: "our corn grows badly" (McNickle, 1994, p. 19). When Salt is accused of laziness and dereliction by Flute Man in the kiva, he defends himself by revealing his secret growing project; one thing he does understand is the importance of corn to his community, and he is trying to help them by growing corn in a new, wetter location (McNickle, 1994, p. 19-20). Still, Eldest Woman does not offer a

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judgment on what the village will do about their corn; this leaves Salt to turn to the other great leader of the village, The Holy One.

Salt's knowledge is verified in one way; The Holy One agrees that corn is paramount to the village's survival and what's more, The Holy One links corn explicitly to the land itself. Salt learns that the people of the Village of the White Rocks have not always lived in their mountainous cave dwellings. Before that, he tells Salt, "our people lived to the south and west of here" (McNickle, 1994, p. 55), in an era of apparent abundance until a natural disaster forced them to move. The Holy One, a respected elder and village chief, who holds knowledge for his village that is not widely known, here is elucidating grounded normativity, "land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). Just as Salt and his fellow villagers have learned traditions established through the generations including where and how to plant the corn, so has the knowledge of their place of origin been retained by their elders. Connected to this knowledge is the origin of their corn as well, but Salt is not yet ready to hear this. The Holy One is beginning to prepare Salt to succeed him (though Salt does not know this yet). When the boy admits at last, "I was a child, I see" (McNickle, 1994, p. 57), The Holy One is ready to impart some wisdom concerning the relationships between human beings that makes up part of grounded normativity: "I remind you to expect faults in others and to bend your words to travel around their faults" (McNickle, 1994, p. 57). Salt is left, as part of his growth, with a task, to find the Village of the White Rocks' "secret trail" (McNickle, 1994, p. 58); before he can journey to distant lands, he must first come to know, as the leaders of his village have passed on from one to another, the land where his people still live. Salt has just had his first glimpse at the grounded normativity that enables the respected elders of his village to not only lead, but lead well, and his Bildungsroman narrative will see him return to this theory.

French, too, matures slowly but surely through his journey. Like Salt, who must realize the importance of corn, tied to the land, before he can realize the importance of the human relationships in his community, French realizes on a hunting expedition the importance of a reciprocal relationship between humans and animals. They all hunt alone, so French is ensconced in a tree hollow. When he sees a moose, it is he alone who sees it. At first, French sees a vision of himself, "the conquering hero, marching into camp with more than all of us could carry" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 49). The nebulous concept of manhood dances before him as it did for Salt. Yet French has begun to understand "the position that land occupies as an ontological framework for understanding *relationships*" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 60). For French's family, always travelling, always on the move, hunting is a needed form of sustenance, but as they move through the land, their movement from location to location is a blessing to the returning animals: the group cannot stay in one area, where they would risk overhunting. Their constant movement through the land forces French to consider the full value of the moose in opposition to the reality of their circumstances: "we'd be leaving half, at least half, behind to rot" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 49). French considers the moose one last time and lowers his rifle: "I couldn't do it. I couldn't let it come to this, not for him and not for me" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 50).

The reciprocal relationships between human and non-human that stem, per Coulthard, from a genuine connectedness to land, are attaining importance for French, and dwarf even his visions of himself as a successful hunter, or conquering hero. French is beginning to mature, and it manifests in his coming-of-age narrative as grounded normativity, as a respect for the land around him and all the lives, human and non-human, that it contains.

After a struggle for power in the Village of the White Rocks, The Holy One formally tasks Salt with journeying south to the origin place, not of their people, but of their corn. The Holy One explicitly names Salt as "the one to save [his people]" (McNickle, 1994, p. 163), positioning the young man's coming of age in the narrative to a central place. To save his people, Salt must no longer be the impetuous youth that he once was. Something in him indicates to The Holy One that Salt has "the desire

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to help our people" (McNickle, 1994, p. 164); Salt now understands the importance of human relations, but must journey to a new land, and retrace his ancestors' long-forgotten footsteps to accomplish this. He must journey to The Land of Fable, from where "our songs, our dances, and our Mother Corn came" (McNickle, 1994, p. 164). By explicitly linking this physical destination, this connection to the land that Salt must make, with the traditions, and importantly, the corn, of Salt's people, The Holy One is impressing upon Salt that grounded normativity, "land-connected practices" will be the key to his journey's success, and to Salt's manhood coming to fruition. These practices, the traditional wisdom of his people, are repeated to him before he departs: advice on how to navigate for a man who has never left his home community; how to safely cross rivers; and alongside this advice, how to treat the strangers he will meet with courtesy and respect (McNickle, 1994, p. 170-1). This time Salt listened attentively to his elder and follows his advice. He honors the wayside shrines he passes, placing rocks atop the piles, "as taught [to] him in childhood," and strangers who would otherwise have mistrusted him in their lands instead spare his life and leave him unmolested to go on his way (McNickle, 1994, p. 174-5). Salt is respectfully engaging with new people and new lands, as he was instructed, and forging reciprocal relationships with new lands and the people of new lands, in the spirit of grounded normativity.

Salt grows into a man along this voyage, one who will return to lead his people, the arc of his Bildungsroman narrative complete and with greater knowledge of grounded normativity that will serve his people well. He comes to realize the value of communication along on his travels and stops to learn the language of another young man he befriends, named Ocelot. He observes the ways of Ocelot's family and can appreciate that they have different ways of doing things than his own village, without wanting to change the traditions of his people (McNickle, 1994, p. 188-9). He meets a slave girl named Quail in Culhuacan and befriends her despite her low status (McNickle, 1994, p. 195-6). Salt tells Quail of his search for "the Mother Corn from which [his people's corn] came" (McNickle, 1994, p. 198).

Quail's people, like Salt's, grow corn, and she appreciates its value; she sings him a song about "Mother Corn" (McNickle, 1994, p. 198). Ultimately, Quail is to be sacrificed, ironically in honor of the new corn crop, in the tradition of the people of Culhuacan. Salt has not yet succeeded in locating the "Mother Corn" that will save his people but decides to save Quail's life even if it means leaving. Here, Salt foregrounds the relationships he has built, and like French, refuses to sacrifice a life in service of his quest. His loyalty and kindness are rewarded; Quail waits months to reveal that she, remembering their conversation, had stowed away the corn that Salt's village needed: "I gathered these few kernels from each of the strong corns that grow in the Valley of the Lakes" (McNickle, 1994, p. 225). Salt has learned to trust others, that he cannot do everything himself, and it pays dividends to him.

His journey to new lands will not have been in vain for his people; indeed, for bringing back new, strong corn, they learn to trust him in turn. Some years later Salt, who is then Village Chief, "made the decision which changed the lives of his people… they traveled southwards… into the valley of the big fields. Land was set aside for them by those who were there first, and the new corn, when planted and watered abundantly, produced such harvests as had never been known… There they lived in peace and supported one another" (McNickle, 1994, p. 233-4). It is Salt, in the course of his coming of age, who has attained the grounded normativity possessed by The Holy One that allows him to lead his people to grace and prosperity in their time of need. He has forged connections with new lands, and knows where to lead them; through Quail, he has helped to provide them with a new and robust strain of corn, through which they in turn are connected to the land. Salt has blossomed into manhood through grounded normativity, his new recognition of "the land as [a] system of reciprocal relations and obligations" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13) which he passes on to his people. They incorporate new knowledge and their relationship with their new land and new corn into "a new ceremony, which they called Red Corn Dance" (McNickle, 1994, p. 234). Through Salt's leadership, they are said to attain peace and harmony and support one another.

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French encounters more trials and tribulations than Salt; before he can fully understand grounded normativity and the importance of relationships between humans, two pivotal moments influence his development. Two Indigenous strangers, named Lincoln and Travis, invite the family to join them in their camp. The family has not been unaware of their presence on the trail, and the situation is highly suspicious, but they decide they cannot avoid encountering the strangers. Things do go awry; the family's youngest member, RiRi, is taken by Lincoln, who falls over a cliff with her, killing them both. In a moment of anger, French shoots Travis. He has taken a life. Afterwards, for French, "something had changed since I'd fired the gun, since I'd killed Travis. It was like a color had ceased to exist and now the world seemed dull" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 139). Minerva, who was closest to RiRi, is changed as well, becoming unresponsive and needing to be carried. French has learned that it is crucial that they take care of each and every member of their group. Minerva repays them; when they camp out in an abandoned barn one evening, Minerva perhaps senses what is to come. She insists on remaining below the loft where all the others sleep. The Recruiters arrive in the middle of the night–but take only Minerva with them. She has moved the ladder to protect the others, and as French makes eye contact with her from the loft as they take her, she "held her finger to her thin lips, just for a split second, before they curled back in a mischievous smile" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 150). Like Salt, French learns an important lesson from his elder, and it changes his attitude. Where he was numb before, he now makes a decision on behalf of his whole group for the first time. When Miigwans suggest the family again head north, French says only, "No", and then: "I'm going after Minerva" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 153). Their elder, her knowledge, her language, and her presence, is worth fighting for, and the dynamic of the family's struggles change. French has emphasized the importance of "reciprocal relations" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13) and taken a strong step in moving not only past the horror of taking a life, but towards honoring Minerva's sacrifice by refusing to leave her behind.

French is learning, one event at a time, the practices of grounded normativity. He learns from Clarence, another elder they meet when they encounter a resistant community of Indigenous peoples outside the town of Espanola. Speaking about his own peoples' ruined homeland, Clarence stresses that one day, his nation can still return there: "we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also… we'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 193). French also learns from his own father, with whom he is unexpectedly reunited in this community. After the attempt to rescue Minerva fails, Rose (with whom French has been developing a relationship) decides to leave. French's dad tells him a story about himself and French's mother; this story, too, is rooted in grounded normativity, as he relates that French's mom urged him to move "toward something" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 217); to value connections, and to see relationships with others as worthy, tangible goals in life. French ultimately decides that his relationship with Rose is the most important thing in his life; he, too, decides to leave, and his father understands (Dimaline, 2017, p. 217). French is able to learn from conversations with Clarence and with his father to understand the importance of patience, of land, and of relationships, just as he once came to understand with the moose.

Lastly, French actualizes what he has learned, and, like Salt, again takes a leadership role. Through conducting himself in keeping with the practices of grounded normativity, he has earned the respect of those around him like Clarence. When French and Rose are on the verge of departing, they receive word of another unidentified group of strangers. They decide to join the "welcome party", who intend to surprise the strangers and assess their intentions (Dimaline, 2017, p. 219). When one of the newcomers speaks Cree, there is confusion as to whether or not the welcome party should follow their usual protocol. It is French who steps in, telling Clarence, "I need to ask him something. Then we'll know" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 227). Clarence nods, showing that he trusts French. When French has learned what he wants to learn–that the newcomer

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"dreams in Cree" (228)–he nods and smiles back at Clarence. "Pack 'em up" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 228), Clarence rejoins; again, French's opinion is all he needs to know. French has learned to trust in others, to establish reciprocal relationships with those around him through grounded normativity, and in exchange, they do the same for him, even those he considers his elders, like Clarence, his father, or Miigwans.

Politically motivated authors like Dimaline, a Métis woman, or McNickle, Métis by birth but a registered member of the Flathead Indian Reservation, utilize grounded normativity in *The Marrow Thieves* and *Runner in the Sun* to highlight the continued relevance of Indigenous knowledges and practices in the times in which they were writing as well as for the protagonists coming of age in their respective novels. My analysis considers the Bildungsroman genre and grounded normativity to be two distinct forms that blend within these novels, and through a joint consideration of which a greater understanding of the novels can be gained. These works are not only political; they still adhere to a conventional form. The novels are still constructed as Bildungsromane, and the journeys of the protagonists to manhood are still the central concern of the plot. That French and Salt achieve this through learning and coming to appreciate Indigenous ways of knowing and living, that is, through grounded normativity, highlights the importance of these same practices for Dimaline and McNickle. Both authors consciously incorporate grounded normativity into their novels, going beyond what the conventional form of the Bildungsroman can achieve and Indigenizing the form by creating novels that highlight the value of the land and land-based practices both for their protagonists and their readers.

In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Caroline Levine describes a new type of formalism for literary analysis that seeks to encompass forms above and beyond, while alongside, the aesthetic forms with which formalism is traditionally concerned. Traditional formalism is "a way of understanding art or literature primarily through its techniques rather than as a mere vehicle for personal expression or for moral

and political doctrines" ("formalism," 2009). In opposition to this, Levine (2015) describes forms as "[any] arrangement of elements--[any] ordering, patterning, or shaping" (p. 3). Levine (2015) highlights that among such elements often considered outside the bounds of formalism are "various political ordering principles" (p. 3) which she attributes to the domain of "literary and cultural studies" (2015, p. 3). The crux of Levine's argument, and the source of her concern, is the tendency of academic scholarship to treat "aesthetic and political arrangements as separate" (2015, p. 3). Instead, Levine (2015) asserts that classifying political, historical, and other contextual concerns that influence authors and their work as "forms" that can be considered alongside aesthetic factors will dissolve "the traditionally troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context" (p. 3).

Levine's theory stresses that genres, or generic forms, are best analyzed in tandem with other forms influencing given literary works (2015, p. 3). For Indigenous Bildungsroman narratives such as *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*, the other "form" in conversation with the generic forms of the works–the other tenets of what makes up a Bildungsroman, the novels' statuses as young adult fiction, or works of Indigenous speculative fiction, and so on–is Coulthard's grounded normativity. *The Marrow Thieves* and *Runner in the Sun* were written for teenage audiences (Purdy, 2016, p. 10), and Fiona McCulloch (2019) asserts that a Bildungsroman written for such an audience will inspire a similar trajectory in the targeted audience as in the protagonists: "as they come to understand themselves more thoroughly, so too do they more fully comprehend their relationship with the external world" (p. 174). Examining what she terms "Postcolonial Bildungsroman" narratives, Ericka Hoagland (2019) also stresses that when an author from an oppressed group writes such a narrative, a prominent aim is "the reclamation of indigenous culture and the assertion of a national identity"[1] (p. 219). As a whole, these definitions suit the journeys of Salt and French in *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*. Their paths to self-discovery and maturity are directly related to their Indigenous identities and cultures, and yet were also

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designed to inspire McNickle and Dimaline's readers to reconsider the lived reality of Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island at the time of these books' publishing.

Some existing criticism by Indigenous scholars does suggest that analyzing these Indigenous texts via the lens of a traditionally Western genre -- the Bildungsroman -- is not without its pitfalls. Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Silko (2017) suggests that for her people, there is "no distinction between types of story" (p. 239), no discernable genres of any kind. Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd (2014) likewise asserts that "genre… colonizes texts" (p. 345). Yet this concern is mitigated somewhat by what Hoagland (2019) describes as the "defining characteristic of the postcolonial Bildungsroman: the ongoing remediation of colonialism's traumatic legacy throughout the self-maturation process" (p. 219). In both *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*, this legacy is addressed through the incorporation of grounded normativity and the development of this broader "postcolonial Bildungsroman" into an even more specifically Indigenous version of this form.

So too does grounded normativity lay to rest the concerns of scholars regarding the analysis of Indigenous literatures using Western theories, such as Levine's theory of forms. Kimberly Blaeser (2016) describes the problem with Westernized literary theories as implying "that the worth of literature is essentially validated by its demonstrated adherence to a respected literary mode, dynamic, or style" (p. 233). Levine's theory of forms moves beyond a prescriptive notion of adherence to any one form, but instead seeks to incorporate social and political realities alongside textual analysis. As such, the novels of Dimaline and McNickle should only be read as Bildungsroman narratives if this reading does not begin and end with the German genre, but actively seeks to go past it. Blaeser's statement points towards such a reading as well. When she hypothesizes a new mode of criticism for Indigenous literatures, that "[exist] within and [arise] from the literature itself," (2016, p. 236) I argue that grounded normativity fills this space, at least within considerations of the Indigenous Bildungsroman. Grounded normativity is a political theory, not a literary form, but given the presence in *Runner in the*

Sun and *The Marrow Thieves* of what would constitute grounded normativity in the real world, this theory then exists as a form within, and without, these novels: both central to the texts' literary forms of Indigenous Bildungsromane, and to their critical interpretation.

For the authors of *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*, grounded normativity and its attendant practices are an active goal of their writing: the synthesis of forms that combine a Bildungsroman with Indigenous political frameworks are far from accidental. This political element in their writing is a representation of what Scott Richard Lyons (2000) terms "rhetorical sovereignty". Lyons defines rhetorical sovereignty as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires" (p. 449, emphasis in original). By "peoples" Lyons means that Indigenous nations, and those within them, assert the right to tell their own stories; that they assert sovereignty over not just their rights, but over the discourse that surrounds them. McNickle and Dimaline assert rhetorical sovereignty over the discourse surrounding Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island, past and present, by incorporating grounded normativity into their novels and making Indigenous knowledges, practices, languages, and traditions an inseparable part of their main plots, their protagonists' coming-of-age.

Cherie Dimaline speaks frankly in interviews about the "responsibility" she associates with being an Indigenous writer (The Globe and Mail, 2017), responsibilities which reflect rhetorical sovereignty through grounded normativity even if not named directly as such. *The Marrow Thieves* was directly intended to "explain the way we persist and thrive as Indigenous people, in spite of [colonial oppression]" (The Globe and Mail, 2017). Dimaline is speaking out against oppression, and telling an Indigenous story from an Indigenous perspective, first and foremost for Indigenous peoples themselves. She tells "a narrative that actually is reminiscent of my own understanding of being an Indigenous person: That no matter what happens, you always belong to our land, we're always going to belong to each other, and we'll seek each other out" (Henley, 2017). Here grounded normativity and rhetorical sovereignty are connected through and tied to the land. *The Marrow Thieves* then is a narrative that describes Dimaline's own Indigenous experience and the resistance of not just her characters,

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but of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island since the arrival of Europeans. Dimaline, in the novel itself and her own discussions about its intent, asserts the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and nations to tell their own stories, and to chart their own paths of resistance, while also stressing the restorative power of the land.

