

Contemporary
Children's and Young
Adult Literature

Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Literature:

*Writing Back to History
and Oppression*

By
Charlotte Beyer

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7422-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7422-9

This book is dedicated to my daughter Sif and husband Stuart with all my love. Their encouragement and support have been vital in enabling me to complete this study.

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PERMISSIONS

Several of the chapters in this book draw on reworked publications, which have been extended, retitled, and updated. I am grateful to the publishers and editors who have given their kind permission for me to reuse the following previously published work in this book:

“Adventures and Affect: The Character of the Boy Detective and Orphan in Astrid Lindgren’s *Rasmus and the Tramp*,” pp. 120-131, from *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others* © 2010 Edited by Michael G. Cornelius by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640. www.mcfarlandbooks.com.

“Haunting the Text: Nicola Pierce’s *Spirit of the Titanic* and Irish Historical Children’s Fiction.” *Women’s Studies* 44, no. 7 (2015): 956-976.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/gwst20/current>

“‘Last Girl Alive’: Kirsty Murray’s Dystopian YA Novel *Vulture’s Gate*,” in *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and Our Future*, ed. Louisa Mackay Demerjian, 141-162. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

“‘No Ship Is Going to Sink With My Family On It’: Motherhood and Travel in Jackie French’s Children’s Novel *How the Finnegans Saved the Ship*,” in *Travellin’ Mama: Mothers, Mothering, and Travel*, eds. Beyer, Charlotte; MacLennan, Janet; Smith Silva, Dorsía; and Tesser, Marjorie, 93-110. Toronto: Demeter, 2019.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Commissioning Editor, Adam Rummens, and all the staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, for their outstanding support throughout the process of writing this book and preparing the manuscript for publication. Grateful thanks must also go to Sue Morecroft for her invaluable assistance.

I am indebted to the peer reviewers whose helpful feedback and suggestions assisted me in improving this book and strengthening its analysis in key areas.

Finally, thank you to the scholars and academics in the field of children's and young adult literature, whose work has informed my own, and to the students I have taught and from whom I continue to learn so much.

INTRODUCTION: INVESTIGATING OPPRESSION, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Aims and Purposes of the Book

This book examines representations of oppression, social justice and writing back to history in selected children's and young adult novels from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. My discussion explores how this body of literature engages with oppression and social justice themes and constructs alternative historical narratives through an imaginative and creative lens. The specific focus in my book is on the academic study of children's and young adult literature from the contemporary era, as this time period offers a wide range of multifaceted novels and textual and literary diversity which serve the purposes of this research. My study thus seeks to make a significant contribution to research in contemporary fiction for children and young adults, and to extend current debates around this wide-ranging body of literature in several specific areas. This book identifies three distinct and specific areas of concern in children's and young adult fiction; namely social justice and crime; writing back to history; and postcolonialism and gender. These three central themes serve to structure the study into three discrete, interconnected parts which each examine particular aspects or questions pertaining to children's and young adult literature. As for my use of the term "contemporary", further clarification is necessary. This book investigates selected contemporary children's and young adult novels, with "contemporary" for the purpose of this research defined as published in the period from the mid-twentieth century up until and including the twenty-first century. In determining this periodisation, my definition echoes that of Steve Padley who in his study, *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature* (2006) defines the contemporary period as commencing at the end of the Second World War.¹ My book examines both

¹ Steve Padley, *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature* (Houndmills: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2006), ix.

children's literature (middle grade, ages 8-12) and young adult literature (age 12-18), due to the overlapping aspect of these reader categories, a point which I will elaborate in further later in this chapter. There is not the scope within the present book to expand on individual national children's and young adult literary traditions and development; however, care is taken to avoid universalisation and ahistorical generalisation in drawing conclusions about texts and their capacity to write back to history and oppression. The preoccupations examined in this study reflect my sense of the urgency and depth of contemporary children's and young adult fiction and its treatment of themes which are crucial to the contemporary period. The novels selected for consideration in the study crucially centre on a range of specific and compelling themes and employ a range of literary subgenres such as the historical novel, detective fiction, dystopia, experimental fiction, to name. This breadth of material fosters inclusivity, demonstrating both the diversity of contemporary children's and young adult literature as well as supporting the wide-ranging scope of this study. In this introductory chapter, I set out the main themes and ideas to be examined in the book, explain my methodology and the theoretical and critical discussions that inform it, and elaborate on the contexts of contemporary children's and young adult literature and the study of the genre.

