

**Reading Otherness in British Fiction for Young
People, 2001-2012.**

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Abstract.

This thesis argues that novels depicting characters who exist outside of the social order have become integral to a twenty-first century corpus of British fiction for children and adolescents. This, in part, stems from a changing socio-political landscape in Britain post-2000 in which discussions of who does and does not 'belong' are becoming increasingly amplified. It will be shown that, against such a backdrop, fiction for young people written between 2001 and 2012 works to counter and challenge mainstream discourses prevalent in, for example, the media. With this in mind, this study's primary texts are categorised as social realism, often providing a commentary on the nature of this historical moment.

Different strands of Otherness in relation to young people are examined in each chapter of this thesis. Chapter one explores Otherness with reference to language, its function in wider society, and its ability to act as a signifier of normativity. It introduces a trio of novels focusing on young people with communication impairments. Chapter two examines how authors depict communities as complicit in Othering practices affecting young people. Chapter three introduces texts in which the protagonists' Otherness stems from their exclusion from important sites of identity formation, such as family, school and nation. Chapter four examines representations of the 'foreign Other' and considers the impact of 'outsider perspectives' on narrative. The fifth chapter revisits one text from each of the preceding chapters and documents their exploration in a school setting. This is included because I believe consultation with the texts' intended audience is necessary in a study focusing on literature for young people. This is due to their status as a demographic that I, as an adult researcher, exist outside of. This study's originality then, stems not only from the contemporary nature of its primary texts, but also from its amalgamation of literary analysis with qualitative research - a rare approach in English studies.

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Introduction.

Setting the scene.

This thesis argues that novels depicting characters who exist outside of the social order are integral to a twenty-first century corpus of British fiction for children and adolescents. This stems in part, from a changing socio-political landscape in Britain post-2000, in which discussions of who does and does not ‘belong’ are becoming increasingly amplified. This thesis shows that, against such a backdrop, fiction for young people¹ works to counter and challenge mainstream perspectives such as those prevalent in the media. Moreover, I will assess the extent to which contemporary British authors provide a ‘voice’ for marginalised characters and how these challenge dominant discourses. Crucially, this thesis also argues the case for the inclusion of the child’s ‘voice’ in children’s literature scholarship in attempting to respond to the issue of their Othering at the hands of adult ‘gatekeepers’. With this in mind, the final chapter centres on the use of qualitative reader-response research in offering a crucial additional lens on primary material.

Britain in the early twenty-first century is a multicultural society in a fractured and troubled state, with a tendency to view individuals representative of difference with fear and distrust. The dominant narratives of this period have tended to ‘fuel’ this fire. These comprise of, for example, the Rupert Murdoch press with its tendency to vilify certain social groups, the (various) anti-immigration acts that were passed under Theresa May’s period of office as home secretary, and, in more recent years, Brexit and its aftermath. Opposing this

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the phrase ‘fiction for young people’ is indicative of an amalgam of what, in American parlance is labelled ‘middle-grade’ children’s fiction and young-adult (YA) fiction. I am using the American terminology because, apart from the somewhat loose and ill-defined moniker ‘teenage fiction’, in Britain fiction for young people is generally classified within the rubric of ‘children’s literature’. These encompass texts intended to be read by young people within an age-range of between approximately ten and eighteen years.

is the liberal left – a political group that writers and other artists tend to inhabit. Although certainly not alone in this mission, British writers for young people provide a crucial counter-balance to these mainstream discourses. Their fiction, as I will show, is often concerned with interrogating the nuances of this particular time period in Britain, in addition to representing young people, an increasingly demonized social group in the early twenty first-century, with a greater sense of understanding, compassion and respect.

My research is concerned with where, amidst such fracture and disruption, young people ‘fit’ in today’s Britain. As my thesis routinely refers to the British *mise en scène* – the social, political and cultural life as it existed in the UK between 2001 and 2012, I have chosen to examine primarily social realist texts. These texts give voice to those on the margins of society, often with reference to key societal shifts that were occurring during this period. They encompass for example, representations of the autistic child, the child criminal and the foreign migrant. This thesis shows how writers give voice to these outsiders, how they attempt to ensure their agency, whilst simultaneously examining the way in which these texts may in fact be *controlled* by the dominant narratives and ideologies through and by which they are produced.

Historically, as will be shown, one of the central issues problematising children’s literature is that both child characters *in* the books, and readers *of* the books are manipulated by adult ‘gatekeepers’ of the genre. Adults are therefore a controlling presence within the genre. Is it ever possible then, this thesis asks, for children’s literature to empower the marginalised through unsullied authorial representations of the voice(s) of young people? Or, is such a voice always distorted through the mediation of the (adult) author? The way in which such authorship can result in problematically subaltern representations will be a recurring

concern. With this in mind, I will show how, despite her best intentions, a popular children's writer such as Jamila Gavin falls into the trap of Orientalism in her portrayal of the eponymous *Grandpa Chatterji*. Comparably, I will demonstrate how Jacqueline Wilson inadvertently appears to support normative family structures, even as she attempts to make the case for alternative domestic arrangements.

Nevertheless, at no stage does this thesis assert that such tensions negate authors' attempts to deal constructively with certain themes and issues. Rather they indicate certain limitations in representation that children's literature, like all art forms, necessarily faces. Ultimately of course, the true 'test' of the success or otherwise of the books for young people explored in this thesis, is whether or not they provoke thoughtful and reflective responses within their intended demographic. Essentially, do they result in child readers *thinking* and *seeing* differently?