D'Arcy McNickle, writing *Runner in the Sun* in the 1950s, faced a political landscape of termination that settler scholar James H. Cox and Pueblo scholar Alfonso Ortiz argue influenced the composition of the novel and explain its undercurrent of rhetorical sovereignty. Cox (2012) asserts that 1954, the year of the novel's publication, marked the climax of termination proceedings across the United States, and that McNickle, "as a powerful member of the [National Congress of American Indians, (NCAI)] fought vigorously against the policy" (p. 153). At the same time, through the NCAI, McNickle was involved in projects seeking to reinvigorate various reservation communities (Cox, 2012, p. 160-1), much like Salt's community is reinvigorated through the introduction of a new strain of corn. Cox (2012) asserts that through *Runner in the Sun*, McNickle intended to "[urge] American Indians to recognize that solutions can come from within their communities, or, more specifically, from the deliberations of Native governing bodies" (p. 161). Alfonso Ortiz (1994), in his afterword to *Runner in the Sun*'s reissued edition, calls the novel "[McNickle]'s response to the tragic policy of termination" (p. 239) by way of "reaffirm[ing] the antiquity of the Indian people" (Ortiz, 1994, p. 238), their historical place in Turtle Island. Ortiz (1994) describes McNickle explicitly claiming rhetorical sovereignty for Indigenous peoples: "claiming for Indian people a reality apart from that granted to them by white people" (p. 239). At a time when Indigenous activism was only just beginning to take root across Turtle Island and facing extreme political hardships via the policy of termination, McNickle is asserting the value of rhetorical sovereignty through grounded normativity in *Runner in the Sun* to impress upon his Indigenous peers across the United States the need for a similarly revolutionary reimagining for their communities and an active resistance against termination.

In *Runner in the Sun* and *The Marrow Thieves*, the protagonists Salt and French both come of age by incorporating grounded normativity into their worldview and thus actualize the Indigenous Bildungsroman through Coulthard's theory. They accumulate enough respect for the land around them that they learn in turn to live their "lives in relation to [other people] and [their] surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 60). Through this knowledge, they come maturely and genuinely into their manhood, and become leaders in their communities who build better, stronger, and more understanding relationships with those around them. The grounded normativity that McNickle and Dimaline use to make their young heroes' journey to adulthood possible reflects the political aims of their novels, i.e. the rhetorical sovereignty for Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island that their writing asserts in the real world. Cree/Métis scholar Emma Larocque (2016) cautions against over-emphasizing the political aspects of Indigenous literatures, stressing that scholars must attend "equally to its aesthetic value. Native Literature is as much about art and nuance as it is about colonial discourse" (p. 61). This is achieved through synthesis of the Bildungsroman genre with grounded normativity into the unique form of the Indigenous Bildungsroman. In this form, the considerations of genre in Dimaline and McNickle's writing is inseparable from the political ramifications of Coulthard and Lyons' theories. For Salt and French, as for McNickle and Dimaline, the coming-of-age narrative matters deeply, but so too is the manner in which they accomplish this growth: in these Indigenous Bildgunsromane, through grounded normativity, both the maturity of the protagonists and the political aims of the authors come to fruition.

Notes

[1] Hoagland here does not mean specifically "Indigenous Peoples" and hence does not capitalize the word, but refers to a given oppressed person's ancestral identity, which could mean indigenous to Turtle Island, as in the case of Dimaline or McNickle, or having an element of diaspora, as in some of the postcolonial authors that she considers in some parts of her essay.

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"Connections light up across time and space"–Detectives in the Magical Realist Web of Female Relationships in *Catching Teller Crow*

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Abstract: The essay explores Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's *Catching Teller Crow* (2018), a magical realist and detective fiction narrative directed at a young adult audience. The text reveals the powerful potential for, not only young adult literature, but also detective and magical realist fiction, to challenge and resist traditional, imperial-rooted forms of family, (neo)colonial orders and damaging power hierarchies. The novel highlights Aboriginal strength instead of trauma and presents the act of adopting well-meaning and actively anti-racist white Australians into Aboriginal kinship structures as an effective countermeasure to the previous policies of separating Aboriginal children from their families. In doing so, *Catching Teller Crow* foregrounds both intra- and intergenerational webs of female intimacy and posits them as essential to a dismantling of pre-established (colonial and patriarchal) orders without leaving behind blank spaces. Instead, family bonds and female friendship open up ways of exploring futures unfettered by oppression and trauma.

"I use what has been, and what will be, to change what is." This paratextual quote from the Australian cover of Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's Young Adult (YA) novel *Catching Teller Crow* (2018) introduces the novel to great effect. Certainly, *Catching Teller Crow* combines 'what has been'–the genre of detective fiction and to some extent that of 'classic' speculative fiction–and 'what will be'–either a future in which justice has been restored to Australia's Aboriginal people or the Indigenous speculative fiction genre. It thus stages an intervention, both generic and for the Australian YA readership who gain insights into the darkest parts of Australian history and into the strength of Aboriginal people in general and Aboriginal women in particular. The novel, the 2018 winner of the Young Adult category of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, puts Aboriginal girls and, to a lesser extent, women center stage in two genres within which they are still considerably marginalized.

Detective fiction tends to reaffirm established orders (see e.g., Döring, 2006; Makinen, 2001). Speculative fiction, on the other hand, does the apparent opposite by routinely engaging with crucial and controversial questions, which may aim at triggering societal change, encourage self-expression and confidence, and/or allow young protagonists to take on agency and frequently use

it in a justified rebellion against authority. However, both speculative and detective fiction belong to a shared history of supposed misogyny and racism due to their literary origins–and both are increasingly rewritten and reconstructed by marginalized writers not previously represented in mainstream popular fiction. For example, recent detective fiction has become more critical of policing strategies and regulatory institutions that maintain and reify order in direct contrast to previous iterations of the genre more loyal to "authority" and the status quo. Several recent examples warn of and problematize our reliance on such systems, which are often indebted to traditions and histories of violence.

As a genre-mixing novel, *Catching Teller Crow*, written by a brother-sister team of Palyku writers, might offer one such site for investigating the relationships between how contemporary speculative fiction, as well as detective fiction, are shifting, since it upends and explicitly rejects traditional structures of authority–here represented by a predominantly white supremacist, patriarchal police force and a social care system that does not treat all of its dependents equally. However, it does not do this by presenting a detective figure who is separate and superior to the police force, but rather by highlighting relationships between Aboriginal women as a necessary intervention in the eventual solution of the case at the heart of *Catching Teller Crow*. This intervention exceeds the limits of the novel and signals

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a much-needed change in the genre.

It is our assertion that *Catching Teller Crow* rejects neocolonial authorities to strengthen both intra- and intergenerational relationships between women rooted in indigenous epistemologies. The novel thus radically challenges pre-established orders. Against oppressive forces, both literal and metaphysical, it uses the detective plot to establish female friendships that yield powerful transcultural resistance. In addition, those very relationships highlight a form of double colonization connected to Australia's "Stolen Generation(s)" and flip the gender script of the often male-imposed dominance common in detective fiction and broader patriarchal societies.

In this article, we set out to examine *Catching Teller Crow* as a magical realist detective novel, first by exploring its magical realist elements and the constellations of female relationships used to highlight the ongoing oppression faced by indigenous girls and women as well as their resistance against that oppression. We will also explore the novel as a postcolonial and feminist rewriting of detective fiction. Lastly, we will consider how *Catching Teller Crow* challenges the structures of patriarchy underlying not only western society as a whole but also speculative fiction and detective fiction in particular. The Great Detective, in *Catching Teller Crow*, becomes a detective duo made up of father and daughter, which highlights familial relationships of love and connection while at the same time subverting the power hierarchy usually inherent in parent-child relationships. Other relationships are equally crucial to the detective plot in C*atching Teller Crow*, not because they exploit love as a motive but because they show how love and connection can lead to an interruption of damaging practices such as the separation of Aboriginal families and the racist abuse Aboriginal people continue to suffer at the hands of white Australian police.

"All the strengths of the Catching women flow down the family line into you" - Intergenerational Intimacy and Magical Realist Strength

Catching Teller Crow, named for its three protagonists, is a work of speculative fiction, which is unsurprising, since Ambelin Kwaymullina (2014) considers herself a writer of the genre. She contributes her genre affiliation to her heritage citing how many of the ideas which populate speculative fiction books [...] are part of Indigenous cultures. One of the aspects of my own novels that is regularly interpreted as being pure fantasy [...] is for me simply part of my reality. (Kwaymullina 2014, para. 8). Kwaymullina sees an intimate connection between speculative fiction writing and indigeneity as both share some core concepts. Both the fantastic–from a western point of view–and the realist are on display in *Catching Teller Crow*, though its generic location–spanning diverse genres such as speculative fiction in general, magical realist fiction, and detective fiction–is certainly complex. As such, we do not claim that *Catching Teller Crow* is solely a magical realist text, but we do argue that it is worthwhile to read it as one.

According to Bowers (2004), magical realism tries "to bring together the aspects of the real and the magical" (p. 22). The term magical, heavily undertheorized (p. 19) can have many meanings: it "refers to the mystery of life" and to "any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science" (p. 19). The magical thus does not necessarily defer to the prescriptive fantastic–the unequivocally nonexistent–but rather refers to the fantastic as an extraordinary element in everyday life. It may describe spiritual or religious beliefs without appraising their truth value, which certainly applies to *Catching Teller Crow*, as it contains several ideas from the Kwaymullinas' epistemology and events that are "out of the ordinary." In fact, "ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmospheres" (p. 19) are regular magical realist elements that can be found in the novel. *Catching Teller Crow*'s postcolonial agenda is also conducive to reading it as magical realist since "[m]agical realism has been commonly theorized in terms of a postcolonial strategy of cultural renewal, according to which such

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fiction is understood as embodying a racialized epistemology allegedly inclusive of magic". (Takolander, 2016, p. 95)[1]

Such a comingling of the magical and real within fiction can be understood discursively as a form of postcolonial juxtaposition (see Boehmer, 2018), where two supposedly "oppositional systems" come into contact and produce "disjunction" rendering narrative "gaps, absences, and silences" (Slemon, 1995, p. 10). In our view, magical realism promotes engagement with supposed conflicts, staged and framed by neocolonial discourse, between differing epistemologies. A magical realist approach can thus be interpreted as conducive or detrimental to modeling forms of transcultural entanglement. In contrast to Takolander (2016), we hold the position that trauma readings with an eye to magical realism might be productive and claim authenticity without a decrease in "interest [...] in authenticating magic" (p. 95).

It is immediately apparent that *Catching Teller Crow*'s ghosts correspond to hauntings of magical realism, but so too do the "extraordinary talents" the Catching family displays and which allow them to forge relationships between ancestors and descendants regardless of western-centric temporalities. The novel's plot as well as its intense focus on female and familial relationships would not even be possible if it were not as much a magical realist text as it is a detective novel. After all, we learn within the first few pages that Beth Teller, one of the novel's protagonists, is no longer "a living, breathing girl" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 4). Equally soon, however, the reader also learns that, without Beth's ghostly presence and her father Michael's ability to see her, the investigation central to the novel would likely never progress. While Michael, the story's main detective, is aware of the power structures that can dominate small communities like the one at the core of the investigation, he quickly concludes that there is no crime to investigate (p. 6). It is Beth who insists that they question the only

witness, even though Michael does not expect the testimony to be particularly reliable. Beth frequently chimes in to assist his deductions (see e.g., pp. 90, 125, 136), in some cases leading Michael toward important evidence and persons of interest that result in the various resolutions of the central crimes—her ability to outperform her professionally trained father may indeed be a further magical realist consequence at work. It is not much of a leap then, to conclude that female and familial relationships are center stage in *Catching Teller Crow,* if only by Beth's relation to her father and her hand in their shared work.

However, the novel does not stop there. It is structured by a dual-narrative, not the typical detective dual-narrative of crime and investigation (although that is also present), but rather two different narrative perspectives, which, taken together, accentuate the magical realist dimension of *Catching Teller Crow* perhaps more than the detective one. The first and arguably central narrative perspective follows Beth and is primarily expounded in an autodiegetic prose form. The other narrative follows Isobel Catching and is written in a deeply personal, autodiegetic poetic form. Taken together, the narratives synthesize to produce a third narrative, which revolves around Crow, the first victim of the novel's perpetrators. Crow's narrative highlights the ongoing abusive power local authorities can wield over female Aboriginal lives. Isobel's narrative goes even further, linking the present-day to the history and continued legacy of the Stolen Generations. Thereby, the polyphonic structure reveals the gaps and latent presences embedded within any singular narrative, voice or history. *Catching Teller Crow* thus joins other postcolonial voices in resisting master narratives by revealing their reductive limits, most deftly demonstrated by Crow's presence. The three narratives also foreground the three main female voices, which form a part of the Kwaymullinas' attempt to highlight female connections–both intra- and intergenerationally.

While the Aboriginal girls at the center of the novel emphasize intragenerational relationships, inter-generational female intimacy is at the heart of Isobel's poetic narrative. Her free-verse poetry is mainly used

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to describe her traumatic experiences in a magical realist manner, but there are several interruptions in near-prose, which point away from Isobel's own narrative toward those of her female ancestors. Their link is immediately set up to be "magical," which reconfirms that the speculative fiction narrative accentuates female relationships and strengths across generations. Isobel first brings up her ancestors as a kind of charm, "words that / control fire" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 28) to help Isobel deal with her anger. She recites the names often, almost as a refrain:

> *Granny Trudy Catching…*
> *Nanna Sadie Catching…*
> *Grandma Leslie Catching…*
> *Mum…*
> *Me.* (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 2018, p. 28)

These recitations resemble words of summoning that remind Isobel that "all the strength of the Catching women flow down the family line and into" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 28) her. Isobel remains deeply respectful of her own culture, as she does not voice her ancestors' names because her "family don't speak the names of the dead" (p. 28). Approaching death in this way may be unfamiliar to non-Aboriginal readers. However, the novel provides enough cultural context surrounding death and grief for the reader to understand that the tradition of not naming dead loved ones does not imply an absence of emotion or repression of sorrow[2]. Instead, Isobel's internal evocation of her ancestors produces intimacy with the deceased and enables "[c]onnections [to] light up across time and space" (p. 155), ultimately unshackling them from the imperialistic temporalities that they were subjected to.

The Catching women are mentioned frequently, often preceded by references to Isobel's mother as the words "speak in Mum's voice" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 30) or "Mum's voice speaks" (pp. 111, 155). Thus, another Catching woman is woven into this web of female relationships spanning vast distances and times. The short tales

from the Catching family history disrupt the poetry-narrative through their near-prose form, as previously mentioned, and, therefore, draw special attention to their content. Each individual mini-narrative refers to a point in the life of a Catching woman when she faced oppression due to her Aboriginal identity. However, rather than dwell on the obvious negative consequences, the narrative reframes these incidents as moments in which the women displayed tenacity and from which their descendants can draw strength. The first tale brings the issue of the Stolen Generations to the fore by referring to the laws that enabled it directly (p. 31)–Nanna Catching manages to escape the law because of her "strength with water" (p. 31), which can be seen as an "extraordinary talent" and thus a magical realist element. By spotlighting water as a fantastic element, Nanna Catching's narrative reconfirms its fundamental nature which sustains life, not just for humans but all earthly life. In this way, still deeper connections are articulated by the Catching women. They conjure up relations between human and non-human, living and dead, past and present.

In a later tale, the laws that enforced the legal abduction of Aboriginal children are referenced again and stated to have "lasted for generations" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 111). Consequently, Isobel's Grandma Leslie Catching is also taken away from her family but, unlike her mother, she is unable to escape and is instead brought to "[o]ne of the worst places" (p. 111), likely one of the mission stations where Aboriginal children were brought to in order to be educated according to white Australian values. Once again, the focus is on the Catching women's strength in connection to the natural world. When Grandma Leslie Catching is faced with a harsh life ahead of her, she draws power from her memories of "the rocks of her homeland. [...] Rocks that had lived for millions of years" (p. 112). This reference speaks to a strong connection between Aboriginal people and their traditional homeland that skirts imperialist constructions of Aboriginal people as 'closer to nature' and therefore 'savage' but instead highlights the Aboriginal concept of country[3].

Catching Teller Crow, continued

Grandma Leslie
[...] *made herself strong like rock. She survived hard times.*
[...] *She got through until she was grown up. Then she went looking for her mum, who'd never stopped looking for her.*
Your grandmother knew how to endure. (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 112)

Female resistance against oppression is highlighted here instead of trauma, a theme that extends back to the earliest Catching ancestor's tale recited by Isobel, that of Granny Trudy Catching. As Isobel's mother tells her,

Your old Granny was born into the frontier times when white men first came to our homeland. Terrible things happened to her. There was nothing she could do about it. All her choices got taken away. But she drew strength from her homeland. Her family. Her people. She never forgot how to laugh. She never forgot how to love.

Your Granny knew how to hold on to who she was. (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 155)

Once again, it is not the oppression and the ensuing lack of agency that is the focus, but rather the fortitude Granny Trudy Catching displays despite it. Her resistance does not feature direct opposition toward the intruding white men, since it consists of drawing strength from connections rather than disruptions.

The presences of the two Stolen Generations narratives in Isobel's magical realist poetry allows the reader to connect the Stolen Generations and the children's home at the heart of *Catching Teller Crow*'s detective plot. The home was built in an isolated location to "help" troubled children (p. 13). Its young occupants are racially diverse (p. 14), but the Stolen Generations are still an easy tie-in, since, according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2020), "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in child protection and out-of-home care services compared to non-Indigenous children" (para. 1). As the detective story unfolds, it also becomes increasingly clear that Isobel has been abducted by the same people responsible for running the children's home. Furthermore, they are likely sexually abusing young girls in their care, predominantly those of Aboriginal descent since–as the case of the missing girl Sarah Blue shows–their disappearances are easier to cover up than those of white girls. As the narrative proceeds, it becomes evident that the abuse and disappearances should be the crimes under investigation, not the arson and murders, for which the detective duo initially seeks an explanation.

"Dead girl, dead girl"—Postcolonial (Feminist) Detective Fiction

Victim. Motive. Suspect. The popular genre of detective fiction carries certain traditional markers and motifs, a dual narrative structure (Todorov, 1977, p. 44; Barzun, 1980, p. 148, Malmgren, 2001, pp. 21-22), the crime and the investigation among them. In most cases, the narrative is spent gazing with or at the Great Detective (see Reilly, 1999b, pp. 191-2) and upon the puzzle of the crime (see Grella, 1970; Rzepka 2005, p. 10). As a kind of readerly game, in much of the genre, the outcome sought is never to prevent future criminal acts but rather to restore existing orders[4] by substituting the crime's absence with its own master narrative (see Döring, 2006, pp. 60-1). As clues are gathered by intelligent wielders of empirical (and often imperial) science (see Rzepka 2005, pp. 32-48), suspects are interrogated, and the mystery is solved. How could such an innately conservative genre offer meaningful resistance against hegemonic power?