Rationale and Academic Lens

This book approaches the examination of children's and young adult fiction through an academic and textual lens. Scholarly research on children's and young adult literature is constantly evolving; however, much of the initial research focused on how fiction for children and young adults served specific purposes around literacy and the acquisition of particular skills in education contexts. The focus of my book does not question the value of teaching or pedagogy; however, children's and young adult literature has frequently been seen as a tool for teaching literacy and particular skills, and read in light of educational theory and practice, in ways which have at times been at odds with academic textual criticism on the genre. In contrast, this book focuses on the academic study of a range of global contemporary children's and young adult novels, examining vital themes and establishing ways of reading established texts, as well as providing important critical perspectives on lesser-known authors and their works. The evolution of academic criticism on children's and young adult literature can be traced from the early work developed in the 1960s when teacher education institutions began to use children's literature as part of their pedagogical

instruction.² Since then, the scholarly study of fiction for children and young adults has encompassed a number of different academic disciplines, and involves students and academics investigating critical and theoretical as well as political dimensions of children's and young adult fiction and the politics of its production.³ In this study, then, the academic lens I employ brings together close readings of texts using critical theory and analytical concepts, along with the examination of social justice themes. In my exploration of children's and young adult fiction in this book, I am concerned with analysing the texts as texts, situating them within critical and theoretical concepts broadly used within contemporary critical and cultural debates. Examining selected contemporary children's and young adult novels from Britain, Ireland, Sweden, America, the Caribbean, Australia, and New Zealand, this book's plurality of perspective is a unique and compelling feature. Exploring representations and themes from such diverse parts of the world, including texts in translation, necessarily means paying careful attention to cultural nuances and demonstrating awareness of how straightforward comparisons or evaluations of texts against canonical texts are potentially problematic and fraught with potential pitfalls, generalisations and erasures. My analysis draws on a range of critical and theoretical perspectives, prominent among which are postcolonial and feminist forms of analysis. As Kimberley Reynolds argues,

research in children's literature interfaces with other disciplines, not least by appropriating critical and theoretical approaches developed for one purpose or discipline and adapting them to support thinking and investigation based on narratives for children. Because children's and YA literature spans all formats, media and genres, is written by males and females, by those in power and those being oppressed, and much of it has undergone transformations between media, research in the field may involve using virtually any research tool or approach.⁴

The purpose with this book is to demonstrate the vital ways in which children's and young adult literature takes part in, vitally contributes to, and shapes current cultural and social discussions about a range of issues and questions. As we shall see, far from being regarded as popular or simplistic

² Clare Bradford, "Australian Children's Literature", in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. Peter Pierce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 302.

³ Kimberley Reynolds, "Research and Theory: Introduction", in *Children's Literature Studies*, eds. M.O. Grenby and Kimberley Reynolds (Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 2011). Kindle Edition, 123.

⁴ Kimberley Reynolds, "Research and Theory," 123.

writing to be dismissed or trivialised as merely entertainment or educational, the children's and young adult novels examined in this book demonstrate the significance of contemporary children's and juvenile literature in portraying and challenging hegemonies, whether these are patriarchal, colonial, racial, gendered, or geographical. This important point, about the capacity and power of genre fiction to influence wide readerships and popular cultural debates, is one which I have also made elsewhere in relation to crime fiction and its articulation of social critique.⁵ However, it should be recognised that differing forms of genre fiction explore and impact on social justice themes and discussions in often quite different ways which are hard to quantify. In the case of children's and young adult literature as a specific type of genre fiction, as we shall see in this book, an array of subgenres and textual features are drawn on in order to enhance the genre's articulation of social and cultural critique.

Oppression and writing back to history are key themes being investigated in this study. These themes are vital preoccupations, not just in children's and young adult writing, but in literature and popular culture in the postmodern and postcolonial age generally.⁶ It is necessary to first define the terms 'oppression', 'social justice' and 'writing back to history' more closely, and to explain how I employ the terms in my textual analysis. The theme of oppression is defined broadly in this book to encompass a range of injustices portrayed in the children's and young adult novels examined here, ranging from class, race and gender oppression, to postcolonial and family inequality. As a wide-ranging theme, the representation of oppression in children's and young adult literature takes many different forms, some of which are considered in this book. Importantly, the analyses of individual novels investigate the specific contexts and circumstances, thereby avoiding an ahistorical or inadequately contextualised interpretation of the theme. Social justice can be defined as "[t]he objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest."⁷ Critics

⁵ See for example Charlotte Beyer. "‘In the Suitcase was a Boy’: Representing Transnational Child Trafficking in Contemporary Crime Fiction." In *Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking*, ed. Christiana Gregoriou (Palgrave Pivot, Cham, 2018), 89-115.

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2003.

⁷ N.a. "Social justice" *Oxford Reference*.

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100515279>. Accessed 17 December 2020.

such as Jacqueline N. Glasgow have examined the ways in which fiction for children and young adults can be employed in education to teach social justice questions, from a pedagogical perspective.⁸ However, relatively little research exists addressing the broad theme of social justice as a literary theme in children's and young adult writing, or the ways in which subgenres such as crime and detective fiction are used to promote such themes. My examination here centres on precisely this relatively neglected area of research, expanding the investigation of social justice as a theme to include genres such as coming-of-age, dystopia and experimental fiction. Through the analysis of representations of oppression in contemporary novels for children and young adults, I investigate how those novels which I have selected pay attention to marginalised and silenced perspectives.

Writing back to history is the process through which literary texts challenge and reassess dominant representations of history, by addressing the perspectives of those who have been marginalised and representing history from their point of view. This book focuses on how selected children's and young adult literary texts explore history and historical characters and the politics of their representation. The purpose of this study's examination of these novels is to investigate how these particular novels critically engage with history and its representation. There is not the scope within this study to examine history as an academic discipline or to analyse various scholarly approaches to historiography; the focus here is on the depictions of history in literary texts as cultural narratives. Nikki Gamble explains in relation to children's and young adult fiction and the use of the historical novel that, "[h]istorical fiction concentrates on public events and private consciousness. While some writers are interested in macro-historical events others [...] are interested in the impact of history on individual lives."⁹ Gamble further observes that in describing history and events and characters of the past, children's and young adult fiction creates a personal and intimate connection between the reader and the material through imaginative means. She argues that, "fiction invites the reader to experience the past through the eyes of a character, or characters. It provides an imitation of memory, rather than displaying actual memories as a diary or documentary would."¹⁰ The novels examined in this book richly illustrate these points in their individual and differing ways of mediating and/or challenging history and

⁸ Jacqueline N. Glasgow, "Teaching Social Justice through Young Adult Literature." *The English Journal* 90, no. 6 (2001): 54-61.

⁹ Nikki Gamble, *Exploring Children's Literature* (London: SAGE Publications, 2013) Kindle Edition. 154-55.

¹⁰ Gamble, *Exploring*, 154-55.

the individual's relationship to it. Addressing gender and colonial oppression through children's literature is another key dimension in this book's overarching concern with social justice, which is interconnected with the other aspects I am investigating here. Thematic representation is central to children's and young adult literature; therefore, the study of themes is also vital to this book. As Jonathan Todres and Sarah Higinbotham explain, "the content of children's literature is crucial. It matters for the children concerned and, by extension, for the very nature of the societies in which they grow up."¹¹ Todres and Higinbotham's insightful book is a highly significant piece of research which has informed my own thinking about oppression, social justice and writing back to history in children's and young adult literature in this book. The unique constellation of novels examined here showcases the texts' use of imaginative and creative means through which to challenge inequality and present alternative narratives of hope and visibility for child, juvenile and adult readers of the genre alike. As we shall see, this particular constellation of children's and young adult novels examined here allows new insights into the workings of the themes this book focuses on. This book's overarching themes of challenging oppression and writing back to history to achieve social justice therefore serve to connect the novels examined in this book through their concern with challenging power structures and discourses of authority. Through its culturally sensitive and open readings, the book works against reductive generalisations, as we shall see in the chapters which follow this Introduction.

It should be noted at this point that in more general discussions in this book, I will be referring to the body of writing under examination as "children's and young adult literature", whereas in my examinations of individual novels, I may refer to texts by as either "children's novel" or "young adult novel", depending on the text in question. The phrase "children's and young adult literature" is used as an overarching term to describe the diverse body of literature examined here, in recognition of the fact that some of the works are directed at children in middle grade (8/9-12), and some of them juvenile/young adult (12-18). However, these age groups should be regarded as indicative rather than prescriptive, in recognition of the fact that there is much overlap between these groups and readers (younger children reading young adult books, for example), and that adults read young adult and children's literature. Furthermore, it should be noted that this book uses the term 'genre' to describe children's and young adult literature as a field of literature. While acknowledging that there is disagreement among

¹¹ Jonathan Todres and Sarah Higinbotham, *Human Rights in Children's Literature: Imagination and the Narrative of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xii.

children's literature scholars as to whether the employment of the term genre is appropriate,¹² I use the term genre in this book to describe children's and young adult literature, and occasionally the term 'subgenre' in the examination of texts drawing on generic conventions from, for example, crime fiction conventions or dystopia, or coming-of-age narrative. In this, I follow Todres and Higinbotham, who propose an inclusive definition and use of the term genre in their discussions of children's and young adult literature. They argue that children's literature is not a static genre, that genres always remain fluid and in process, and that readerships can't be categorised as either child or adult readers: "'child' and 'adult' are not always fixed categories (children, indeed all individuals, are in a constant process of developing), and neither is 'children's literature' a static genre."¹³ This is a comprehensive critical approach to fiction for children and young adults and its definition which fits the purposes and parameters of my present study.

The Content of the Book

This book is divided into three parts which are governed by specific structuring concepts which provide a critical and thematic context for my analyses of the individual novels. I see these three dimensions as interconnected aspects of the book's overarching themes which reflect how feminist and postcolonial criticism have highlighted narratives around history, identity and inequality, and their representation and counter-representation, as key concerns. My book's three-part thematic and conceptual structure affords an important sense of coherence and provides a means for the reader of understanding this study as a whole, as well as allowing them to establish their own connections and links among texts and themes which echo and resonate. Children's and young adult novels exist in a world of intertextuality, just like other literary genres. The three parts in the book acknowledge these multifaceted textual, generic and cultural influences, while affording a thematic structure through which to navigate this complex and fascinating terrain, and serving to mediate but not erase the differences caused by linguistic-, cultural-, national- and cultural-specific circumstances and traditions.

¹² Marah Gubar, "On Not Defining Children's Literature." *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 126, no. 1 (2011): 210.

¹³ Todres and Higinbotham, *Human Rights*, 24-25.