As Nalo Hopkinson (2010) wrote in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, "massa's tools don't dismantle massa's house–and in fact, I don't want to destroy it so much as I want to undertake massive renovations–they build me a house of my own" (p. 8). Although referring to the realm of speculative fiction, her claim is just as relevant when considering how to answer the above question.

Catching Teller Crow, Continued

Detective fiction, so consumed with maintaining civility and non-criminality, is a perfect site for postcolonial critique of the very institutions and authorities that are normally upheld by the genre. A positive appropriation of detective fiction to enact change paves a possible avenue for postcolonial resistance and even renovation. By making use of such appropriation, postcolonial authors of detective fiction might model epistemologies, dismantle institutional authority and even produce forms that challenge or reframe the genre to not simply maintain existing orders, generic or otherwise.

The detective story in *Catching Teller Crow* initially revolves around a fire in a children's home and the burned body found inside. At first, there seems to be no great mystery and the most plausible explanation is faulty wiring. When Michael and Beth interview the supposed witness, Isobel Catching, the detective plot starts to unveil. Her entire narrative is wrapped in magical realist metaphors that seemingly hide the crimes committed against her, yet her testimony is crucial in solving the case and showcases the intricate entanglement between magical realism and detective fiction. She describes the "Fetchers" as winged creatures clad in robes that hide their forms (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 41). "Their faces are covered by white masks with human features" (p. 41), which hint at the Fetchers' human identities, whose monstrous sides remain hidden. The two Fetchers take Isobel to a place where "[the] earth opens like a mouth" (45), later revealed to be a bunker, and they are "swallowed" (p. 45). Numerous female victims have already been held captive and died there. The Fetchers are, however, only lesser monsters, mere assistants to the terrifying 'Feed'. They only 'fetch' victims for the perpetrators because they have "[n]o heart, no guts, no core of self" (p. 103)–an accusation which enables Beth to connect her father's assessment of Cavanagh and Flint as "people with no moral core" (p. 177) to the Fetchers. The Feed is described as "large. White. Thin." (p. 106) with "mirror-eyes" (p. 106), and as Beth later realizes,

the mirror-eyes actually represent a pair of glasses, allowing Beth and the reader to identify "[o]ne of the Feeds [as] Alexander Sholt" (p. 175). The merging of the two narrative forms–both contain elements of detective fiction and magical realism–is described in striking terms as "Catching's story and [Beth's] experiences [...] suddenly slammed together" (p. 174). The solution of the crime Beth and her father are investigating thus only becomes possible once detective and magical realist story are intertwined.

It is also within Isobel's narrative that Crow is introduced to the reader as a mysterious being huddling in the "[c]orner of the room. Too dark to see into" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 101), though it is quickly revealed that the creature is a girl, albeit entirely grey– "Grey skin. Grey hair [...] / Grey dress" (p. 102). She is "a dead girl" (p. 103) who has been in the bunker "[s]ince the Feed began" (p. 103), indicating that she is the criminals' first victim. This information also enables the reader to identify Crow as the missing girl Sarah Blue, who disappeared twenty years prior and was written off as a runaway (p. 78). Crow, a young, vulnerable girl, is an almost stereotypical victim for a detective story (see Makinen, 2001) but her situation is more dire–as an Aboriginal girl, she is twice endangered, not only because of her gender but also her ethnicity. It is, after all, not coincidental that she went missing instead of her white best friend. While one of the reasons why her disappearance was not properly investigated was undoubtedly that the son of the local chief of police was involved, the crime could only be covered up so completely because she was Aboriginal.

> If a white girl had gone missing like that, [...] 'there'd have been an outcry. It would have been on the news, in the papers, something everyone talked about in the street. [...] [P]eople didn't care enough. No one was paying attention. (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 128)

The fact that girls like Isobel and Sarah/Crow are victimized is thus not happenstance but systemic. Violence occurs to Aboriginal girls so frequently, often perpetrated by white men, that Isobel's first thought

Catching Teller Crow, continued

upon seeing Beth accompany her father is that she may be haunting her murderer (see Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 58). Although Australia is a colony no longer, colonial legacies remain relevant. As the Mabo decision and continued anxiety surrounding "culture wars" and much postcolonial scholarship have demonstrated, the after-effects of Australian colonialism continue to be profound. The form of systemic oppression that Isobel and Sarah experienced is a form of double colonization, a term coined to come to grips with the combination of colonial oppression and patriarchal oppression that colonized women frequently face (see Peterson & Rutherford, 1986). We understand double colonization as an effective term to reference the continued oppression of women from the former colonies who face continued systematic effects as a result of colonial occupation and the power imbalances it enforced and continues to support. In *Catching Teller Crow*, double colonization is staged heavily by the use and subversion of detective fiction tropes that traditionally seem to support misogynistic and/or racist readings.

In Isobel's narrative, Crow seems to remain in her role as the powerless victim, seeing no way out except death (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 103). She thus falls in line with the detective fiction canon, where women characters often "are relegated to victims" (Makinen, 2001, p. 92). Crow even sees herself as someone with "no claws or wings or bite" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 109), in stark contrast to her name and later appearance. It is only near the end and only through Beth's superior interpretation of the clues that Crow's role in the narrative is revealed. Flipping the traditional script of the detective novel, Crow becomes not only a victim but also a perpetrator of crimes of vengeance. Interestingly, even though a 'spectral crow' is not a stereotypical suspect in most detective novels, the clues that point toward Crow are scattered throughout the text according to the generic requirements. Once the solutions to the central crime are elaborated, Beth reflects on her previous experiences, wondering How many times had I seen crows around town and never noticed [...]? How often had

there been mysterious gusts of wind at exactly the right moment? Crow had been there all along, trying to impart to me the gift of her hard-won knowledge [...]. (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 185)

Indeed, Crow *has* been there all along, and, as in most classical detective fiction, the reader may search within the narrative and identify all the clues available to them, even overtaking the detective in the investigation. For example, Beth encounters a crow at the site of the children's home that gives Beth the impression that it may have seen and reacted to her (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 12). Interestingly, she follows her observation by stating that, in a police investigation, and perhaps even more definitively in a detective novel, "if two things happened together, you'd suspect the first thing had caused the second until it could provide you with an alibi" (p. 13). Implicitly, the reader is thus encouraged to at least suspect that the crow may be aware of Beth.

More clues toward Crow's involvement accumulate as the novel proceeds. When the Tellers try to interview the only witness, "a gust of wind slammed the front door open and sent a cloud of dust whirling" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 21), thus distracting the nurse who was going to show Michael to the witness's room. They are then called by Isobel, who is not actually the witness Michael is supposed to interrogate, though she proves to be critical to the case. It can also be assumed that Crow was in contact with the care home children and most likely behind the wind that "told them to run" (p. 15) as well as the reason why the children seem "like they're *not* afraid, almost like they think everything's been taken care of" (p. 89). Additionally, the murder weapon in all the stabbings is "an unusual weapon–some kind of blade with a slight curve to it" (p. 67), or, rather, Crow's beak. The connection between Crow and Sarah Blue is also made early in the text, in the form of a rather subtle clue: Cavanagh and Flint, the two Fetchers, are found in "the last place she was seen" (p. 91) before she vanished. In presenting a variety of clues during the novel, *Catching Teller Crow* follows the most traditional detective story script, in which clues "function as signposts on the road to the explanation of the mystery" (Reilly, 1999a, p. 78). Indeed, according to Rzepka (2005), "the author [...] provides clues adequate to solve it, while the reader, [...] tries to solve

Catching Teller Crow, continued

the mystery within a predetermined time-limit (p. 14). This examination of "clue after clue, lead after lead" (Todorov, 1977, p. 45) is conceivable with *Catching Teller Crow* if the readers are familiar with speculative fiction and can recognize the possibility of sentient wind.

Catching Teller Crow ends, as detective fiction is wont to do, with the revelation of the murderer and the explanation of the sequence of events. However, unlike "traditional" detective fiction, the novel does not engage in reifying established conventions or orders (Döring, 2006, p. 61). According to Döring (2006), a detective "re-installs the missing links between the present and the past, between the story of the crime and the society living in its aftermath" (p. 61). Michael and Beth provide these links, but they certainly do not install a master narrative nor do they confirm an existing order. The existing order of the past made the crimes possible in the first place–and it is important here to recognize that the real crime at the center of *Catching Teller Crow* is not the deaths of the four male criminals, the Feed and the Fetchers, but the abuse of Aboriginal girls throughout the fraught history of Australia since its colonization. This colonial order is not reinstated but instead partially dismantled in the aftermath of the Tellers' investigation.

Just as the narrative undoes singularities by means of its polyphonic structure and the destabilizing of prose so too does the ending offer a multiple, rather than singular, close. Firstly, the detective story ends in a fairly conventional manner; Michael explains the recovered narrative of the crime and dictates a narrative to fill the absence left by the crime. He provides some of the criminal context factually but diverges with regard to magical involvement, instead spinning a story about how the perpetrators turned on each other and familial revenge followed by subsequent cover-ups left them all dead. Even the use of the same murder weapon is explained away as "an artistic touch" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 179). While Michael suggests that they may

never know the truth (p.179), he produces a narrative that is convincing enough to be accepted by the local police officer Allie.

As Allie leaves, Michael breaks down, revealing his own feelings of guilt and remorse, having realized that Isobel Catching has been dead from the start and her narrative has been a ghost story (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, pp. 180-2). At a nearly metatextual level, Michael speaks out about the problem of the detective who always arrives "too late" to prevent society from falling into disorder. "[W]e didn't get here at the beginning. We got here when it was all over. We got here at the end" (p. 182). However, rather than undoing established orders that demonstrate the limits of police institutions and the powerful detective figure, the voice of Catching replies. "*Of course* you're here at the end. So what? It's the beginning that hasn't happened yet" (p. 182).

Not long after, Beth explains to her father that he has "missed all the clues" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 184) of Crow's involvement in the crime that initially drew Beth and her father to the town and the ensuing murders. While Michael has "solved" the case, believing Catching to be the murderer, it is up to Beth to take over the traditional role of the detective by explaining at least some of the clues that led to her reconstruction of the crime story (p. 185).

After learning of his continued failure to find the identity of the killer, Michael's first words to Crow, now a "thing of claw and wing and bite" (p. 185), are an apology, admitting that she was "failed by the police" (p. 185). Her actions are portrayed as justified and Michael seems to ask for her permission to let the police take over from that point onward and she affirms. Catching's call to turn to "the beginning" is a powerful rejection of the detective novel, but not a complete dismantling of the ending[5]. Instead, this second ending offers the possibility for resolution *beyond* merely reacting to crime. The magical realist voice of Catching gestures to the possibility for change–not an expectation to rewrite the past or fill criminal absences with explanations or 'master narratives'. Rather, the detective's failure to reconstitute and revitalize the

Catching Teller Crow, continued

orders that caused the tragic imprisonment, abuse, and murders of the lost girls is marked as the "ending" of those orders instead of a reification of them. The second ending merges with the false narrative that Michael produced–and though it is more factual, magical and unbelievable, its outcomes appear, at their surface, to be similar. While the second ending offers reconciliation between victims and law enforcement, the scope of its resistant potential seems somewhat limited.

The final resolution offered in *Catching Teller Crow* is unavailable to all but the three "dead girls," and it may offer a path of resistance that is not given by the forced closure of endings. Death is not the end within the world and worldview the girls Catching, Teller, and Crow share–it is merely a different facet of existence (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 5), only accessible to the dead and certain people like Isobel who "can *walk all the sides of the world*" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina p. 18). Crucially, it is only after Beth, Isobel, and, especially, Crow have managed to defeat the oppressors and put new processes of justice into motion that the three girls fully embrace their new existence. The last scene contains the tearful, painful goodbye between father and daughter, but also reads as a kind of liberation and release–Catching and Crow successfully escape from their abusers and leave their trauma behind while Beth and her father finally move on from her tragic death. The final images of *Catching Teller Crow* once again accent the deep and intimate connections between the three girls as they hold hands and "ran as you only could when you weren't alive, or when you could walk between all the sides of the world" (p. 190). Instead of running away, the girls run toward the future, bearing an optimism that defies resolution to refract into possibilities outside of the narrative and ultimately demonstrate how the detective novel might offer a site of resistance, even renovation, against hegemonic power.

"A dad you can be proud of" —Upending Oppressive Racist and Sexist Hierarchies Through the Family

YA literature usually features parents who are in conflict with their teenaged children or, perhaps even more often, are completely absent. Whether plagued with, as Robinson (2009) puts it, "ineffectual or absentee fathers" (p. 216) or with parents who are "more likely to repress than to empower" (Trites, 2000, p. 56), fictional teenagers usually must navigate the storyworld without active support from their parental units. Additionally, *Catching Teller Crow* might be argued to fit the mold regarding Beth's deceased mother[6] (see Nadeau, 1995, para. 5) and even, to some extent, an unsupportive father, albeit due to grief. However, there is more to the relationship between Beth and Michael Teller than that. Their relationship is not nearly as hierarchical as traditional conventions of a patriarch-led family, rooted in older traditions of the "empire of the father" (see Broughton & Rogers, 2007, p. 8). Even though Michael is an obvious candidate for supporting conservative, colonial-born structures as a lawman, he does not dictate or attempt to control his daughter. He works against racist and sexist hierarchies, as do all three of the central girls. Yet, at the heart of this resistance is the family, often considered a limited relationship structure founded on blood-relations and the implied power relations of filiality. However, in *Catching Teller Crow*, familial relations are shown to harken to new concepts of affiliation that are no longer gated by the pre-given premise of concepts of birth or descent.

Michael, the primary patriarchal figure of the text, actively combats preconceived notions of patriarchy and masculinity as they relate to his career and fatherhood. Rather than press or forcefully interrogate witnesses and suspects, Michael allows Catching to express her poetic narrative at her own pace, returning to listen to her over several days. While Beth demands answers, Michael shows a caring patience atypical of the eccentric, near inhuman Great Detective or the rugged hard-boiled variety (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, pp. 53-4).

Catching Teller Crow, continued

For Michael, unlike the archetypal detective figure, broader structural problems are root causes for crimes. He rightly identifies the abuses of power that covered up Crow's disappearance and points out several times that those who enabled these abuses of power are also responsible for them (pp. 128, 185). In doing so, he charts unexplored pathways for the legacy of a troubled colonial ancestry and refuses to further bolster or profit from these legacies. Moreover, he does not accept or reproduce the dehumanizing and racist tendencies of his parents. Michael attempts to address the systemic problems of his society, even when grappling with his own grief. He comes closest to being somewhat patriarchal when he is lashing out at himself for failing Beth: "'I couldn't keep you safe. I couldn't take care of *my* child. I don't deserve to go to birthday parties, and watch the cousins grow up when you'll never…'" (p. 129). Here, Michael succumbs to the societal pressure that demands that he always protect his daughter even from situations that are impossible to prevent while ignoring his duties of emotional care and nurture toward Beth. However, even in this instance, he eventually reverses course, realizing that he has not "been acting like [a dad] for a while" (p. 188) since he kept Beth anchored to the "living" side of the world instead of encouraging her to move on. It is exactly this tension between Michael's duties as a father and his grief that determine the dynamic between Beth and him as well as his role in society.

Throughout *Catching Teller Crow*, but even at its outset, it is clear that Beth and Michael's relationship dynamic has been fundamentally altered by her death. In an almost parental tone, she chides him to get on with the investigation and to admit that her death was an accident, all in an effort to "keep him headed in the right direction" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p 11). Beth prods her father to take care of himself, to eat proper meals (p. 57), gets him out of bed to do his job (p. 66), and even sends him to take a shower (p. 68). Outside of more outward behaviors, she also internalizes her role and understands her responsibility to Michael in a reversal of parent-child hierarchies. She hides her tears from her father to protect him (pp. 64, 125),

she takes pride in his accomplishments, like when he sets Bell at ease (p. 70), and even worries about his future and the person that he will become when she is no longer watching over him (pp. 63, 127). These conventional dynamics are turned on their head, but they are expressions that any child could have for their parents. *Catching Teller Crow* neither devalues children nor presumes them to be subjects incapable of complex relationships. In doing so, it works against western concepts of strict parent-child relations by emphasizing the limits of age-based hierarchies. When Routledge (2010) identifies that "[f]or many child detectives, [...] the pursuit of criminals also involves the exploration of their relationships with adults" (p. 330), he is certainly correct if we consider *Catching Teller Crow*, but, importantly, the novel exceeds this frame. Beth's exploration of her relationship with her father stands in for the deeper dynamic of the parent-child/father-daughter relation that serves as a site for investigating the broader structures of Australian, and perhaps western, society.

Touched on several times in this article is also the fact that Beth is as much a detective as her father. They work together as a detective duo. Unlike traditional detective stories that feature the dynamic of the detective and the competent but un-investigative sidekick, *Catching Teller Crow* does not imbue Michael with a sense of untouchable brilliance nor does it reduce Beth to only an observer. While neither detective is flawless and they both come to false conclusions at times, together, they solve the novel's crime and do not write it off as a mere accident. Not uncommon in modern or contemporary detective stories, detective duos with more or less equal roles in the investigation gesture away from the singular white, western, and male detective perspective toward the multiple. That is of course, not to say that children have been relegated to the sidelines in detective fiction. In contradistinction to a child detective that is different from the adult detective, whether in their process of detection or otherwise (Routledge, 2010), *Catching Teller Crow* provides a backdrop to consider their connections rather than divisions. Beth, "Ghost-detective" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 85) is able to "engage with the world in ways not usually possible for children and solve mysteries in ways not possible for adults" (Routledge, 2010, p. 331).