Part One, Social Justice and Crime, specifically investigates the ways in which contemporary children's and young adult authors represent crime and social justice themes. The two chapters featured in Part One examine two novels, namely Astrid Lindgren's *Rasmus and the Tramp*; and Patricia McCormick's *Sold*, focusing on the novels' portrayals of child characters in relation to crime and social justice themes. Part One examines controversial and critical themes such as orphanhood, crime, human trafficking and modern slavery, in order to interrogate the relationship between children's and young adult literature and social justice questions. Part One specifically examines the way in which crime themes in children's texts are used to challenge and interrogate both historical representations of social justice, crime and inequality. This discussion includes a consideration of how current inequalities causing exploitation of the Global South are depicted in fiction for children and young adults, profoundly affecting children and the literary representations of their lives, experiences, and social/cultural contexts. Published in 1956 and translated into English in 1960, Lindgren's novel *Rasmus and the Tramp* is the earliest literary text included in this book; however, her novel clearly demonstrates that social justice themes in children's and young adult literature have a long history. Through its contrast with McCormick's twenty-first-century novel, Lindgren's text serves to demonstrate how representations of social justice themes have evolved, but also addresses how authors of children's and young adult literature at different historical points have utilised the crime fiction genre in different ways in order to offer social and cultural critique. Lindgren's novel thus specifically serves as an important point of connection and contrast with McCormick's 2007 novel *Sold*, the latter novel illustrating how crime fiction for children and young adults has evolved over time, in step with contemporary social justice issues. Lindgren and McCormick's novels show how, in shifting the focus from the detective figure to the victim of crime, children's and young adult literature explores the impact of inequality and exploitation on children and juveniles, thereby serving a vital function in generating greater awareness in readerships of social justice issues affecting children locally and globally. Both novels appeal to readers through the evocation of emotion and traumatic experience, perspectives also discussed by critics such as Casey Keene who has examined the importance of engaging child readers as active readers participating in processes of building knowledge of social justice.¹⁴ I draw on ideas and discussions from

¹⁴ Casey Keane, "How Can Children's Books Be Used to Promote Social Justice and Peace?" WAVnet: an online resource library for gender-based violence, 3 June 2019, <https://vavnet.org/news/how-can-childrens-books-be-used-promote-social-justice-and-peace>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

crime fiction criticism and perspectives in order to analyse the use of the theme of crime in contemporary children's and young adult literature and to investigate how and why those themes are conveyed. I argue that Lindgren and McCormick call attention to children and juveniles as victims of adult abuses of power and influence and inequality such as discrimination and exploitation in human trafficking. Part One thereby serves a vital function in opening this book, and establishing one of its major themes, namely the representation and investigation of social justice, crime and inequality in contemporary children's and young adult fiction. I argue that these social justice questions are vital to the ways in which contemporary fiction for children and young adults communicates its challenge to the status quo, by highlighting inequalities and the issue of agency and influence for children, and suggesting alternative relationships or ways of thinking about, self, family, community, and world.

Part Two in this book is entitled, *Writing Back to History*, and examines the ways in which contemporary children's and young adult novels from postcolonial and multicultural contexts use the genre and its narrative possibilities in order to challenge dominant historical narratives and write back to history. The three chapters in Part Two demonstrate how contemporary children's and young adult novels construct and enhance alternative accounts of historical events which bring to light neglected or marginalised perspectives and provide an outlet for hitherto silenced voices. The three novels examined in Part Two are, Nicola Pierce's 2011 novel *Spirit of the Titanic*, Jackie French's *How the Finnegans Saved the Ship* (2001), Michael Morpurgo's 2012 novel, *A Medal for Leroy*. Through the novels by Pierce and French, Part Two investigates the representation of identity and history, exploring Irish-Australian postcolonial migration and transnational identities in children's and young adult literature, the impact of collective trauma such as the Titanic disaster and the concept of postcolonial haunting. Part Two examines the relationship between nation, race and history, by investigating how Morpurgo reconsiders historical accounts of the two World Wars in order to acknowledge and explore the experiences and perspectives of black British and diaspora European individuals and families and the impact of trauma suffered on an intergenerational level. Morpurgo's novel not only challenges dominant historical narratives but also importantly depicts the evolution of Britain as a multicultural society and culture. Through these examinations of the texts and their description of the impact of historical narratives on gender, class, colonial, religion and family relationships, my book explores how these children's and young adult novels reassess the relationship between identity and history. Discussions include representations of migration and children's

experience of transnational mobility, the processes of national and cultural identifications, the complexities and inequalities of race and ethnicity, and the impact of racism, xenophobia, religious conflict and persecution. The three children's and young adult novels examined in Part Two are closer together historically in terms of their publication dates, than Lindgren and McCormick's, reflecting the differing approach to the theme under investigation in Part Two. Rather than establishing a contrast between the novels and the evolution of the crime genre and its representation, a purpose which informs the discussion in Part One of crime and social justice, Part Two focuses specifically on the articulation of the relationship between identity and nation through the writing and rewriting of history, and the role children's and young adult literature serves in that creative imagining. Situated closely together historically in terms of their publication dates, the postcolonial texts in Part Two demonstrate the transformative powers of contemporary children's and young adult literature in affecting the representation and assessment of history and narrative.

Part Three, Postcolonialism and Gender, examines the intersection between postcolonial oppression and resistance, and issues around gender and identity, presented through the lens of selected contemporary children's and young adult texts. Part Three investigates three young adult novels, namely the Caribbean author Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970); the Australian author Kirsty Murray's 2009 dystopian fiction *Vulture's Gate*; and New Zealand Maori writer Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987). Examining these postcolonial young adult novels from the Caribbean, Australia and New Zealand forms the basis for Part Three's analysis of the complex intersections of gender, ecocriticism and postcolonialism represented and reimagined through the imaginative lens of child and juvenile characters and their experience of the world. In Part Three, I argue that contemporary children's and young adult literature explores these complex intersecting modes of oppression through their characters, themes and narrative techniques, thereby generating sophisticated, innovative and compelling novels which demonstrate the generic and creative range of fiction for children and young adults. Murray's dystopian novel provides a compelling and imaginative young adult narrative which deftly weaves together explorations of gender and friendship with environmental destruction and repressive political regimes. In analysing uses of the coming-of-age story in Hodge's representation of colonial childhood, education and indoctrination of colonial values and norms according to which black girls are defined as doubly other, as well as class contrasts between urban middle-class blacks and rural blacks. These discussions include a consideration of orphanhood and bereavement and the effect of

these traumatic events on the protagonist Tee, as well as the impact of these multiple aspects on subject-formation and self-worth. Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* explores female marginalisation in the context of the novel's ecocritical and postcolonial challenge to a patriarchal system which is perpetrated through the protagonist Kahu's own Maori family and tribe as well as through postcolonial inequalities in society at large, all serving to define and silence her. Analysis of intersecting modes of oppression in the texts is central to tracing social justice themes in these three children's and young adult novels. Part Three, then, employs feminist debates and ideas in order to explore a portrayal of gender and identity in contemporary children's and young adult literature, elaborating further on themes such as gender inequality, forms of oppression, the family and its hierarchies and roles. Likewise, Part Three also engages critically with ideas and themes from ecocriticism, a mode of literary analysis which, as Derek Gladwin argues, provides, "a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment."¹⁵ My examination of representations of natural and environmental harm focuses on local as well as global aspects, analysing the issue in relation to wider cultural discussions around literature, oppression and social justice.

Through these representations and their careful ordering into separate sections which interconnect, this book thus presents a unique and compelling examination of contemporary children's and young adult literature as a genre with extraordinary versatility and reach. There is not the scope within this book to provide additional references to or discussions of other adults', children's and young adult novels which may be thematically or generically linked to the texts under examination. My approach in individual chapters is to focus on a single novel in each chapter for close textual analysis and contextualisation. Rather than provide a broader account of a larger range of texts, for the purpose of this study it is more constructive and meaningful to analyse individual texts in depth. This in-depth textual analysis provides opportunity to bring critical and theoretical perspectives to bear, and to develop a full examination of the thematic and narrative specificities of each novel as well as their cultural and national context.

¹⁵ Derek Gladwin, "Ecocriticism", in *Oxford Bibliographies*, Literary and Critical Theory, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0014.xml>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

Methodology and Analysis

The book's layout in three distinct but interconnected parts enables an examination of particular textual features and themes within those groupings. For the purpose of this study, I define contemporary children's and young adult literature as texts for younger children, teens and older teens, using the terms "children's literature" and "young adult" to describe the generic range of novels treated in this book. My rationale for selecting these particular novels for examination in this book is guided by two key considerations. I identified the specific novels under examination here as key texts, on the basis that they provide a strong focus on one or more of the major themes in the book's three parts. Because of that identified focus, I determined that these novels represent compelling examples of global children's and young adult literature, conveying social justice themes with complexity, nuance and through well-crafted narratives. I selected these particular novels as key texts because I determined that this study requires a range of texts from different national, cultural, literary and linguistic traditions historically. I prioritised lesser-known authors as well as more widely known writers, in order to generate a compelling discussion which would offer fresh insights to the field of children's and young adult literature research. The novels examined here all feature powerful, complex story lines, nuanced child or juvenile characters, and affective and imaginative depth. These novels also importantly focus strongly on social inequalities of race, gender, class as part of their narratives, while offering hope for their child and juvenile characters struggling to overcome these challenges. Those representations are crucial to this book's main themes. It should be said here that my examinations of the texts are not presented in strict chronological order within Parts One, Two and Three, as the evolving discussion is guided by the novels' exploration of the particular themes under investigation, rather than chronology.