Catching Teller Crow, continued

Meanwhile, Michael can interact with the world, questioning witnesses and directing law enforcement to move against the perpetrators. As complementary detectives, they support each other's investigative practices, demonstrating the need for diverse epistemic approaches to locate the true crime of the novel, the oppressive force of local police and economic elites[7]. Even before the narrative, Michael went against the grain by rebelling against his family in various ways that resist oppressive, colonialist structures. His own father was a cop who mercilessly used "the law [...] to protect some   people and punish others" (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 6), the others usually being Aboriginal people. As Beth explains, Michael "took all injustice personally, but especially anything to do with Aboriginal people not being treated right" (p. 128)–the reader never learns whether this particular interest in the well-being of Aboriginal people predated Michael's relationship with Beth's mother, but the fact that he has been so fully integrated and welcomed into Beth's maternal family suggests that he likely already "didn't want to be one of the people who didn't pay attention" (p. 128). His relationship to Beth's mother led to a final estrangement from his family who threw him out as soon as he started dating her and who had "never wanted anything to do with [...] their Aboriginal granddaughter" (p. 6). The reactions of Beth's maternal relatives to the relationship and to Michael are markedly different as he has been fully integrated into the family and remains an important part even long after his wife's death. Beth's grandfather is even explicitly stated to have been the "parent who'd always treated [her] Dad like one of his own sons" (p. 120), which reflects Aboriginal belief systems. According to Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina (2014), a complex network of relational patterns expands the concept of family to include "animals, plants, places in Country and elements or celestial phenomena" – effectively "[a]nything that exists can, and is, family to some degree" (p. 37) and so the adoption of another member into the family is a natural consequence. In a way, this may be seen as a complete reversal of the Stolen Generations, as it is the white man who is warmly welcomed into a big Aboriginal family as opposed to the many Aboriginal children forcibly taken away and isolated from their families to be raised within white society–in *Catching Teller Crow*, the spotlight is mostly on the female children as represented by the Catching women, which makes the contrast to Michael's story even more stark.

The loving Aboriginal family is a constant presence in *Catching Teller Crow*, even though they do not actually appear within the narrative except for a phone call. Numerous references showcase not only the close-knit nature of the family but also Michael's easy integration into it. When, during a flashback they all assemble at a hospital to await news on Uncle Mick's fate after a heart attack, Beth's dad is clearly included in the "*quite* so many family members" (p. 19), which seem strange to the likely Eurocentric doctor, and he is equally included in the following celebration, to which he also contributes. It is readily apparent from the intimate way in which he refers to family members as "Grandpa Jim" (p. 189), for example, that he loves his "adoptive" family deeply, but it is also explicitly stated, when Beth, aghast at Michael's reasons for not wanting to attend Grandpa Jim's birthday party, exclaims "But you love the cousins! *I love the cousins!*" (p. 129). After Beth's death, her aunts and uncles frequently call Michael to comfort and check up on him. They even try to prompt him to reconcile with Beth's Aunty Viv, who Michael places some blame on for his daughter's death (Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2018, p. 8). Ultimately, the novel's final ending closes with reuniting family, which is shown to have the powerful potential needed to bring people, even if unrelated by blood, together and allow them to choose "the opposite of grey" (p. 189). Michael calls Aunty Viv and reconciles, and the three girls transform into figurations of love. The hope of the future is not reduced to black and white, nor a mixture of them–the gray of deadness associated with Crow. Rather, the future is rendered colorful and multiple.

Conclusion

As David Kern (2020) writes in a review of *Catching Teller Crow*,

The deep roots of systematic abuses of power targeting Aboriginal children remain yet to be unearthed and a 'reconciliation' of the past, a potential beginning of a decolonized future, has yet to happen. The 'closure' of one particular story, the narrative suggests, is just the beginning of a much bigger project of healing and acknowledging the many other stories that are still hidden from view. (Kern 2020, p. 77)

The novel, as we have shown, does just that. Its polyphonic structure, interweaving of magical realist and detective elements, as well as its postcolonial strategies articulate a need for new beginnings in order to depart from the hegemonic status-quo. Its use of intra- and intergenerational relationships between women, most notably the Catching women, makes use of magical realism's tension between the real and magical to emphasize the strength that can be derived from epistemologies that draw upon the force of personal histories–those "lost voices and discarded fragments" that have been "pushed to the margins of consciousness by imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures" (Slemon, 1995, p. 16). *Catching Teller Crow* also makes use of its magical realist elements to rewrite the traditional detective story, de-centering the Great Detective and uprooting the restoration of order/master narrative schemata. As a resistant Young Adult fiction novel, *Catching Teller Crow* also ruptures the conventions of this rapidly growing genre as well. Instead of absentee or dead parents that represent the failures of their society, both dead and living parents are figured as transformative agents in their own right, capable of complementing their younger counterparts without subordinating them. Adult-child relationships are refigured as based on mutual support instead of perpetuating the usual power hierarchies. Only in

cooperative practice do Michael, Beth, Catching and Crow succeed in resisting oppressive, and often sexist and racist hierarchies. Michael and Beth's roles as detectives, Catching's intergenerational relations to the Catching women, and Crow's serial killing all work against racist and sexist orders. Their relationships, but especially Catching and Crow's friendship as well as Beth and Michael's filial/co-detective relations, are sources of strength for their own acts of resistance, and even their personal development.

The family, and importantly, female friendships offer the possibility for healing, for new beginnings and perhaps even for the systematic renovation required to generate societies founded on difference. The use of detective and speculative fiction in the form of magical realism as a mode of writing to lay the foundation for such resistance and change is to demonstrate that, while the past does matter and can be a powerful source of strength, it can also be deviated from. Additionally, perhaps most importantly, it is the young adult audience that may profit from these new impulses the most. In terms of YA literature, *Catching Teller Crow* also does important work in suggesting alternative ways of coping with trauma, death, and grief, as well as highlighting non-western conceptions of kinship. Both topics have been alluded to within this article, but more work could certainly be done, concentrating on these themes in particular. A formal analysis, dedicated to exploring the novel's narrative innovations and its creative use of prose and verse, would also be a worthwhile endeavor. Certainly, the Kwaymullinas' novel, albeit short in length and belonging to a genre not always taken as seriously as it should be, deserves to be studied in much more depth and variety–it is a complex novel and an important addition to the Young Adult genre that, while introducing epistemologies new to many young readers, also resonates deeply in its intimate portrayal of love, grief, family and friendship and in its resolute resistance against oppressive systems of any sort. Paraphrasing that paratextual quote from *Catching Teller Crow's* Australian cover: What has been and what is to come; at the point of connection that spans great spaces and deep times, we might begin to change what is.

Catching Teller Crow, Continued

Notes

[1]Takolander (e.g., 2010, 2016) addresses the problematic exoticism that implies that non-western cultures are inherently more magical and thus unreal, though we argue that non-western and Western speculative fiction texts are not inherently different in that regard. One need only consider J.R.R. Tolkien and
C.S. Lewis to see that religious and spiritual ideas in fantasy are frequent in western literature and neither exoticize the belief systems portrayed nor devalue any claims of spiritual truths.

[2]Discussions of death, grief, and sorrow in *Catching Teller Crow* would extend beyond the scope of this article but may provide fruitful ground for further research.

[3]Ambelin Kwaymullina (2008) describes country as "not simply a geographical space" but rather "the whole of reality, a living story that forms and informs all existence" (p. 9). Its importance for Aboriginal spirituality becomes apparent when she states that "[c]ountry is the source of all creation, all beauty, all wisdom. It sustains us, nourishes us, guides us. It gives us life, and teaches us how to live so that life [...] will always go on. Country is our joy, our love, our hope. Our country is our heart" (p. 10).

[4] In another context, Tobias Döring (2006) notes that "all genre fiction [...] is inherently conservative, reaffirming pre-existing formulas and so reassuring readers of an existing order. But this holds true with special force for the tradition of detective fiction" (p. 61).

[5]This is also mirrored by the novel's form, as the chapter "The End", which includes the expected closure for a detective novel, is followed by the chapter "The Beginning", which takes the three 'dead' girls toward new futures.

[6]Such a claim would be reductive in *Catching Teller Crow* since it would dismiss the fact that Beth's mother is relatively absent in the narrative as a sign of respect for the dead, rather than a reification of a western genre formula.

[7]Michael's and Beth's relationship is a nexus point when it comes to the novel's merging of various genres. As a dynamic detective duo, they fulfill an important role within the genre of detective fiction, but their parent-child dynamic also relates closely to central concerns of the YA genre. In addition, Beth's identity, as both the mixed-race child of a white/Aboriginal couple and as a ghost, ties in with a categorization of *Catching Teller Crow* as postcolonial magical realism.

Catching Teller Crow, Continued

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Construction of 'Limbo' as Resistance: A Reading of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*

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Abstract: Young Adult (YA) fiction often depicts the interconnected themes of resistance towards authority and the expression of individuality arising from such a conflict. In some cases, this tussle does not yield a prominent resolution. Alternative narratives become difficult to construct in a hostile society, which alienates the YA subject. The protagonist then retreats to a strange alternate dimension to find solace. This dimension may appear fantastical, yet the question remains: if we can dissect the essence of such a space is this dimension simply a place of escape or does the construction of such a dimension represent an extension of the resistance towards authority? This paper seeks to analyse Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* to understand the psychological impetus propelling the construction of such a reality. The ideas of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan on the imaginary, symbolic, and real may help to unravel the nature of reality the YA seeks to secure through his construction of the alternate space. However, it must be considered that Murakami's construction of the text is not fuelled by Lacan; thus, he may deviate from him at certain instances. Hence, this paper shall also explore if there is anything added to Lacan's discourse by texts like Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*.

Keywords: *Social conformance, Resistance, Father-son relationship, Sexual identity, Alternate Realm, Belonging.*

"Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head? . . . . Of course it is happening in your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p. 723).
These lines from perhaps the most celebrated young adult (YA) speculative fiction of recent times are relevant to the dichotomy between what is considered to be real and imaginary that I will be discussing in my examination of Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*. Another word that Murakami uses to describe this alternate realm is "limbo", which he defines as "the neutral point between life and death. A kind of sad, gloomy place" (Murakami, 2005, p.403). The theme of limbo in speculative fiction is a popular one in the context of young adult fiction. This paper seeks to understand the psychosocial conditions which might result in the construction of a 'limbo' space. In the context of this research paper, the word limbo has been used to represent the alternate realm depicted in Murakami's novel.

The paper also seeks to study the narrative purpose served by such a space. Furthermore, the roles played by issues like resistance against authority-wielding figures and manifestations of individuality in guiding the protagonist towards limbo will also be studied. Lastly, the paper aims to find out what constitutes 'reality' for the young adult subject.

The Questions raised by Murakami's Text

Kafka on the Shore charts the journey of the runaway who introduces himself as Kafka Tamura. He has an alter-ego, the boy named "Crow" and as per his suggestion, Kafka decides to quit school on his 15th birthday. His escape is motivated by his will to break free of an Oedipal curse. His mother along with his adopted sister left the household when he was young. Kafka had been living with his father (Koichi Tamura), who is a celebrated sculptor but an inadequate father. Kafka reveals to his newfound friend Sakura, whom he assumes to be his missing sister, that even though they lived in the same house, they hardly met, and in fact it is his father who hurled the Oedipal curse upon him. Kafka goes to a distant town and takes up an apprenticeship at the Komura Memorial Library, under the 40-year-old Miss Saeki. He befriends a slightly older individual, Oshima, at the library – they are united by their inability to conform to the socio-political grand narratives of urban Japanese society.

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At the library, Kafka is visited by the spirit of a 15-year-old Miss Saeki, and he is enchanted by such an otherworldly experience. He longs to meet her and simultaneously undergoes a sexual encounter with the present-day Miss Saeki. Kafka assumes that Miss Saeki is his missing mother, even though the available pieces of evidence indicate otherwise. With the sudden death of Miss Saeki, Kafka seems to lose his will to live. While staying at a log cabin in the woods, he journeys deep into the forest. This experience triggers his passage into limbo, the alternate realm. His psychological anxieties propel him to travel through the impenetrable forest. He reaches a small town, where time seems to have come to a halt, and there is only the bare minimum of technology. He meets the 15-year-old Miss Saeki once again in that town, and he considers that it would be better to stay in this realm of forgetfulness than to return to his world, where he does not have anyone or anything that could add significance to his life. The adult Miss Saeki visits him in that surreal setting and convinces him to return before the portal to his world is closed forever. Kafka returns to his world and decides to give it a chance even though his father has been murdered by unknown assailants and his mother/love interest remains dead. He decides to construct life according to his terms in the company of his friends.

The text also reveals in alternating fashion the parallel odyssey of an adult character, Nakata. It often appears that Nakata and Kafka are somehow connected. Nakata experiences the fantastic as the result of a childhood expedition in the forest, and his life is altered by his experiences forever. He loses his intellectual capacities as a promising student, yet he gains the ability to talk to cats. He kills Johnnie Walker, supposedly the alter-ego of Koichi Tamura, to protect the missing cats. Following this violent episode, Nakata's life is fuelled by the single-minded pursuit to find the entrance stone and stop the influence of the fantastic realm over the normal world. In this pursuit, he is accompanied by Hoshino whom Nakata befriends during their journey. However, the focus of this research paper shall primarily remain on Kafka and his escapades.

Kafka's tale plays with traditional tropes of young adult fiction like the themes of love, friendship, resistance, and father-son relationship, yet the challenge arises with the portrayal of limbo in the final act. Although adult characters like Miss Saeki and Nakata decide to choose forgetfulness and movement away from human society, the young adult protagonist is made to choose the opposite direction. It seems that Murakami's narrative is almost keen to give this message to its young adult readers that hopefulness is integral if one decides to shape life according to his terms. But questions remain - what factors lead to the construction of the alternate realm? What purpose does it serve in reflecting and shaping the personality of the YA protagonist? Why is it only the young adult who can escape it?

An Ill-Fitting Cog: Juxtaposition of Fantasy and Lacanian Framework

The conception of this research paper began with the aim of exploring the conventional young adult themes like resistance to authority, father-son relationship and construction of individuality within a society that demands conformation. However, as briefly stated earlier, Murakami's narrative threads these conventional concerns through a fantastic setting. The text heavily employs fantastical and metaphorical images and spaces to put forward its message, if there is any. Hence, coming up with a methodology that may help to unravel these evident complexities is a challenge.

The immediate challenge the text hurls at the reader is how to categorise the fantastical elements in it. Tzvetan Todorov classifies fantasy into the uncanny and marvellous - if "the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described . . . the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary . . . new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous". (Todorov, 1973, p. 41). Farah Mendelsohn has taken this further in identifying four categories of fantasy, depending on how magic enters the tale: "the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal (where neither the reader nor the story characters are sure that the fantasy exists)" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 14). She stresses the importance of adhering to specific stylistic traits for a

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work of literature to qualify as fantasy.

Her definition of liminal fantasy seems to best capture the essence of Murakami's narrative. The fantastical elements are present in the text, but the attitudes of characters towards the fantastic appears to vary. The sense of wonder seems to be missing from the characters; instead, there is malaise. Mendlesohn highlights that the 'blasé' undertone evident in certain fantasy narratives qualifies them as a liminal fantasy. Also, as the story ends the readers seems to encounter a particular dilemma – they are unsure whether the fantasy was even there or was it perhaps an extension of the imaginary. This subversion of expectations of the readers is a characteristic trait of liminal fantasy (Mendlesohn 2008). Mendlesohn also explains how liminal fantasy may alienate the readers by normalising the magical (Mendlesohn, 2008, p.226). However, a problem seems to emerge at this point – the existing discourse on fantasy seems to rely solely on the formal aspects of the narrative. In other words, it does not seem to consider the fantastical to be related to the characters in the tale.

Thus, Murakami's narrative contains fantastical elements and it resembles a liminal fantasy in which magic exists simultaneously with the real. It is unclear for the readers when the boundaries between the real and the fantastical are blurred. However, Murakami's narrative seems to resist structural straightjacketing. The way in which magic enters the lives of the characters seems to vary greatly from one character to another. For instance, the narrative showcases elements of the portal-quest when Kafka is accompanied by two soldiers through the dense forest. However, the narrative also seems to resemble an intrusion fantasy at certain junctures, such as when Colonel Sanders, a self-proclaimed metaphysical being, persuades Hoshino to take the entrance stone. Murakami's narrative also resembles an immersive fantasy when the readers witness the likes of Nakata and Miss Saeki – they only possess half of their shadows

(Murakami, 2005, p 364). In other words, parts of them are trapped in the fantastical realm and they can never return to the 'real' world. Thus, it seems that *Kafka on the Shore* invokes all the categories of fantasy literature that have been discussed by Farah Mendlesohn. Now, the latter does mention the possibility of texts which may resist categorisation – "while many books move internally from one category to another, very few authors produce a single text that exists simultaneously within multiple categories" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p.15). However, it remains a relatively less explored area. A strictly structural approach does not seem to explain how the fantastical may evolve with characterisation within the span of one narrative.

Therefore, questions arise – is the fantastical even there within the text? Alternatively, could it be merely an extension of the character's psychological state? In the course of *Kafka on the Shore*, Hoshino never meets Kafka, yet they both experience the fantastical. So, perhaps the fantasy is not purely speculative, it exists within the reality of the narrative. However, the differential experiences of the same fantastical reality may be due to the differing psychological realities of the characters. In other words, it seems that a character's approach and reaction to the magical elements around him seem to be greatly influenced by his psychological state. Thus, if Kafka Tamura as a young adult reacts to the apparently fantastical reality in a different way than Hoshino, or Miss Saeki, perhaps it is because his mind is coming to terms with its position within the society. Hence, I believe an extensive study of the interrelation between the different 'selves' (individual, social, and the "unfathomable self") is necessary to interpret the slippery depiction of reality and fantasy in Murakami's narrative.

Jacques Lacan is perhaps the most influential psychoanalyst thinker of the latter half of the 20th century. His works attempt to explore how the individual self of the human being reconciles with the imaginary, symbolic and the real. As discussed earlier, the problem of interpretation encountered in *Kafka on the Shore* is not merely formal, instead it also appears to be psychological. Hence, Lacan's ideas on the nature

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of reality seem to be helpful in unravelling the nuances of the text to fathom the mind of the young adult protagonist, Kafka Tamura, who resists his society and escapes from it into an alternate realm, only to return once again.

Lacan explains that his goal is to comprehend reality. He notes that reality appears "tangible" when proved by physical sciences, but there are experiences that cannot be explained by the physical sciences, thereby enhancing the scope of psychoanalytic analysis (Lacan, 2006, p. 63). This perspective becomes relevant as this paper attempts to explore how Kafka Tamura's experience of the fantastical varies from those of other characters. To be more precise, Lacan's account of the 'mirror stage' in infants become paramount in framing the methodology of this paper. He identifies the symbolic, imaginary, and real as parameters guiding one's comprehension of reality. The assumption of the 'self' occurs as the child encounters his image on the mirror. It is the juncture where the 'self' constructs an 'imaginary identity' while being unaware of societal filters. This is what Lacan refers to as the 'ideal I' state. However, as he grows up, he is culturally conditioned, and his assumption of the 'self' transforms into the symbolic. The imaginary construct of the self and the socially constructed understanding of the self are at conflict with each other, and this conflict crystalizes the personality of the human being (Lacan, 2006). However, perhaps the real is that which remains on the other side of the mirror, - unseen forever, only realized in abstractions. In other words, the 'symbolic' is the societal filter that shapes reality; the 'imaginary' is the perception constructed by the self apart from the symbolic. What eludes both 'symbolic' and 'imaginary' comprises the real. Human identity formation is a dialectical process - it considers all these contradictory abstractions of reality, and out of this conflict results the understanding of the self and the other. If psychoanalytic theorisation seems to place an immense faith in the libidinal energies dictating a text, or a subject, it is because the origin of the libido is the 'real', that is beyond the imaginary and

symbolic aspects of reality. Thus, Kafka Tamura's Oedipal struggle can perhaps be interpreted as his quest to fathom reality. His rejection of physical reality and the 'symbolic' reality is followed by his journey into the alternate realm, which seems to be an amalgamation of the imaginary and unfathomable aspect of the real. *Kafka on the Shore* then appears to resist structural definitions of the different categories of fantasy. Instead, it seems to expand the liminal fantasy genre by incorporating the psychoanalytic aspects. In other words, the question of how magic enters the text (Mendlesohn, 2008) undergoes slight modification. Instead, the question becomes - can 'magic' be used as a tool to understand reality as presented in the text?

Evidence for this interrelationship between fantasy and psychological frameworks can be found in the text. Murakami's text operates within the Japanese fantastic literary tradition, and it cites Murasaki Shikibu's 11th century fantasy *The Tale of Genji* through a casual conversation between Oshima and Kafka. It seems to me that this interaction may add to the psychosocial repertoire of the narrative. Oshima refers to the epic tale when he explains to Kafka the concept of the 'living spirit', or *ikiryo*. He mentions an episode in which Genji's pregnant wife Lady Aoi is repeatedly attacked by the living spirit of Lady Rokujo out of jealousy. However, the latter had no idea of this ghastly event. She woke up time and again mistaking the faint memories as nightmares (Murakami, 2005). Oshima further remarks how the Japanese literary tradition acknowledges the blurring of the physical and the subconscious. He says

The world of the grotesque is the darkness within us. Well before Freud and Jung shined a light on the workings of the subconscious, this correlation between darkness and our subconscious, these two forms of darkness, was obvious to people . . .. In Murasaki Shikibu's time living spirits were both a grotesque phenomenon and a natural condition of the human heart that was right there with them . . . But today things are different. The darkness in the outside world has vanished, but the darkness in our hearts remains, virtually unchanged. Just like an iceberg, what we label the ego or consciousness is, for the most part, sunk in darkness. And that estrangement sometimes creates a

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deep contradiction or confusion within us. (Murakami 2005, p. 208).

Oshima here is attempting to answer Kafka's query about living spirits. But Murakami employs this trope perhaps to situate the existence of Miss Saeki's teenage spirit haunting the library and Kafka's hypothesis of his soul leaving his body and murdering his father within the discourse of Japanese fantasy. Hence, it appears that psychology and Japanese literary tradition are working together in weaving the fabric of the narrative.

Kafka Tamura Versus his Society and Education System

Kafka is a 15-year-old high school teenager. He seems dedicated to his life as a student in his studies and duties. However, Murakami's narrative appears to prepare him as a foil to the grand narrative of the post-World War II education system of Japan. The devastation of World War II and the state of the country following it resembled a dystopia. Schools resembled centres for the mass production of capable workforces. Murakami's narrative seems to ask whether such a system can nurture individuality in its ever-present demand for efficiency. People were conditioned since their youth to work towards building a better nation, and most of them comprised the "middle class" (Varley, 2000, p. 335). It appears that the resurrection of the national economy, therefore, stands on repressed individuality.

The above assumption may be true if one considers the 'madness' of Kafka's father, Koichi Tamura. He is a successful sculptor, but also an accomplished investor in the stock market. Yet, in a state of frenzy, he supposedly assumes the identity of Johnnie Walker, a serial killer slaughtering cats hoping to collect their souls, thereby enabling him to control the world. Kafka's desperate attempt to distance himself from his father is perhaps motivated by his desire to not turn out like his father, a possible victim of the state's grand narrative as

propagated through the education system. Kafka does not wish to repress his individuality, but he is unsure how to reconcile contradictory impulses.

Murakami's narrative also explores the follies of the society that regulate the education system. More precisely, the text seems to address how society manipulates young adults under the guises of ideology and allegiance. 1970s Japan witnessed violent student riots like those occurring in many other parts of the world. However, Wesley Sasaki-Uemura writes that, "[after the tragic and shocking death of student leader Kamba Michiko at the hand of the riot police] . . . The Liberal Democratic Party had to turn from its confrontational political agenda to a low-key approach emphasizing programmes to promote economic prosperity" (Sasaki-Uemura, 2002, p. 20). This shift from an ideological battle against oppressive politics to financial evolution is seen as problematic in Murakami's narrative. The young adults, brimming with energy and fighting to champion a more democratic vision of their society, are made to conform to the politically motivated vision of economic prosperity. Koichi Tamura had been a student during the 1970s and even though the text hardly talks about his past, yet one is perhaps right to imagine that he knew about the student riots. His later obsession with consumerism, as described by Kafka Tamura in the opening chapter, further strengthens Sasaki-Uemura's observation. Thus, Guy Yasko writes how Japanese authors like Yasuo Tanaka blamed the students as "brand obsessed consumers" (Yasko, 2002, p. 482).

It follows that Kafka's escape from his father's house is not just personal, it is political. He does not wish to be like his father. He does not identify with the grand narratives of consumerism and economic prosperity that his older generation has accepted. He pursues education, not as a path to something else, but simply because he likes to know. He takes shelter in the Komura Memorial Library, which contains books pertaining to Haiku poets and ancient Japanese culture and literature. Kafka does not run away from education, but he chooses to do away with the education system around him. He feels that there is a gap between what is taught and what is "really out there". He constantly mentions that the adult world is a dangerous, rough place. He lets the readers know in the

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opening chapter:

> Let's face it, teachers are basically a bunch of morons. But you've got to remember this: you're running away from home. You probably won't have any chance to go to school anymore, so like it or not you'd better absorb whatever you can while you've got the chance. Become like a sheet of blotting paper and soak it all in. Later on you can figure out what to keep and what to unload. (Murakami 2005, p.9).

His perception of the teachers as 'morons' being representatives of the education system does not exist in isolation. He mentions elsewhere that he studies in a school that caters to the rich upper classes of his society (Murakami 2005). It is a comfortable place, different from the world around him. Hence, the teachers who make these students feel accustomed to their make-believe surroundings are perhaps doing a disservice to the students by not exposing the artificiality of their class privileges. This contradiction between the 'innenwelt' (the inner world of a human being) and the 'umwelt' (the inhabited environment) is what Lacan calls identifies as alienation, or a "fragmented body" (Lacan, 2006, p. 78). Hence, Kafka yearns to fathom the reality of his society and is constantly working to discern his place within the same.

A contemporary YA Oedipus

Kafka, like a quintessential postmodern protagonist, appears to know that society can be an ominous presence, with its incessant demands for conformance. His disillusionment with the education system perhaps stems from his home. He belongs to a dysfunctional family. His mother had left their household when he was quite young. She took his adopted sister with her but did not take him. Kafka's father is sceptical of him and believes that, like Oedipus, Kafka will murder him and sleep with his mother and sister.

The disconnect with society becomes apparent through the understanding of the Oedipus myth itself. Oedipus's struggle as described by

Sophocles in the translation by Watling was motivated by a desire to rescue his kingdom from the plague (Sophocles and Watling 1947). Kafka, however, is motivated by a desire to escape from his immediate society. In other words, society in Murakami's narrative may be the plague that leads Kafka to commit the violent, metaphorical murder of his father. Sakura sums up the estranged relationship between Kafka and his father:

> Your father sounds like an alien from outer space or something," Sakura says. "Like he came from some far-off planet, took on human form, kidnapped an Earth woman, and then had you. Just so he could have more descendants. Your mother found out, got frightened, and ran away. Like in some film noir science-fiction flick. (Murakami 2005, p. 83).

The problematic father-son relationship in this narrative wields a profound metaphorical significance. When Koichi Tamura curses Kafka that someday he will murder his father and sleep with his mother and sister, the narrative appears to highlight the animosity of one generation towards the other. The older generation seems to accept the woman being confined to the domestic sphere, however, as the Japanese society underwent several economic changes, women ventured into the working space. A sharp decline in marriage and birth rates in the 1980s (Broadbent, 2002) may suggest the disconnect between men and women. Susan Napier writes, "[T]he post war fantasies of male writers are notable for the absence of women characters. Women are no longer part of wish-fulfilment fantasies. Instead, they are part of the reality which the male protagonist longs to escape" (Napier, 1996, p. 54). Perhaps in Koichi Tamura's understanding, the Japanese woman can be a lover, but not a caring wife. Hence, the Oedipal curse that he hurls at his son (who embodies individuality and scepticism towards convention) is essentially the angst of one generation towards the other.

Kafka's vulnerable state, eagerness to understand the other, and honesty allow him to befriend Miss Saeki and Sakura. He ends up romancing the 15-year-old spirit of Miss Saeki and experiences a sexual encounter with the grown-up, sleep-walking Miss Saeki. He also shares a

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brief sexual episode with Sakura. His father's prophecy seems to contain some truth. Kafka has slept with Miss

Saeki and Sakura, whom he thought to be his missing mother and sister. Now the question arises, how can Koichi Tamura's murder be associated with Kafka, as the latter was miles away from him physically. As Kafka wonders whether it is he who had killed his father in a dream, Oshima reminds him – "On the day of the murder you were here at the library, reading until evening. You wouldn't have had enough time to go back to Tokyo, murder your father, and then get back to Takamatsu. It's impossible" (Murakami 2005, p. 183).

Yet the liminal fantastic mode of storytelling gives Kafka some supernatural abilities present in Shinto lore. The soul, also known as *tama* in Shintoism, is said to possess the power to leave the body momentarily when someone is ill, but it finally departs the body only after death. The *tama's* journey outside the body may work to alleviate any "curse that might be endangering the ill person (Buckley, 2002, p. 103). It may have been possible for Kafka then to murder his father even in his dreams in order to destroy or even execute the Oedipal curse. This episode in the narrative can be interpreted to place Kafka as the murderer if Lacan's framework is considered. Lacan mentions that the conflict between the inner world of a subject and the external influences guiding that subject not only alienates that subject but also fragments him. Hence, dreams may become a viable medium where these fragments revisit the subject (Lacan, 2006). Thus, it is possible that the narrative allows Kafka Tamura's fragmented self to possess Nakata who murders Johnnie Walker, the assumed alter-ego of Koichi Tamura. Thus, Nakata's final words before the murder carries more weight if one considers the above perspective – ""Please, stop it. If you don't, Nakata's going to go crazy. I don't feel like myself anymore" (Murakami, 2005, p.136).

Kafka's metaphorical murder of his father seems to be a commentary on father-son relationships. He rebels against the authority of his father because Kafka did not identify with the grand narratives guiding him. His father did not treat him as a son, instead, he thought of him as a property. Even when Kafka runs away from his home, the narrative does not offer any insight into whether his father even noticed his absence. There is hardly any worthwhile memory shared between them. Instead, it is the curse that dictates their attitude towards one another. In other words, the young adult is hardly seen as a companion, and Kafka's search for his mother and sister is essentially a search for belonging. If one approaches the text from this angle, then Kafka's sexual interactions with the women he encounters are essentially promises of fulfilment and chance at constructing meaningful relationships.

Also, Kafka's single-minded pursuit of his mother and sister can be interpreted as his search for the elusive reality. For Lacan, the mirror stage marks the construction of the imaginary and symbolic identities, thereby, removing man from reality (Lacan, 2006). So, Kafka's relentless attempt to do away with the symbolic and imaginary may be his endeavour to reach the pre-mirror stage. Elsewhere, Adrian Johnston mentions that Lacan's idea of the 'real' can be traced back to the courtly love tradition in English literature, in which the ideal and elusive figure of the 'lady' represents the 'real' for the poet (Johnston, 2018). This understanding of the 'real' indeed becomes interesting while reading *Kafka on the Shore*, the story of a young adult protagonist in search of his missing mother, who happens to fall in love with the 'teenage spirit' of the same person whom he believes to be his mother. The sexual episode between Kafka and Miss Saeki, the presumed mother figure is meaningful. It reflects the understanding of reality, which is associated with sexual desires and biological functions of man, removed from the symbolic perception of reality. Lacan mentions that such an understanding of reality has been popularised by Freudian psychology, in which interpersonal relations come under the cultural domain and biological functions are taken to be their substratum. Even though Lacan emphasizes the 'recklessness' of such a hypothesis (Lacan, 2006, p. 73), Murakami's narrative seems to play with this idea in its attempt to explore what constitutes reality for Kafka Tamura as a young adult.

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Kafka's struggle to construct a dialectical understanding of his reality through equating the 'fragments' of the imaginary, symbolic, and real transcends the personal domain and becomes universal. However, although Murakami's narrative seems to put immense faith in the capacity of the young adult to construct meaning, thereby replacing the language of the previous generations, it is simultaneously sceptical of his ability to do so. The following section, therefore, explores the relationship between resistance and the young adult.

Rebellion and its Aftermath

Rebellion comes with a promise of replacing the status quo with something better, although, there is no guarantee whether such an outcome may happen. Japan witnessed such incidents in the 1960s and onwards, and Murakami's work utilizes this backdrop to give depth to some of the characters. Koichi Tamura and Miss Saeki, who are in their 40s as Kafka encounters them, reflect two possible outcomes of the student riots in Japan.

The student movement can be said to have had three distinct phases in the Japanese political climate. First, students associated themselves with the growing influence of the Japanese Communist Party. They often staged protests challenging the policies of the government as well as the university administration. The second phase appears in the 1980s when students are disillusioned with politics and are presented as materialistic. The third phase represents the post-1990s students who are absorbed within the individualistic consumerist society, and student activism becomes an illusory dream and social coherence is hardly present.

Koichi Tamura and Miss Saeki represent the 1980s phase - Koichi's study room is laden with branded products originating from across the world, while Saeki's beloved dies during one such violent student protest and her world shatters overnight. The death of a young adult who was brimming with potential reflects the scepticism towards such

movements. Murakami's narrative attempts to strip the halo associated with student resistance. It shows how students can be manipulated by political parties in power, causing damage to life and property. This is perhaps a homage on Murakami's part to commemorate the death of Tokyo University student leader Kamba Michiko during clashes between riot police and student protestors in 1960 (Sasaki-Uemura, 2002).

However, if Murakami's narrative is sceptical of the fruitfulness of students' resistance, it is not negating its democratising capabilities. It is simultaneously doubtful of power structures regulating society. Hence, the narrative does not celebrate the failure of the students' movement either. The hollowness of Koichi's life, his obsession with commodities appears to cause a breach in the relationship with his son and possibly wife and daughter. He meets a horrific and lonely end.

The narrative seems to dissect the idea of resistance - if student rebellion seems to question the symbolic order shaping society, it should also be perhaps considered, what does such an act yield? The rebellion may be considered successful if the symbolic is amended to incorporate the ideal-I, that is the 'imaginary reality' envisioned by the students. However, if such an outcome does not happen, then malaise and resignation prevail. Murakami's narrative presents this vision of Japan - an urban space harbouring a hoard of alienated individuals, resigned to existence without purpose. The adult characters in Murakami's narrative then are nothing but alienated young adults who have grown up, having tried to change the symbolic order and failed.

Even though the adults seem to give in to this despondent life, the young adults seem to have a choice. This ambiguous feeling which the reader experiences, seems to get manifested in the form of the alternate realm. It appears to be less of a place, but more of a space created by the mind in constant conflict with civilisation. Murakami's work seems to hint at the possibility that maybe resistance on part of the young adult, or even the adult, is futile. However, it does not offer a clarification on this issue. Instead, the narrative seeps into the alternate realm. This transition is almost similar to Christopher Nolan's film "Inception" - where questions are not directly

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answered, but are dealt within constructions of the mind.

The Other-Realm

Murakami's narrative, unlike conventional young adult fiction, does not seem to advocate rebellion. There is an air of passivity lurking in the borders of the text. It offers an interesting choice to the young protagonist - he can either continue trying relentlessly like Sisyphus to change the dystopian elements within his society, or he may retire into the monotonous yet peaceful alternate realm.

This alternate realm is accessed in a surreal manner, with the help of an 'entrance stone. The narrative reveals this alternate realm to resemble a small, desolate suburb. It has a library, but the people living there are bereft of their memories. Characters like Miss Saeki prefer to be here as their memories hunt them every waking moment. The young adult with dreams grows up only to realize that he cannot seize what he wants from the world. This constant need to adjust to a life that is hardly desired gradually becomes wearisome. Resignation seems to be the easier option in such a circumstance and the alternate realm is the site of resigned sustenance.

Lacan states that conflict between the imaginary self and symbolic self leads to fragmentation of the psyche, and "[t]his fragmented body…is regularly manifested in dreams when the movement of an analysis reaches a certain level of aggressive disintegration of the individual" (Lacan, 2006, p.78).If this understanding is accurate, then the surreal, dream-like alternate realm in *Kafka on the Shore* may actually be projection of Kafka's inner turmoil. Therefore, Kafka's journey through the deep woods which takes him to the alternate realm is suggestive. He is going away from civilisation for he has seen its limits as a young adult. He wonders earlier how the world of grownups has such a wide range of emotions and experiences, which perplexes the young adult. He reaches the secluded place and stays for a while. He meets the 15-year-old Miss Saeki and they share a conversation, and her departure puts forward certain pertinent questions:

> I'm alone again in the little cabin, inside a closed circle. Time isn't a factor here. Nobody here has a name. She'll be here as long as I need her. She's fifteen here. Eternally fifteen, I imagine. But what's going to happen to me? Am I going to stay fifteen here? Is age, too, not a factor here? I stand in the doorway long after she's disappeared, gazing vacantly at the scenery outside. There's no moon or stars in the sky. Lights are on in a few other buildings, spilling out of the windows. The same antique, yellowish light that illuminates this room. But I still can't see anybody else. Just the lights. Dark shadows widen their grip on the world outside. Farther in the distance, blacker than the darkness, the ridge rises up, and the forest surrounding this town like a wall. (Murakami 2005, p. 394).