In terms of text selection, a vital dimension of this book's engagement with contemporary children's and young adult literature is inclusion of generic breadth and scope. These criteria underpin the rationale and methodology for the book, and also informs my selection of novels and themes treated here. Firstly, attention to subgenre and narrative possibilities enables this book to present analyses of a number of genres within contemporary children's and young adult literature. These include dystopia, crime fiction, the realist coming-of-age novel, the historical novel, fiction about travel and migration, as well as experimental hybrid literary forms. The close attention to genre and textuality forms an integral part of this book's analyses, and presents a unique and innovative feature of its examination. Children's and

young adult literature thus features a range of subgenres and forms which serve the vital purpose of expanding the genre and energising its representations. I examine how authors utilise the intricate relationship between form and content in order to generate fresh and original narratives which are capable of voicing alternative and marginalised perspectives and articulate significant social justice themes. Secondly, a key rationale for this book's text selection is inclusivity. A diversity of cultural, racial, national, linguistic and social perspectives is included, in order to reflect present-day global literary environments. I selected these particular texts based on their diversity, range, and differing strategies for critiquing social and cultural inequalities, for my examination of oppression in contemporary fiction for children and young adults. In devising the book's content, I felt it was vital to include novels from the earlier part of the contemporary period, in order to establish a sense of the evolution and changes within the genre (Lindgren). I also deemed it essential to include black British and Caribbean identities (Hodge, Morpurgo), as well as postcolonial perspectives (Ihimaera, French, Murray). American children's and young adult literature (McCormick), and literature which explores experiences such as trauma, crime, and human rights transgressions (Pierce, McCormick), were also deemed essential for the book's purpose. Texts have thus been chosen from across the children's and young adult literature spectrum which communicate central ideas in compelling, creative and innovative ways, by authors who specialise in writing for children as well as authors who write for mixed age groups and audiences. Here, I echo Todres and Higinbotham's assertion that,

the imaginative and creative space of children's literature is a critical domain to preserve for children [and therefore] not promoting the reading of children's literature through a single ideological perspective; in fact, doing so violates the creative integrity and complexity of the books.¹⁶

As previously stated, this book does not concern itself with examining children's and young adult literature in relation to its use in primary or secondary education for pedagogical purposes. Nor does the book address children's and young adult writing as part of literacy teaching defined as teaching language in schools through the use of authentic texts such as children's literature rather than textbooks.¹⁷ The study does not utilise reader response theory, defined as referring to theories about how readers

¹⁶ Todres and Higinbotham, *Human Rights*, 20.

¹⁷ Terry D. Johnson and Daphne R. Louis, *Literacy through Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987).

respond to literature and how and why readers differ in their reading practices,¹⁸ or elaborate on the role of children as readers from a pedagogical perspective. These dimensions of research and scholarship are of course both important and valid; however, they are beyond the scope of this book which is within the academic study of contemporary children's and young adult novels as literary texts.

My methodology in this book is textual analysis. I use textual analysis as a tool to open up the texts to exploration and examination of the specific themes and ideas under consideration in this study. In organising the material in this book, I have identified major themes, structures and textual features which support, illustrate and/or extend my close reading of the novels. My textual analysis is informed by feminist and postcolonial criticism as well as crime fiction criticism; however, these critical and theoretical perspectives serve to inform my analysis, not to dictate its terms or conclusions. Mike Allen outlines the principles of textual analysis as methodology in his definition, stating that,

Textual analysis is a methodology that involves understanding language, symbols, and/or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences. Visual, written, or spoken messages provide cues to ways through which communication may be understood.¹⁹

My application of textual analysis is combined with contextual and critical information, as well as theoretical concepts and contextual debates which serve to inform analysis, underpin my discussions, and illustrate the links between children's and young adult literature and recent academic investigations. This contextual and analytical work involves drawing on a range of scholarly discussions and examinations from across the different literary genres as well as critical examinations of children's literature specifically. This wider contextualisation is crucial to my chapters' use of textual analysis, because as Mike Allen notes,

the messages are understood as influenced by and reflective of larger social structures. For example, messages reflect and/or may challenge historical, cultural, political, ethical contexts for which they exist. Therefore, the

¹⁸ Michael Benton, *Reader Response Criticism in Children's Literature* (University of Southampton, Centre for Language in Education, 1993).

¹⁹ Mike Allen, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. 4 vols. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017). DOI: 10.4135/9781483381411.

analyst must understand the broader social structures that influence the messages present in the text under investigation.²⁰

Rather than following one specific theoretical line of enquiry throughout the book, my analysis draws on insights and approaches which I deem to be specific and appropriate to the text in question and its context. My approach ensures that the children's and young adult novels which I have selected for examination in this book receive the specific cultural- and historical attention they require. This is done in recognition of that fact that, to force one particular critical perspective on a diverse group of texts would run the risk of neglecting historicity and oversimplifying the complex ideas and representations illustrated in these novels. Instead, this book consciously draws on an array of critical perspectives and texts, demonstrating that children's literary texts require the same degree of specificity of critical treatment and engagement as any other genre or text. This book's employment of a range of critical approaches is in line with other contemporary scholarship on children's literature, as Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel explain,

the establishment of a separate category of works for young readers has been accompanied by a rich growth in the body of critical work that has sought to interpret the trends, themes, and conventions that define particular eras of children's literature. Most recently, critical directions have focused on questions about identity, environmental approaches, postcolonial readings, material contexts, and theoretical trends like historical materialism, psychoanalysis, and extra-textual or paratextual features.²¹

Affect and empathy in character creation are crucial to the texts chosen here. They provide opportunity for reader identification and as such are important criteria in my rationale for text selection. Discussing the representation of affect and eliciting the reader's engagement and emotional involvement generated through children's literary texts, Elizabeth Bullen, Kristine Moruzi, and Michelle J. Smith further state that:

Texts also position readers to vicariously experience characters' feelings, to know what it feels like to be someone else, including those unlike

²⁰ Allen, *SAGE Encyclopedia*, n.p.

²¹ Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel, "Introduction", in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Children's Literature and Culture), eds. Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 1.

themselves. As such, affect, empathy and emotion are categories of analysis that have the potential to advance critical theories of children's literature.²²

My primary focus is on the novels as literary and imaginative constructions, and on the textuality of contemporary children's and young adult literature. The book thus pays attention to setting, characters, genre, plot, narrative perspective, uses of literary language and symbolism, the political and critical aspects of the writing and context, and the function of children's and young adult texts in communicating these themes. The study investigates children's and young adult literature as literature, offering ways in which to read the novels, interrogating their contexts, and reflecting on what challenges and possibilities for new insights emerge from using this scholarly lens. The textual analysis which forms the basis for my methodology is informed by critical thinking and concepts from a number of different approaches, including postcolonial criticism, feminist literary criticism, crime fiction criticism, narratology, and of course criticism specific to the reading of children's and young adult literature as a genre, which I will elaborate on next.

Critical and Theoretical Perspectives

This book draws on critical and theoretical debates in its textual analyses, but it is not a book about theory. Rather, the individual chapters illustrate and evidence the productive and compelling conversations and interplay between literary texts and critical terms and discussions. In this study I wanted to create a complex critical lens which is multi-faceted and intersectional. My textual analysis thus focuses on genre and themes, investigating aspects of textuality as well as important themes within the novels, selected in order to place these texts within specific critical and cultural contexts. Individual chapters are structured in such a way as to foreground and make apparent the thematic and textual concerns in the piece. This method reflects the acknowledgement by Anna Katrina Gutierrez that, "Children's and young adult literature have been understood and interpreted through, if not shaped by, the effects of economic, political,

²²Elizabeth Bullen, Kristine Moruzi, and Michelle J. Smith, "Children's Literature and the Affective Turn: Affect, Emotion, Empathy," in *Affect, Emotion, and Children's Literature: Representation and Socialisation in Texts for Children and Young Adults*, eds. Kristine Moruzi, Michelle J. Smith, and Elizabeth Bullen (London: Routledge, 2017), 1.

cultural, social and technological processes on theoretical perspectives.”²³ The international composition of the texts along with their diverse cultural and linguistic contexts have methodological implications for my textual analysis of the themes they feature, insofar as texts from differing cultural and national backgrounds cannot be reduced to a simple adherence to universal narrative patterns or representations. As a migrant writing in my second language, I am aware of the complex processes of cultural and linguistic mediation, and the impact of these processes on children's novels and the way in which I read and interpret these novels. As a scholar writing in my second language, I am aware of the complexities of examining literature in translation and living and working outside of the national context in which I was born. Commenting on the significance of cultural embeddedness, John Stephens, Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy, explain that, “[c]ritical description of particular literatures is apt to be culturally embedded, but to varying degrees influenced by practices of outside academic cultures, which in turn become globalized.”²⁴ My readings in this book, then, are informed by these important insights, and do not purport to be universal, ahistorical or unembedded in particular privileges and contexts. Rather, my book establishes the importance of shared themes and concerns without erasing or minimising cultural and other differences and the ways in which these impact on representations. My investigations in this book form part of an international of scholarship endeavouring to offer nuanced and complex analyses of children's and young adult literature. As David Damrosch argues, “For any given observer, even a genuinely global perspective remains a perspective from somewhere, and global patterns of the circulation of world literature take shape in their local manifestations.”²⁵ The acknowledgement of subjective perspectives and the situatedness of both critic and texts are essential to the thorough analysis and critical assessment of contemporary children's and young adult literature as a global

²³ Anna Katrina Gutierrez, “Globalization and Glocalization”, in *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature* (Routledge Literature Companions), eds. John Stephens with Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 11.

²⁴ John Stephens, Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy, “Introduction”, in *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature* (Routledge Literature Companions), eds. John Stephens, Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 1.

²⁵ David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Translation/Transnation) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), Kindle Edition, 27.

body of work. These factors are especially significant, since, as Stephens, Belmiro, Curry, Lifang, and Motawy demonstrate, “the repertoires of genres and forms utilized by children’s authors differ between regions. The temporal relationship between the emergence of children’s literature and the impact of modernity varies widely across the world.”²⁶ Here it may be relevant to state my working definition of world literature which informs my discussions in this book, following Damrosch who states that the term world literature refers to “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language.”²⁷ This is key to my argument and discussion of contemporary novels for children and young adults in this book. As Damrosch points out about world literature, it is, “not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries.”²⁸ These points apply to all the children’s and young adult texts examined in this book, but in particular to novels in translation such as Lindgren’s, and to Ihimaera’s novel which involves both English and Maori languages in the narrative.