Kafka feels that in this reality, he will arrest the moment and everything he is will slowly come to a halt. In other words, one's identity is not rigid but always in flux. Every moment adds to the development of one's self, and if one manages to stop that process, then one's personality comes to a pause. The dilemma is almost reminiscent of Keats' pair of lovers in his poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" - they have gained permanence by forsaking humanity. In the poem, the couple has successfully gained permanence as they are etched on stone. Yet, Keats's speaker is also aware that their love cannot be consummated (White, 2010). Likewise, Kafka Tamura realizes that he will never feel the range of experiences that an adult does. Yet he wonders that life does not have any meaning for him, for there is no one who truly cares about his existence. However, he returns to the familiar reality as he comprehends that life breeds memories, and memories shape one's existence. Murakami's narrative offers hope, but the promise is personal and not socio-political as has been the trend in other popular young adult texts depicting the theme of resistance. For instance, if J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series depicts how the young adult acts as the fulcrum of the rebellion which uproots the dystopian tendencies in society and establishes an egalitarian premise, then Murakami's narrative tends to question rebellion and celebrates co-existence of the individual and society. Like the adult figure, Kafka does

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not resign if his 'imaginary' understanding of reality does not coincide with the 'symbolic' understanding of reality. He remains hopeful and tries to reconcile the two.

Questions may arise - Are the people he meets in the alternate world real? Or, is the alternate world real itself? But such questions become redundant if one considers what it is to be real. Reality in Murakami's narrative seems to be anything that leaves an impact in one's life. Even dreams and thoughts become real if they shape one's personality and determine one's perspectives. So, the narrative seems to deconstruct this idea of reality altogether. Nevertheless, this alternate realm seems to have been constructed by borrowing minimal images from Kafka's familiar world. It appears that the symbolic does leave an impression even deep within the 'imaginary' reality inhabited by Kafka. Perhaps this liminal zone between the imaginary and symbolic is what Murakami's narrative refers to as 'limbo' - a place of resignation - where the symbolic gradually gets discarded and the imaginary self is relieved of its expectations. What remains is perhaps but a lingering presence of what had been. If such a realm comes under the category of fantastical, then the fantastic can perhaps be defined as that which is bereft of the symbolic and imaginary.

However, Kafka's eventual return to his known reality does not mean he will happily unite with the world that he had been keen to escape. Instead, he opts for a brand of resistance that is small-scale, perhaps limited to the individual level. He constructs relationships with people who seem to matter to him, Oshima and Sakura. He refuses to follow in the footsteps of his father, and the final showdown between "the boy named Crow" and "Johnnie Walker", possible alter egos of Kafka and Koichi Tamura, is pertinent. Johnnie Walker desired totalitarian control over the world, whereas the boy named Crow always tried to shield Kafka from the world and his father. The latter's victory over Johnnie Walker gives momentum to the

interpretation that Kafka would find a way to exist in society, without necessarily conforming to its grand narratives. He would construct his own meaning and exist in a pocket of society. Kafka Tamura steps into the shoes of Nietzsche's superman. If the adult characters seek to resign from the world in search of forgetfulness and tranquillity, the young adult character hopes to construct meaning in an absurd universe.

Construction of the Real

Kafka's struggle to come to terms with his individuality through resistance and eventual acceptance of societal norms, to discover the identity of his mother and to escape his ominous father can be thus perceived as the young adult protagonist's encounter with the 'imaginary', 'symbolic' and 'real'. But what stands out, refusing to be pinned down through literary analysis, is the existence of the alternate realm where Kafka finds himself towards the final chapters of the novel. Questions arise about the possibility and utility of such a realm in shaping the psyche of the YA mind.

Kafka's journey into the alternate realm through the forest is symbolic. He is moving away from human civilisation into something more primal. To take a cue from the philosophical understanding of reality, it can be said that "reality is independent of our experience and judgement" (Luntley, 1995, p. 38). In other words, reality is something that exists 'a priori' of humans - it is anything that retains its characteristics even after the intrusion of human culture. So, Kafka's search for truth allows him to bypass the artifice which he had known to be real. However, as he reaches the alternate realm, he understands its limitations. He feels reality is not something to be reached; instead, reality must be onstructed with the help of one's experiences. The nature of this reality is not pure, it is tainted by one's expectations and flawed understanding, yet it appeals to him more than the truth that remains before the dawn of civilisation.

Murakami's narrative does not seem to declare any winner in the tussle between manmade versions of truth and a priori perceptions of reality. It simply appears to highlight the necessity of belonging to a reality that makes

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life liveable. Kafka's bildungsroman essentially speaks of his education, where he learns how to construct meaning in life as a young adult. Borrowing Lacan's framework of the imaginary, symbolic, and real may help the readers to fathom Kafka's passage.

Kafka's understanding of his father as an embodiment of authority in his life is 'imaginary'. Hence, the first-person narrative of 15-year-old Kafka Tamura never allows us to meet Koichi Tamura. The readers learn about him and interpret him through Johnnie Walker. But the text does not even offer one word being shared between the father and son in real-time. Also, the social identity of Koichi Tamura is 'symbolic' – a renowned sculptor and a successful investor. The 'real' Koichi Tamura remains elusive. Even Nakata's understanding of Koichi Tamura as possibly Johnnie Walker, the serial killer who murders cats, is his version of the 'imaginary'. The imaginary and symbolic identities of the father shape Kafka's resistance towards authority, that is, he is resisting something that is not 'real' but comprises the real for him. For instance, his refusal to study in a private, upper-class school is also his attempt to challenge his father's 'symbolic' social identity. The murder of his father by an 'unknown assailant' destroys the imaginary and symbolic identities of his father. What he had been resisting till now suddenly ceases to exist. The showdown between Johnnie Walker and the boy named Crow in the forest obliterates the last remaining 'imaginary' version of his father. All that remains is the 'real', which cannot be pinned down.

Johnnie Walker, even though defeated, cannot be destroyed, because the real is out there somewhere. His final words become relevant in this context –

See, what'd I tell you? Don't make me laugh. You can try all you want, but it's not going to hurt me. You 're not qualified to do that. You're just a flimsy illusion, a cheap echo. It's useless, no matter what you do. Don't you get it? (Murakami 2005, p. 403)

It is this showdown and the experience of the alternate realm which perhaps make Kafka understand that he is trapped like Sisyphus to continue this never-ending pursuit of the 'real'. The narrative through Kafka's tale seems to put forward this notion that even if there is any reality outside human construction, it may not be fulfilling. The readers are not even sure if Kafka had met Saeki in the alternate realm, or if she was a figment of his mind. Yet, it is Saeki who convinces him that he must forgive his mother for abandoning him, and he must return to his reality. Thus, the pursuit of 'real' gets manifested through uncovering the identity of his absent mother, and the conflict with imaginary and symbolic reality as embodied by his father, are finally resolved at the end of the narrative. The alternate realm acts as a cocoon that shields him from his world and provides him with a space to contemplate his place within it. It becomes the site of the ritual that allows the young adult protagonist to reconcile the imaginary and symbolic understanding of his reality. Unlike the grown-up characters, he fathoms the necessity of reconciliation to have a chance at a life that is not marked by passivity and forgetfulness.

Kafka's journey, and the resultant ambiguous attitude of the readers towards this fantastic narrative, may identify Murakami's narrative as a 'liminal fantasy' as had been suggested by Mendlesohn (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 14). However, as stated earlier, the text seems to showcase multiple instances that resist such easy categorisation. The alternate realm acts as a plane of forgetful existence for characters who prefer resignation over life. However, for the young adult Kafka Tamura, it acts as a site of maturation. The nature of the place adds to the aura of the text, it captures the fancy of the readers and gives a glimpse of reality stripped from its symbolic appendages. However, at times, the utility of the space seems to become more important than its structure in Murakami's narrative. It will be erroneous to assume that one does not influence the other. Instead, form and philosophy appear to come together to concoct a unique dialectical relationship – if existing scholarship on the topic has been keen to comprehend the structural intricacies, Murakami's narrative seems to explore the philosophical and psychological repercussions of the tale. The synthesis is the text in which both interact and ensure the maturation of the coming-of-age Kafka Tamura.

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Arriving at a Conclusion

This enquiry began with the aim to investigate the nature of the alternate realm in Murakami's work, and the factors leading to the experience of such a space. Even though the narrative appears in the mould of a liminal fantasy, yet a closer inspection reveals that within the scope of the narrative several fantasy genres fuse, separate, and merge again. Perhaps, it can even be argued that the fantasy in Murakami's narrative transforms into a separate entity that reflects and explores the inner psyche of the young adult protagonist. Hence, even though Murakami's narrative apparently depicts conventional young adult themes like resistance against convention, sexual awakening, belonging, individuality and hope, yet one may feel that Murakami's narrative transcends these themes.

In a surreal manner, the narrative seems to suggest that the young adult can never possibly fathom society. Kafka, however, identifies his father as the epicentre of the conventional socio-political machinery. In other words, Kafka Tamura's reaction against the limitations of his education system becomes a reaction against the privilege guaranteed to him through his father's societal status. Thus, his rebellion is less directed towards the external world; instead, it is more personal. Such a conflict appears to enhance his uneasiness rather than alleviate it. A sense of futility pervades the young adult protagonist, and he seeks to escape into a space that is removed from his familiar reality.

This alternate realm is defined as 'limbo' in Murakami's narrative. The narrative also appears to focus less on establishing this space as a fantastical structure; it is more eager to use it as a metaphor that reflects the passivity experienced by the young adult protagonist. The experienced reality of Kafka Tamura, which is but a labyrinth of the 'imaginary' and 'symbolic', is left behind through this escape into the alternate space. It provides respite to the adult characters like Miss Saeki, who mbrace this realm and its forgetfulness-inducing quality, but resignation does not appear to be an appealing

option to the young adult. The young adult conceives the possibilities he can still revisit in his flawed society. He recognizes that he can only grow through experiencing what society throws at him, and the alternate realm takes away such an opportunity. The alternate realm is then perhaps like a cocoon in which the young adult is educated until he can make his own decision.

Nevertheless, the aspect of being hopeful seems to differentiate the adult from the young adult. The former sees hope as futile and prefers forgetfulness, while the latter is courageous enough to give hope another chance, despite knowing how it may end. This courage perhaps stems from the third aspect of reality according to the Lacanian framework - the incomprehensibility of reality. Murakami's narrative seems to celebrate this infiniteness of the 'real', and associates with it the ability to generate hope.

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Learning to See: Transgender Self-Determination and Unmarked Objectivity in April Daniels' *Dreadnought*

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Abstract: Young adult [YA] science fiction has seen a significant rise in LGBTQ+ storylines in the last several years. Despite sci-fi's history of inventive gender systems, transgender storylines remain underrepresented, or shrouded in metaphoric mystery. This paper will analyze the role of gender "passing" and deadnaming (calling a person by their birth name even if they have developed a different identity), as well as the effects of biological essentializing. Through this analysis I will assert the potential of transgender YA science fiction to upend notions of cisgender supremacy and validate transgender coming-of-age experiences.

Keywords: transgender, YA sci-fi, transfeminism, deadnaming, superhero

Just pages into April Daniels' 2017 novel *Dreadnought*, teenage Danny takes the bus downtown, past curfew, risking the ire of her strict parents, to complete a seemingly mundane task: purchase a bottle of nail polish. Known as Daniel to her family, Danny paints her toenails in an empty alleyway, exercising one of the only methods by which she can safely enact her gender. Soon, her harmless, covert feminine ritual is interrupted by loud explosions -- and then she is hunched over the dying body of a superhero named Dreadnought, who bestows his powers upon her in his final moments. Through this transfer of power, Danny is physically transformed: she can now "pass" as female, granting her both literal (super)powers of strength, agility, and flight, and the social power of an ideal feminized body that correlates with her gender identity. A process that would have taken years of hormone treatments and surgical intervention has miraculously happened in just moments. And yet, despite this super-powered transition that materially and irreversibly modifies Danny's body, and despite her self-identification, people close to Danny still fail to see her as a girl. *Dreadnought* presents this familiar challenge of transgender acceptance and recognition alongside a gripping plot featuring young Danny's attempt to save her city from the impending danger of Dreadnought's murderer, the cyborg named Utopia. Daniels' superhero narrative works alongside the thematic focus on transgender visibility and acceptance to provoke questions about visuality, identity, and perspective, offering a rich and suspenseful trans-feminist bildungsroman for young adult and adult readers alike.

Danny's super-powered transition in *Dreadnought* is met with disbelief by both her family and the structural powers that govern superhero activity in the novel. Unlike her predecessors, who have taken on the mantle of Dreadnought and also experienced physical modifications in the process, the legion of superheroes questions Danny's legitimacy as both a woman and a superhero, and this questioning is a direct result of her status as transgender.

Some got a little taller, one grew back, some lost toes, that sort of thing. But they were all cis -- that is to say, they weren't trans -- so their bodies didn't change to match their gender identities because they were already matching. (Daniels, 2017, p. 53)

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Although each carrier of the mantle has undergone a physical transformation that gifted them with their ideal physical forms, Danny is questioned by "The Legion" of superheroes and her family after her transition, as though she is playing a joke or attempting to deceive them. This distrust offers an important parable for modern-day narratives of transgender people as deceptive or uniquely performative, allowing YA readers to question and envision what it would take for a cis-sexist society to recognize and accept transgender people as valid and legitimate. This paper analyzes the rhetorical methods by which both political conservatives and trans-exclusionary radical feminists [TERFs] work to delegitimize transgender identity during Danny Tozer's journey toward both visibility and the right to self-determination in *Dreadnought*. Through an analysis of the character-based reactions to Danny's gender transition in this first installation of the *Nemesis* series, I analyze the rhetorical methods underlying the concept of unmarked objectivity and expose their role in perpetuating transphobic ideas and systems. Unmarked objectivity derives from Donna Haraway's 1988 essay "The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." I use unmarked objectivity here to signify the partial perspectives held by those in seemingly unmarked bodies and identities -- bodies and identities that possess (racial, gendered, and/or sexual) privilege and therefore have been positioned as universal, rather than specific and marked. These bodies and identities are, of course, as specific and marked as any, despite this normative construction. By virtue of this privilege and status as universal and unmarked, these perspectives are often treated as objective, rather than also deeply entrenched in personal experience and influenced by specific cultural and social constructs, including the gender binary. YA transgender science fictional narratives like *Dreadnought* critique this notion of unmarked objectivity by centering marginal perspectives, situating ideological conflict amidst the coming-of-age

process, and reimagining social and technological systems to benefit the marginalized. Daniels depicts both the gender euphoria Danny experiences through her super-powered gender transition and the instances of gatekeeping and transphobic gaslighting that impact her super-hero narrative, offering a rich coming-out story filled with several opportunities for a critical investigation of how the concept of objectivity is weaponized to support transphobic social and political aims.

Visuality as an Instrument of Unmarked Objectivity

Notions of objectivity and unmarked positionality are at the core of exclusionary politics, like transphobia, which positions cisgender identities as default, natural, or universal. Daniels' novel disrupts the normative ideologies that underlie many supposedly objective accounts of reality. The choice to literalize power (through Dreadnought's granting of power to Danny) and use it in service of a transgender protagonist challenges cisnormative notions of unmarked positionality by gifting Danny with the same superpowers and bodily transition offered to her cisgender predecessors; the transphobic reaction to this transition illustrates that these predecessors were received as normative and rightful successors of Dreadnought, exposing the ways in which cisgender identities operate as faux universal positions in modern culture. Common tropes of disenfranchisement, violence, and death often plague trans and gender-diverse characters in literature and other forms of narrative media; Daniels' novel rejects these tropes, and instead poses larger epistemological questions: what does it mean to know one's gender? How do cultural assumptions and norms surrounding gender limit our perspective? How can we broaden our individual and cultural perspectives, and what role does visuality play in that effort?

Learning to See, continued

Objectivity is closely associated with visuality, in that visuality can be wagered as an extension of objectivity -- to see is, for some, to believe. This association is often used to delegitimize transgender people by suggesting that because a transgender person's body does not replicate the dominant perspective (figured as the objective truth) of what a particularly gendered body should look like, their gender is then false, a misconception, or a psychological condition. This association of visuality with ways of knowing, recognizing, categorizing, or delimiting gender is complex and can cause harm to gender diverse people who are not offered such an extreme science fictional transition as Danny, people whose visuality may not appear to coincide with cultural expectations of gender.

Butler writes that gender is "a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, 1988, pg. 522). From birth, visuality is positioned as an objective method of knowing and recognizing gender. Viewing the genital outline of a fetus in utero via a sonogram is considered a medically viable (in other words, objective) method of identifying sex, which is constructed as a determinant of gender. To all but a doctor trained in the science fictional technologies of Danny's world, her body represents what the medical establishment would characterize as "female." Daniels' narrative disrupts the idea that anything is objective – even biological sex – by allowing biological sex to act as a malleable characteristic in this world. It is later discovered that Danny does not have a womb, and therefore will not be able to become pregnant.

Although her reproductive transition is what TERFs in this narrative might call "incomplete," simply introducing biological sex as determined by one's desire for a specific body and enacted by opaque technologies of power ("super powers") offers a reading of both sex and gender as product of social construction and partial perspective. Danny's

transition in *Dreadnought* exemplifies Butler's assertion that gender "conceals its genesis;" her transition is bodily, and her sex assigned at birth is only determinable via a series of complex medical tests at the headquarters of the superhero association Legion Pacifica. If the visualization of genital sex is seen as the genesis of gender, Danny should be recognized and accepted as a girl. That she is still questioned and positioned as false or performative in her gender illustrates both the immense complexity of gender as a construct and the limitations of visuality in facilitating knowledge or recognition of gender identity.

The limitations of visuality as a method of knowing is further exemplified by Danny's interactions with her parents following her transition. When Danny returns home, unaware at this point of her superhuman capabilities, her father Roger is unable to see her. Despite the fact that her mother recognizes Danny as some version of the child that left her house that morning, Roger's visual limitations, restricted by his inability to recognize himself as having a perspective (as opposed to just *knowing*), prevent him from recognizing his child. When Danny says "Hi, Dad," Roger immediately reads her body as a young woman's, and therefore *not* Danny's: "Wh- I don't have a daughter" (Daniels, 2017, p.22). Once Roger is finally convinced that the girl who stands before him is, in fact, Danny, he vows to "fix" her, and sets in place a plan to force Danny into de-transitional medical care (p.24). While readers can infer that Roger does not believe that Danny's bodily transition makes her a girl, he somehow believes that bodily detransition will make her a boy. The limitations of visuality here are Roger's: despite the fact that Danny's gender identity is now perceived by most to "match" her appearance (a problematic itself), and despite the fact that Danny articulates repeatedly that this is a desired transition, the perspective held by Roger, derived from his position as her father and as a cisgender heterosexual man, interferes with his ability to actually recognize her.

Learning to See, continued

Roger's inability to see Danny offers a new, metaphoric use of the invisibility trope in superhero fiction. Rather than invisibility acting as a superpower, as protection against harm or a stealth tactic, the metaphoric invisibility here works as a consequence of unmarked objectivity. As a remedy to ways of seeing that allow the perceiver to remain unmarked, Haraway calls for an embodied vision that is constituted through the body and through our respective positionalities (Haraway, 1988). Like Sandra Harding's notion of the view from below, Haraway calls for a rejection of knowledge produces via a "gaze from nowhere" (p. 581). The idea of an objectivity that "mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (p. 581) is linked to the universalizing of certain identities, and therefore the specification (or marking) of others. By claiming the power of seeing but rejecting the return of that gaze, cisgender people are afforded the category of universal, default, or "normative" genders, escaping that return vision. Thus, while cisgender people are afforded the protections of the supposed invisibility of our gender and its unmarked state, transgender and gender-different people experience not the protection of invisibility but the burden of it.

Roger claims this "power to see and not be seen" in his rejection of Danny's new body and her now-visible identity as a girl. Danny's mother does not identify her immediately, but slowly begins to recognize her child. She encourages Roger to pause and attempt to see Danny: "This is Danny. Look at… well, *look*" (Daniels, 2017, p.23). Daniels then writes that Roger's eyes widen, apparently evoking his attempt to follow his wife's imperative to just *look*. However, clearly, all Roger can see is what Danny is not:

"We're going to make this right. I love you. You're my son."
I take a half step back. "Well… not anymore."

We'll go to the doctors. We'll get this looked at," he says. Dad doesn't sound like he's all here anymore. He's not really looking at me. He's looking past me, toward some kind of pathetic optimism where he doesn't have to deal with who I really am. (Daniels, 2017, pp. 23-24).)

Roger takes his wife's instruction to look as an opportunity to look for the person he wants to see – his son. Because he allows (consciously or otherwise) his perspective to masquerade as objective and unmarked, he can only recognize Danny in context of a mistake requiring medical intervention. He does not know himself to be the father of a daughter, so therefore Danny must not be a girl. Were he to truly attempt to look without projecting his own identity as the father of a son onto Danny, he would see Danny's "same short blond hair, same basic face, but softened by the puberty [she] should have had" (Daniels, 2017, p.22). As he looks "past" Danny, feigning vision but seeing someone who isn't there, he demonstrates the limitations of a marked perspective that cannot acknowledge its own partiality. He cannot see who clearly stands in front of him: his daughter who now meets all normative cultural criteria to be viewed as a girl, and who responds to his statement that she is his son with a clear statement to the contrary: "Not anymore" (Daniels, 217, pp. 23-24).

Surprise, astonishment, and inquiry are expected in this situation; after all, Danny left the house that morning looking very different from the physical form she returns in. It is not Roger's inability to *accept* Danny that I am admonishing here -- although, as the novel progresses, that too is worthy of critique. Before acceptance, before reintegration into the family structure, and before comfort with Danny's gender identity can be achieved, the first and most basic step is for Roger to *see* Danny. This is something he, and others who knew her before her transition, repeatedly fail to do and, importantly, that failure is unknowable to them. When those with socially normative identities conflate their perspectives with objectivity, they begin to lose sight of that which they cannot see.

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Roger's inability to see Danny illustrates this profound lack.

The False Promise of Passing

Danny's transition suggests then that visuality, when figured as a method of knowing or understanding the truth of identity, is limited. This limitation of visuality is closely related to the concept of passing and its cultural associations. Passing is a fraught term usually applied to someone who is marked by (gendered, sexual, and/or racialized) marginality but is viewed or perceived as in the dominant, unmarked group. Julia Serano writes of the potentially harmful use of the term: "Primarily, it gives the impression that the marked person is the active party (i.e., they are working hard to achieve a false appearance), and that the perceiver is merely a passive and objective observer who is 'fooled' by the marked individual" (Serano, 2013, p. 194). While Danny's body now succeeds at representing the dominant perspective of womanhood -- so much so that Danny realizes her body is actually modeled from a "photoshopped underwear model" -- she is still viewed as an interloper, treated as though she is attempting to fool the world with her created body (Daniels, 2017, p. 54).

Some may interpret Danny's gender transition as a reaffirmation of binary gender systems or a valorization of passing, as it is her physical transition that provides mental and emotional relief from feelings of gender dysphoria and suicidality, but I read Danny's transition instead as provoking several questions about the link between visuality, identity, and social power: What if this life-saving, gender-affirmative medical care, meant to allow people to acquire the physical characteristics commonly associated with their gender identity, wasreadily available, and this simple? Or -- what if such care was rendered less necessary? What if, culturally, we divorced identity from visuality? Or constructed their linkage from a different position, a different perspective? What power (and protection) is inherent in passing, in reaffirming the existing cultural link

between identity and visuality, and how might we make that power accessible, or irrelevant?

> Shapeshifters reveal, alongside an idea of identity as unfixed, an indication of the central role the visuality of the body plays within the process of identity. They also characterize and represent an idea of identity as embodied performance, subject to the limitations of visuality available to the "shapeshifting" body. (Kirkpatrick 2015, p. 129)

To be clear: Danny is not a shapeshifter. Her body is transformed only once, at the moment the mantle of Dreadnought is bestowed upon her, and her bodily transformation is a result of her own internal desire. So, the lack of identity fixity Kirkpatrick references is less applicable to Danny's journey. Unlike many non-cisgender people, Danny does not experience her gender as continually changing, evolving, or malleable: she is, and always has been, a girl. When her mother, in an attempt to process her sudden transition, says "I feel like I've lost my son," Danny firmly replies "Mom, you never had a son" (Daniels, 2017, p. 188), reflecting this fixity. Despite these divergences from Kirkpatrick's concepts of the shapeshifting trope above, the role of visuality in identity development and the notion of identity as "embodied performance" which is "subject to the limitations of visuality" offers an important framework for considering this narrative's implied rejection of unmarked objectivity (Kirkpatrick, 2015, p.129). While a rejection of binarized notions of gender is important, and transgender validation should never be predicated on appearance or compliance with gendered norms, visuality often plays an important role in the social and interpersonal lives of trans peoples.

While Danny now has unquestioned access to the "embodied performance" of her identity through her newly transformed body, she is still limited by what Kirkpatrick calls the "limitations of visuality available to the shapeshifting body" (2015, p. 129). As Serano's positioning of the perceiver as "merely a passive and objective observer" reveals, "identitarian" positions that are seen as unmarked – in this case, cisgenderism –

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only obtain this non-categorization through access to unquestioned social and political power. Despite the social and political privilege of inhabiting a dominant, unmarked positionality, the view from such a position is not unencumbered; Kirkpatrick's "limitations of visuality" are actually limitations of this supposedly unmarked perspective. By acknowledging the position of the "passive and objective" observer as an active, specific, marked entity, subject to the limitations of its own perspective, the supposed universal category is exposed as just another variation of human existence. In order "to become answerable for what [or whom] we learn how to see" -- or whom we refuse to see - we must undo this binary of marked and unmarked perspectives and acknowledge these visual limitations (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Danny's bodily transformation defies the cissexist idea that passing confers legitimacy; Danny now passes, but her passing body does not overcome the entrenched cissexism that limits individual perspective in both human and superhuman worlds.

The valorization of passing is a cissexist reaffirmation of biological essentialism. In addition to this critique is the reality that passing is not accessible for everyone, even if they desire it or require it as a method of protection against transphobic violence. Part of the initial appeal that Daniels' series offers to young adult readers is that it imagines a world in which a "passing" physical transition is not only possible, but accessible. In light of the massive impediments to transgender healthcare in the U.S., an instantaneous, painless, non-pathologized, and free gender-affirmative transition like the one Danny experiences is highly compelling.

Despite the incremental progress toward greater trans and nonbinary inclusion in the United States over the past half a century, the path to accessible and affordable gender-affirmative healthcare is riddled with barriers, many of which are steeped in notions of unmarked objectivity. For example, in 2018, the Kansas State Republican

Party voted against any measure that would legally validate the existence of transgender diverse people in their state.[1] In their committee resolution, they write that they believe in "God's design for gender as determined by biological sex and not by self-perception" (Neira and Lee, 2021, p. 121). The use of self-perception" in this statement calls back to Serano's critique of the perceiver as unmarked: it is not only gender-diverse people who have their own perceptions of gender, despite this clear implication. One might even argue that gender itself is a perception. By introducing "biological sex" and "self-perception" as dichotomous, the writers of this resolution encourage us to believe that biology and scientific accounts of the body are not also influenced, perhaps even governed by, perspective. This separation of "fact" from perspective and positionality continues to endanger queer and trans people who are excluded from health care and civil society due to its influence. This particular resolution by Kansas State Republicans also reveals an impulse among gender conservatives toward "the god trick," a rhetorical move that Haraway criticizes in her 1988 essay. Despite its linguistic resonance with the use of "God's design" in the Republican resolution above, Haraway's formulation of "the god trick" is not about Christian power, but about the hegemonic power of dominant perspectives. The god trick is employed either consciously or subconsciously as a tool of manipulation, convincing others that the "scientific" perspective that is most objective, trustworthy, and rigorous is one that is without perspective at all -- the "trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). To state that "God's design for gender" is "determined by biological sex" is a highly conspicuous use of the god trick; it conflates a supposedly universal understanding of a religious "God" with the equally suspect universalizing of "biological sex," removing the author's own social, religious, and gendered perspectives from the meaning-making process. *Dreadnought*, as a text concerned with perspective and particularity, rejects the god-trick by illustrating the ways in which individual perspective and social location shape and

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limit who is able to be seen, and by whom. That Danny's identity remains invisibilized, unable to be seen as a girl despite her transition and self-declaration, suggests that while passing is unethically figured as a necessary precondition of transgender acceptance, it does not always buy admittance into a gendered identity category.

Centering Transfeminist Epistemes

The importance of naming is a key theme in Daniels' *Dreadnought*. Self-selected names offer one of the ways in which transgender people, especially transgender youth, "render themselves intelligible" to their families, friends, and to a cisgender-dominant culture at large (Sinclair-Palm, 2017, p. 2). Danny has gone by "Danny" her entire life, and continues to do so throughout the novel but, importantly, she articulates her true full name as Danielle. After Danny is transformed by the dying Dreadnought and receives both the power of the mantle and her desired physical form, she is summoned to meet the Legion Pacifica, an elite group of superheroes formerly led by the previous Dreadnought. It is at this point that Danny first asserts the power of naming by asking Doc Impossible to introduce her as Danielle Tozer. Doc Impossible, who has already proven herself to be Danny's greatest ally in the Legion, gladly introduces her: "Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce Danielle Tozer, carrier of the mantle."

This empowering moment of self-declaration is soon interrupted by Graywytch, a woman superhero who functions as Daniels' archetypal villain and TERF.. Graywytch immediately interjects: "*Daniel* Tozer" (Daniels, 2017, p. 58). Danny's internal dialogue reveals the depth of Graywytch's hostility: "She's looking at me like I'm an interloper" (p.58). Graywytch's refusal of Danny's appropriate name is called "deadnaming," the practice of using a transgender person's pre-transition name (Sinclair-Palm, 2017, p.5). This is a delegitimizing tactic that permeates anti-transgender rhetoric from all political directions, and

assumes omnipotence on the part of the deadnamer. By disregarding Danny's chosen name and reasserting a gendered name that fits with her interpretation of Danny, Graywytch is communicating that she knows who Danny is with more certainty than Danny herself.

This calls back to Serano's indictment of the perceiver in her analysis "passing." She writes that the perceiver is positioned as a "passive and objective observer" who is being "fooled by the marked individual" (Serano, 2013, 194). Graywytch confirms her self-perception as the objective observer and Danny as the interloper when she states, unfoundedly, that Danny does not wish to carry the Mantle of Dreadnought: "He only wants to keep it to be sure of being able to continue perpetrating this masquerade of his [sic]" (Daniels, 2017. p. 66). By calling Danny's gender identity a masquerade, Graywytch illustrates Serano's conception of the perceiver as viewing the transgender person as an imitation or simulation, someone who is attempting to fool them. Further, this implication that Danny is masquerading as a woman resonates with common rhetorical moves in trans-exclusionary radical feminism which often positions transgender women as impersonators or interlopers, rather than simply women. To put the importance of self-selected names in context of this larger discussion about the false security provided by notions of perspective-less objectivity, I return to Haraway's writings about the importance of social location and partial perspective in knowledge-making:

> We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name. So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about the particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits responsibility (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

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I read Haraway's imperative to "name where we are and are not" as a reaffirmation of the importance of acknowledging our partial perspectives that are informed by social location -- location which is laid out across a map in which the center is figured as the site of power, knowledge, and omnipotence, or a sort of view from above. By naming herself and asserting that name to the novel's trans-inclusive feminist mentor, Doc Impossible, Danny is communicating where she is on that map -- or, perhaps more importantly, where she is not. Thus, self-selected naming practices offer for trans youth a method by which they can assert their perspective in all of its partiality and contingency. Graywytch's deadnaming of Danny, in addition to presenting a clear desire to delegitimize her identity as a woman, also asserts this "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. "The audacious implication that Graywytch, having met Danny only seconds before, might somehow have the unencumbered vision to define Danny for herself is a clear illustration of partial perspective masquerading as universal and unmarked objectivity. Graywytch positions herself as the knower, and Danny the object to be known, denying her and transgender women like her the agency to articulate their own self-knowledge. Trans-exclusionary radical feminism's use of objectivity to delegitimize transgender identity offers a departure from the universalizing impulse of political conservatives, like Kansas State Republicans and, arguably, Danny's dad, Roger, whose identity as a cisgender, heterosexual man is often perceived as universal or unmarked. The TERF iterations of transphobia often operate, not as a universal or unmarked perspective, as in the case of Kansas State Republican's equation of their god with the supposed facts of biology, but as inherently specific and marked. They articulate their gender theories as cisgender women, and gatekeeping admission into the gendered category.

The history of lesbian separatism, a political movement active primarily in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, offers a rich archive of lesbian-feminist community building and political activism that undoubtedly has shaped feminist theorizing in the 20th century. That tradition comes from a clear understanding and valuation of women as inherently marked, or different from men. One such contribution is separatist group Radicalesbians's concept of the "woman-identified-woman," coined in their self-published essay of the same name (Radicalesbians, 1970, p.1). The "woman-identified-woman" was meant to signify a political identity for those who sought economic, political, social, and romantic life outside of the relations provided by heterosexual culture. Lesbian separatism was largely a cisgender movement, and individual separatist groups like Dykes and Gorgons and The Gutter Dyke Collective[2] often strongly condemned the inclusion of transgender women in their spaces.

Julie R. Enszer advocates for an understanding of lesbian separatism as a nuanced, contradictory, and at times productive political theory. For the purposes of this critical examination of YA science fiction's potential to destabilize transphobic notions of unmarked objectivity, however, I focus here on the transphobic iterations of lesbian feminist thought to contextualize their appearance in *Dreadnought*. Enszer's writing about the conflict between Olivia Records, an all-women music production company, and Janice Raymond, infamous anti-trans theorist and writer of *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), provides a clear example of the transphobic rhetoric used in the separatist movement. Olivia Records employed Sandy Stone, a transgender woman, in 1974 as part of their production team, which Raymond and other known trans-exclusionary separatists protested (Morris, 2015). Enszer quotes Raymond, who wrote to the record company: "We feel that it was and is irresponsible of you to have presented this person as a woman to the women's community when in fact he [sic] is a post-operative transsexual" (Enszer, 2016, p. 187).

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Raymond's transphobia, characterized by Halberstam as a sort of "lesbian feminist paranoia"[3] reveals a core belief in her own objectivity, rooted in biological essentialist views of gender as a product of sexual labeling. This conflation of perspective with objectivity suggests a deep inability to reckon with the role of

difference within political identity groups, and a rigidity in her view of sex and gender. Enszer suggests that this conflict between Raymond and Olivia Records reveals divergence in lesbian separatist thinking: "The Olivia Records collective asserts a vision of lesbian separatism that is relational and evolving, while Raymond and the other feminists named in the letter ask for clear and definite boundaries" (Enzer 2016, p.187). The notion of a political theory that is "relational and evolving" is akin to Haraway's advocation of an embodied vision which acknowledges its partiality and perspective; after all, "clear and definite boundaries" must be drawn from a particular perspective, and must present as objective truths, despite their construction, to enforce compliance.

This focus on biological labels and their supposed relationship to binary gender categories upheld by some lesbian separatists and contemporary Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists makes a clear debut in Graywytch's rejection of Danny in *Dreadnought*. When the Legion begins to discuss Danny's suitability for the mantle, and by extension her ability to claim the name of Dreadnought as her "supranym," Graywytch affirms Danny's earlier observation that she has cast Danny as an "interloper," both within The Legion and within a women's community:

> "Well... the circumstances of his [sic] empowerment are...unusual."
> "Her," I say, and everyone looks at me, like they'd forgotten I was here already.

"That's in dispute," says Graywytch primly. "You were raised to be a man. Your privilege blinds you, makes you dangerous."
"I'm just as much a girl as you are."