Resistance to oppression and reassessment of identity and history are crucial thematic preoccupations running through all of the children’s and young adult novels examined in this book. My methodology for focusing on these specific themes is textual analysis broadly informed by three distinct areas of critical debate: crime fiction criticism, feminism, and postcolonialism. In the following, I will explain how this works in practice and outline the aims of this analytical method. As I have already established, Part One of this book focuses specifically on the ways in which the crime genre is used within contemporary children’s and young adult literature to investigate and challenge the representation of crime, and the issue of agency and justice for the victims of crime. Fiction for children and young adults offers specific opportunities to explore social justice themes in relation to child characters, through its character set, plot, narrative conventions, and so on. Christopher Routledge comments on this dimension, as he explains that, “[c]rime and detective literature for children allows for different possibilities in detection and plotting, especially in cases where the detective is a child, or part of a

²⁶ John Stephens, Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy, “Introduction,” 2.

²⁷ Damrosch, *World Literature*, 4.

²⁸ Damrosch, *World Literature*, 5.

group of children, but it shares common origins with the genre.”²⁹ Conventionally, the genre of crime fiction has been focused on presenting suspense-driven plots driven by detective figures solving crime and restoring order to society. The genre also explicitly concerns itself with the values which inform our social interaction. As Karen Seago states, “crime fiction functions as a barometer of a society’s values and morals reflecting and interrogating what is inscribed as crime.”³⁰ Crime and detective fiction has conventionally focused on achieving justice for victims,³¹ and it is this particular dimension which the chapters in Part One examine as part of their exploration of crime and social justice in children’s and young adult novels, through its attention to textual representations and themes which enhance those facets. In critical discussions of crime fiction as a genre, crime and detective texts for children have often been omitted from consideration.³² Christopher Routledge argues that children’s detective fiction has been somewhat ignored by critics examining the evolution and growth of the genre. This neglect, he argues, has resulted in a propensity to overlook the crucial ways in which crime and detection themes abound in children’s literature outside the notional parameters of the detective genre.³³ However, Lucy Andrew’s excellent monograph *The Boy Detective in Early British Children’s Literature: Patrolling the Borders between Boyhood and Manhood* (2017), and scholarship such as Michael G. Cornelius’ edited volumes on the girl and boy detectives, *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others* (2010) and *Nancy Drew and Her Sister Sleuths: Essays on the Fiction of Girl Detectives* (edited with Melanie G. Gregg), and my own work, have started important critical conversations about crime and detective fiction for children and juveniles. This book’s Part One thus contributes to this evolving conversation, through its two contrasting chapters which demonstrate the evolution of the crime genre and its use of social justice themes in children’s and young adult literature.

Crime fiction criticism is uniquely well positioned to account for the blending of literary genres which can be seen in the texts examined in Part

²⁹ Christopher Routledge, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers* (Long Lane Press, 2012).

³⁰ Karen Seago, “Introduction and Overview: Crime (Fiction) in Translation.” *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 22 (2014): 2-14.

³¹ Charlotte Beyer, “Crime Fiction and Migration,” in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Janice Allan, Jesper Gulddal, Stewart King, and Andrew Pepper (London: Routledge, 2020), 379-387.

³² Routledge, *Crime and Detective*, n.p.

³³ Routledge, *Crime and Detective*, n.p.

One, in Lindgren's mixing adventure and quest narrative and McCormick's trafficking narrative written in vignettes. Rachel Franks comments on this flexibility of the crime genre to work with other literary forms and genres, pointing out that, "[n]o other genre has the capacity to so easily slip across borders into other genres or provide so many opportunities for readers wanting to read for character, story, setting and language."³⁴ It is precisely this merger of genres and fluidity between forms which we observe in the two children's and young adult novels examined in Part One. My analyses in Part One, of children's and young adult literature exploring crime themes, have the explicit purpose of drawing attention to the fascinating interplay between children's and juvenile literature and crime writing, drawing on discussions and concepts from crime fiction criticism in order to analyse and interpret Lindgren's and McCormick's novels. Hence, my definition of the term and genre of crime fiction is broad and inclusive, reflecting John Scaggs' point that, rather than seeking to define the crime genre in unequivocal terms, I am interested in exploring how the crime fiction novel for children and juveniles has evolved.³⁵ Consequently, my present examination considers writing focused on a detective style character (as in the protagonist Rasmus in Lindgren's novel), as an experimental text written in vignette form telling the story of the victim's struggle to survive crime and prevail to obtain justice (Lakshmi in McCormick's *Sold*). In terms of the textual analysis, then, my examination of Lindgren's and McCormick's novels in Part One focuses on themes which broadly connect with both crime and social justice, but enable analysis to bring out and foreground the specific textual and thematic nuances of each text. Through contrasting these two historically and thematically differently oriented crime texts, my book evaluates the evolution of crime narratives for children and juveniles, and the changing aesthetic and thematic priorities of authors in the field.

Gender is a key theme in all the children's and young adult novels that I discuss in this book, and forms an integral aspect of my examination of oppression and writing back to history and their representation in contemporary children's literature. Complex and detailed analyses of representations of gender in children's literature continue to be urgently needed, as Victoria Flanagan points out. She states that:

³⁴ Rachel Franks, "May I suggest murder? An overview of crime fiction for readers' advisory services staff." *The Australian Library Journal* 60(2) (2011), 142.

³⁵ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.