"Oh really?" She leans forward, steeples her fingers. "Do you even know how to put in a tampon?"
[Daniels, 2017, p. 65]

In this excerpt, we see Graywytch return to her assertion of omnipotent power by misgendering Danny and asserting her ability to put Danny's gender into "dispute," as though both her gender and Danny herself are an object of study, subject to some sort of scientific process of legitimation. Graywytch then begins to echo TERF rhetoric by expounding two key talking points often found in anti-transgender feminist writing: that trans women do not belong in cisgender women's communities because they have been tainted by male privilege, and that the biological fact of having a vagina and uterus is the only sufficient condition to warrant identification as a woman.[4] On this first argument, the privilege afforded to cisgender men is evident, and not something I wish to dispute, although it is an accusation that is often levied without appropriate attention to other social factors, like race and economic class.[5] And yet, to return to the importance of naming and of self-identification: Danny is *not* a cisgender man, and to argue that transgender women are somehow afforded more social and political protection is patently false. Even when trans people desire and gain access to medical transition, and even if they are able to "pass" as cisgender, they are statistically at a greater risk of discrimination and harassment, both socially and in the workplace.[4] So while the feminist talking point of "male privilege" is a convenient rhetorical tool to delegitimize trans people who were assigned male at birth, it is a gross misrepresentation of the actual lived experiences of transgender and gender-different people in a cissexist system. Danny's experience of an abusive father who attempts to masculinize her at an early age and insists repeatedly that she undergo de-transitional medical care is a clear indicator that Danny's childhood

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does not present the "danger" associated with "male privilege," as Graywytch would have the Legion believe (Daniels, 2017, p.65].

"Male privilege" aside, the most pervasive and insidious argument made by Graywytch here is that biological sex categories are a necessary determinant of gender identity. Despite the fact that much of feminist organizing has attempted to reject the association of womanhood with only what we widely refer to as "female" bodies, those who feel threatened by transgender women's inclusion in women's identity communities often resort to this form of biological essentialism, which, to think with Haraway, "threaten[s] the fragile space for social constructionism and critical theory" that has been "called into being by feminist concepts of gender as socially, historically, and semiotically positioned difference" (Haraway, 1988, p.591). In other words, when TERFs(represented here by Graywytch) resort to these biologically-essentialist views of gender, they assert a sense of unmarked objectivity that betrays the constructionist roots of feminist theory, instead relying on patriarchal tropes that form the basis of misogyny. Despite the feminist roots of gender constructivism, many trans-exclusionary thinkers have rejected the social constructionist model entirely. This dates back to one of the first lesbian-separatist articulations of an anti-transgender political agenda. The Gutter Dyke Collective published the first statement in 1973 that stated "male-to-constructed-female transsexuals are not wimmin" (reproduced in Spinster, 1988, p. 101). The derogatory use of "constructed" in this docu-ment indicates a belief that transgender women are false, that that their identity as women is a creation of their own imagination, and that cisgender women are somehow outside the process of social construction; their identity as women just *is*. This denies transgender and cisgender women any agency in constructing their gender, and their selves. Haraway, though, is very careful to avoid disregarding notions of biology and the importance of the body entirely. She warns that to disregard biological accounts of sex is to position "the body

itself as anything but a blank page for social inscrip-tions, including those of biological discourse"(Haraway, 1988, p.591). She calls for an embodied visuality that embraces the partiality of individual perspective as a key component in the knowledge-making process, so it therefore follows that "authoritative biological accounts of sex" remain important to this embodied vision. The question, then, is who bestows authority on these biological accounts? For Haraway and for Danny's trans-inclusive feminist mentor and scientist Doc Impossible, that authority must come from the "object" (subject) of study. Haraway writes that under "White Capitalist Patriarchy," which "turns everything into a resource for appropriation," the object must never become the agent and must never be responsible for the creation of knowledge (Haraway, 1988. p.592). If the "object" (here, Danny's transgender body) were to become the agent (Danny herself) then Graywytch, the supposed objective perceiver, would be displaced as the central knower of Danny's identity. Were Graywytch to adopt this cognitive framework, she would be encouraged to decenter her own perspective in support of Danny's self-determination.

Dreadnought as a Trans-Feminist Bildungsroman

Daniels' *Dreadnought* transcends the boundaries of the traditional bildungsroman form in its depiction of a specifically transgender coming-of-age. The bildungsroman, or the novel of development, was coined by Karl Morgenstern in 1819 and has since been considered the "fundamental form" of the European novel (Frow et. al., n.p.). The traditional European form often presents a male character, usually racially and/or economically privileged, who encounters a test or challenge that facilitates character growth, moving the character away from childhood and into adulthood (which often marks a move away from provinciality).

Daniels offers a strong shift from this traditional form in both genre (science fiction) and the framing of the central character: Danny, while racially privileged, is marked by her inherent lack of visibility and marginal status as a transgender girl. Due to the centrality of the bildung form in European and American literature of the

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20th century, there has been significant revisioning in bildung scholarship from a feminist and critical race perspective. Annis Pratt's concept of "growing down" and Joanna Frye's notions of multiple feminine selves in the bildungsroman inform many of these feminist approaches to the genre. Geta LeSeur's 1995 book *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman* offers an analysis of Black iterations of the genre and a critique of male dominance in the field. These are formative texts in the study of the marginal bildungsroman and represent an opening of the generic frame that has historically restricted these narratives of young adult emergence, but the scholarship on LGTBQ+ iterations of the coming of age genre are lacking. Meredith Miller's 2018 essay "The Lesbian, Gay, and Trans Bildungsroman" offers important critical insight into queer coming-of-age narratives, but focuses primarily on cisgender gay or lesbian texts at the expense of explicitly trans characters. *Dreadnought* is a particularly unique example of the transgender bildungsroman because it features a transgender girl who also identifies as a lesbian, offering multiple avenues for cross-coalitional and intersectional analysis.

Dreadnought's Danny offers readers and scholars of the genre a new model for the transition between childhood and adulthood by centering self-determination and staging a rejection of unmarked objectivity. Although Danny's gender transition does not render her a woman in the eyes of her father, Roger, or the TERF-archetype Graywytch, it provides her with a sense of self-assuredness and a feeling of legitimacy, marking a move away from adolescent insecurity to an imperfect, but enduring sense of validity in her identity. At the end of the novel, after Danny has succeeded in an epic battle and saved the lives of several, she holds a press conference as the new holder of the mantle of Dreadnought. In an act of public visibility, she tells the press: "I am transgender, and a lesbian, and I'm not ashamed of that" (Daniels, 2017, p. 281). For Danny, this articulation of her identity is a reclamation of power and an act of self-representation; it allows her to tell her own story, rather than only asserting her identity when faced with the essentializing rhetoric of others. In spite of her now-estranged parents' and Graywytch's transphobia, which constitute the major social and internal challenges in this bildungsroman, Danny is now able to recognize the power inherent in asserting her own marked perspective. This revelation advances a new perspective on the modern coming-of-age journey: characters may not only undergo transformation into a state of maturity *by* the outside world, but via an emerging self-understanding and, in Danny's case, a specifically gendered agency.

Despite the challenges posed by transphobic notions of biology and normative gender identity, *Dreadnought* offers Danny one important ally in her coming-of-age process: Doc Impossible, the doctor and scientist for The Legion. Doc Impossible fulfills the mentorship role typical in many bildungsromane. Apprenticeship is a strong thematic focus of many bildungsromane in the original German form, and that connection is clear in *Dreadnought*: Danny, as a newly-transitioned superhero, must learn the rules and expectations of the trade (and, in *Dreadnought*, superhuman capabilities *do* function alongside capital to constitute an occupation or trade). As a scientific and medical authority on superhuman powers and technology, Doc Impossible is a capable mentor for young Danny. However, her role here is unique in the larger context of the bildungsroman genre because she both reflects Danny's identity as a woman, and validates Danny's transgender identity as a scientific authority. As Maroula Joannou's writing on female bildungsroman asserts, same-gender mentorships are typical for male protagonists, but exceptional for women: "the guidance of a mentor of their own sex is *de rigueur* for the male hero but not the female characters in the classical bildungsroman" (2019, p. 211).

Doc Impossible's mentorship not only breaks convention in positioning a woman as a key authority figure; she offers YA readers a different model for considering the relation between science, medicine, and transgender identity. At several important junctures in Danny's early post-transition life, Doc

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Impossible offers her solace and defense against biological essentializing, which come both from Graywytch and from Danny herself. As part of Danny's medical examination at Legion Tower (an examination all new superheroes are subject to), Doc Impossible discovers that Danny, despite her fantastical transition that defied the limits of current medical science, does not have a uterus. Danny's reaction is one of extreme dejection, provoking an emotionally violent outburst. She says to Doc Impossible, through tears, "I guess I just thought that I was finally a real girl" (Daniels, 2017, p.53). Danny's invocation of the concept of *realness* in delegitimizing her own identity calls back to the cisnormative conditioning she has been exposed to throughout her life; she too has come to ascribe to Graywytch's conflation of constructed biological categories with gender identity. Doc Impossible, enacting her role as mentor, replies, "Hey! None of that! You think it's a uterus that makes a woman? Bullshit. You feel like you're a girl, you live it, it's part of you? Then you're a girl. That's the end of it, no quibbling. You're as real a girl as anyone" (Daniels, 2017, p.53). Doc Impossible's response here emphasizes subjective feeling ("you feel like you're a girl"), lived experience ("you live it"), and identity formation ("it's a part of you") to provide Danny and readers with a model of scientific practice that both acknowledges the realities of the body (that Danny will never be able to become pregnant) and validates the importance of subjective experience and perspective. Because *Dreadnought* is ultimately a bildungsroman, the challenges Danny encounters due to the transphobia of her father, of Graywytch, and her own sense of internalized transphobia constitute an important challenge to her character, which she is tasked with overcoming. Doc Impossible's mentorship as the didactic voice of the novel asserts the value of self-determination, affirming Danny's self-knowledge rather than imposing notions of biological determinism and adult intellectual superiority that often plague YA narratives of coming-out.

Conclusion

Daniels' *Dreadnought* both affirms and transgresses generic boundaries of science fiction, young adult literature, and the bildungsroman in order to offer a picture of transgender sovereignty and self-actualization rarely seen in depictions of trans and gender nonconforming stories. Often, narratives of transgender youth focus on a linear path from one constructed biological sex marker to another, highlighting family and societal strife and the journey toward hormones and surgical transitional care (Bittner et. al., 2016, n.p.). Through the suspended disbelief available in the sci-fi genre, Daniels' begins where other narratives end. Instead of marking Danny's physical transition as the end of her coming-of-age narrative, Daniels positions her physical transition at the very beginning of Danny's journey, illustrating that transgender agency, growth, and development does not hinge on or end with medical intervention. Relatedly, the forward positioning of Danny's transition also illustrates that a "passing" body does not necessarily afford transgender people the right to unquestioned self-determination.

In presenting this "what-if" scenario of an instantaneous and physically painless medical transition, *Dreadnought* asks YA readers to question the limits of perspective and visuality -- to question what our bodies and our standpoints allow us to see, and to validate the existence of that which we have not yet learned to see. Like so many science fictional narratives of marginalization and struggle, *Dreadnought* implores us to hold space for the identities, perspectives, and experiences that our always inevitably marked perspectives have yet to offer us access to, and gestures toward a future in which deviance from cisheteropatriarchy is not delegitimized by an unmarked, bodiless, "conquering gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581).

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Notes

[1]https://issuu.com/tcj5/docs/resolution   Conferring validity and visibility upon trans and nonbinary identities in the eyes of the state is a necessary precondition to mandating coverage for transgender health care.

[2] For more information on Dykes and Gorgons, The Gutter Dyke Collective, and other separatist groups, see *For Lesbians Only : a Separatist Anthology,* by

Sidney Spinster, published by Onlywomen Press in 1988.

[3] Halberstam, 1998, p.147

[4] For some of the most current iterations of these decades-old talking points, see J.K. Rowling's (writer of the beloved children/YA fantasy series *Harry Potter*) latest foray into anti-transgender activism on her personal blog. Philosophy scholar Kathleen Stock's essays on the platform Medium provide additional fodder for these trans-exclusionary arguments. For what I consider origin writing on trans-exclusion in feminist spaces, see writings by Sidney Spinster and Janice Raymond.

[5]Kimberé Crenshaw's writings on intersectionality in legal studies have offered an important theoretical basis for critiques such as these.

[6] See Emilia L. Lombardi PhD, Riki Anne Wilchins, Dana Priesing Esq. & Diana Malouf (2002) Gender Violence, Journal of Homosexuality, 42:1, 89-101, DOI: 10.1300/J082v42n01_05

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Books in Review

Meghan Gilbert-Hickey & Miranda A. Green-Barteet (Editors**)**
Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction,
University Press of Mississippi, 2021, pb, 266 pp. $35.00
ISBN 9781496833815

Reviewed by **Julia Haba-Osca, Ph.D.** Universitat de València

Meghan Gilbert-Hickey and Miranda A. Green-Barteet's *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* (2021) began as a response to critic Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' call for more critical attention to the Dark Fantastic. (Her book, published in 2019, is titled *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*). Exploring how race is presented and overlooked in recent speculative young adult (YA) literature comprises the foundation of this collection. The thirteen essays are concerned with how the portrayal of races and other forms of difference both reflect and perpetuate contemporary discourses of otherness. Each of the four sections has been organized with a unifying theme in mind, although the contributors' essays speak in concert with one another.

The first section, Defining Diversity, considers novels that feature characters of color but that do not directly confront the ways in which race affects characters' experiences. In "Blood Rules: Racial Passing and the Commodification of Difference in Victoria Aveyard's *The Red Queen*", Sarah Olutola considers how the fantastic-dystopian novel invokes familiar discourses of racial otherness by reflecting the lack of inclusion of racial minorities into American political and social structures. Similarly taking up the concept of otherness, Kathryn Strong Hansen's essay, "The Fairy Race: *Artemis Fowl*, Gender, and Racial Hierarchies", asserts that the series fail to consider race and gender directly since it has the potential for creating characters with intersectional identities, yet it reinforces current hegemonic structures. Finally, Jill Coste's "Enchanting the Masses: Allegorical Diversity in Fairy-Tale Dystopias" analyzes Stacey Jay's *Of Beast and Beauty* and

Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles* series, arguing that these works use allegory to present diversity but in fact deracialize diversity while still representing marginalization.

The essays in the second section, Erasing Race, consider how the lived experiences of racialized characters are elided under the guise of colorblind ideology and through the creation of postracial worlds. In "Neoliberalism's Erasure of Race in Young Adult Fiction: Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* as Counterexample", Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites argue that neoliberalism has influenced the erasure of race in contemporary YA dystopian fiction. To demonstrate how YA dystopian novels reproduce the individual privilege, the authors consider Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* as example. Malin Alkestrand's essay, "(De)Stabilizing the Boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them': Racial Oppression and Racism in Two YA Dystopias Available in Swedish", analyzes Mats Wahl's *Blodregnsserie* and Ursula Poznanski's *Die Eleria Trilogie*. These texts speak to racism and ethnocentrism in a contemporary Swedish context, using recent immigration history and tribalism in Europe. The final essay in this section, Sierra Hale's "Postracial Futures and Colorblind Ideology: The Cyborg as Racialized Metaphor in Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles Series*", consider the series' use of colorblind ideology and technology as a metaphor to perpetuate racist discourses.

The third section, Lineages of Whiteness, considers the ways in which whiteness is privileged and normalized. Meghan Gilbert-Hickey interrogates Patrick Ness' work in *'I've Connected with Them': Racial Stereotyping and White Appropriation in the *Chaos Walking* Trilogy"*. Gilbert-Hickey analyzes how the trilogy replicates both settler colonialism and Western racism, thereby reifying whiteness and erasing the experiences of Indigenous

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characters. Elizabeth Ho's "Asian Masculinity, Eurasian Identity, and Whiteness in Cassandra Clare's *Infernal Devices Trilogy*" argues that the series reinscribes Victorian racist structures because it does not prove an ethical appropriation of past and present systems of oppression. Finally, Alex Polish examines how disability is constructed as a form of racialized otherness in "Eugenics and the 'Purity' of Memory Erasure: The Racial Coding of Dis/ability in the *Divergent* Series". He contends that the series creates a colorblind world, which is defined as a privileged world, enabling characters to believe that race no longer exists.

The book's final section, (iv) Racialized Identities, examines texts that feature racially othered characters, simultaneously unpacking an insistence on racialized discourse and looking toward works that include characters with intersectional identities. Joshua Yu Burnett's "'Vine Head', 'Snake Lady', and 'Swamp Witch': Racialized Othering in Nnedi Okorafor's *Zahrah the Windseeker*" simultaneously critiques speculative fiction for its one-dimensional depictions of race and works within the confines of the genre to advocate for fluid, multifaceted intersectionality. "Between 'Castoff' and 'Half-man': Pressuring Mixed-Race Identity in *The Drowned Cities*" by Susan Tan examines the complexities of race and racialized otherness in Paolo Bacigalupi's

novel. Tan argues that the novel offers exciting possibilities for including racial identity in YA speculative fiction. Esther L. Jones' "Black Girl Magic: Bioethics and the Reinvention of the Trope of the Mad Scientist in Black YA Speculative Fiction", understands the texts she analyzes as challenging and rewriting social scripts of mental health and disability. Her work forces us to interrogate our own complicity within these cultural narratives. In the final essay, "Forefronting Race and Law: Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and Challenging the Expectations for Idealized Young Adult Heroines", Zara Rix argues that Kwaymullina imagines a dystopian Australia as a way to teach readers about Australian history with its indigenous people. The Indigenous Futurism envisions a path that respects and honors tradition while leaning on notions of law to move toward an ethical social order.

This anthology offers a compilation that speaks to this moment in speculative fiction since each section peels back layers of institutionalized racism and discrimination that have been endemic in this genre. All the essays point toward the potential of YA science fiction to both address and interrogate racial inequities in the West and beyond. It should become an ideal reference book that can be used both at university courses and personal libraries, since it celebrates the current progress towards inclusivity, and sees an enduring future for intersectional identity. As a matter of fact, this volume also constitutes a call to action for writers of YA speculative fiction and will surely seed intersectional conversations about a genre that is only beginning to realize its potential.

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