With this in mind, the fifth chapter introduces reader's responses to give both voice, and as much narrative control as possible, to children as they act as both readers and critics. Indeed, throughout this thesis, I will make the case for why, as children's literature critics, we must consult with and listen to young people themselves far more routinely than has previously been the trend. Pertinently, as will be illuminated in the subsequent section, this comprises a crucial aspect of this thesis's 'original contribution to knowledge'. I will argue however, that despite the attempt to redress the problematic power dynamic characteristic of this discipline, by 'tipping the balance' in favour of the child through direct inclusion of their 'voice', this nevertheless remains a flawed strategy for the reasons discussed in relation to, for example, Jacqueline Rose and Perry Nodelman. My argument in relation to reader-response research then, is not that it is a definitive method of 'solving' the tension

between adult and child that exists at the heart of children's literature studies, but rather, that it can be a strategy resulting in a greater sense of equality in the field, where children's perspectives are valued and celebrated rather than disregarded.

Whilst on one level, the originality of this thesis lies in the contemporary nature of its primary texts, the majority of which have not received any critical attention so far, the methodological approach and findings constitute the key contribution to knowledge posited. As explained, in chapter five, I show how reader-response practice results in a unique and contextually grounded reading of the twelve novels that form the bedrock to this work. However, in terms of the wider cultural work accomplished by this thesis, I will also show what a reader-response methodology can provide for children's literature scholars who may not be interested in these specific texts.

Literature Review.

Peter Coveney's seminal *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society* (1957) takes the stance that children's literature has historically positioned the child 'as a symbol of the artist's dissatisfaction with the society which was in a process of such harsh development around him' (31). With reference to Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, Coveney explores how a rapidly changing political climate in this period, resulting in a 'national mood' of 'discontinuity', 'conflict' and 'insecurity' (31), influenced fictional representations of childhood in a manner characterised by 'isolation' and 'alienation' (31). Here then, the image of the child as Other is presented as stemming from changes taking place in relation to societal change. As suggested in the opening paragraph to this

introductory chapter, my thesis argues a comparable case, with literary representations of Otherness being examined in the light of their associated historical and cultural contexts.

Coveney's work is one of the earliest critical volumes on children's literature to examine the interplay between Otherness and identity. For him, the Othered child negotiates a form of 'withdrawal from spiritual and emotional confusion in a tired culture' (32). This can be interpreted as an individual's conscious or subconscious rejection of the dominant social order. This thesis draws heavily on this idea, demonstrating how Othered protagonists often utilise their Otherness as a form of liberation from such an order. We will see this dynamic unfold on numerous occasions throughout this thesis, for example, in relation to Stol, Chingis and Nergui's non-compliance with school rules in *Up On Cloud Nine* and *The Unforgotten Coat*.

Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan: or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984) begins with the author engaging in similarly historicist discussions to Coveney. Specifically, this centres on the way in which late-Victorian and Edwardian England gave rise to a body of children's literature underpinned by concerns centring on 'lost childhood innocence' in a society, to refer to Coveney's phrase, in the midst of 'harsh development' (31). With reference to the 'case'(study) of J.M. Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter Pan and Wendy*, Rose suggests that Victorian perceptions of what was 'good' for children resulted in writing for this audience becoming less concerned with the types of stories children may actually wish to read, hear and engage in, and instead bound up in the 'adult desire' (2) to control and regulate such material. Rose's book traces how this negation of what the child 'really wants' in favour of an adult-imposed 'moralism' (2) has essentially come to characterise the genre,

resulting in what is for her, a corpus of literature that is essentially deceitful in its attesting to be *children's* literature.

Comparably to Peter Pan, for Rose children's literature itself becomes a fantasy - 'a set of evasions' that 'crumbles' under the 'divisions' (7) it has constructed and subscribed to. She continues to argue that 'the history of children's fiction should be written, not in terms of its themes or the content of its stories, but in terms of the relationship to language which different children's writers establish for the child' (78). The crucial question that should be asked of children's books, Rose continues to assert, is: 'what are the conditions of participation and entry which they lay down?' (78). The titular reference to an inherent 'impossibility' in children's literature, centres then, upon the fact of such a 'conditional' relationship between author and (child) reader existing at all. Children's literature becomes an 'impossible' form precisely because of this dissonance. Adults become gatekeepers, negotiating and establishing the terms through which children both access literature, and are constructed within its pages. This means that children, both the subject and implied reader of a corpus of fiction perhaps fraudulently presented as 'belonging' to them, are essentially rendered voiceless.

Rose's view of the 'impossibility' of children's literature has been greatly influential in the academic study of this field from its initial publication in 1984 to the present. Indeed, it certainly underpins the proceeding texts examined in this literature review which, as I will show, routinely enter into dialogue with Rose, consistently returning to the question of whether, given children's habitual lack of agency, fiction for young people can ever truthfully be conceived of as *children's* literature. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, this thesis also tackles Rose's problematization of the genre. In a thesis focusing on Otherness, Rose's

view is crucial, because she is implicitly arguing that children are necessarily silenced; framed as 'the Other' by virtue of the central dynamic on which children's literature is constructed. As this thesis proceeds and I introduce qualitative research involving young people, I will suggest that one way to begin to address Rose's view of the 'impossibility' of children's literature is to restore agency to child readers through privileging their 'voice' and recognizing that what they have to say about 'their' fiction holds value. In part, this is because children's insights offer a perspective that will always exist outside of adult subjectivities. In short, I will argue that listening to child readers helps to destabilize Rose's 'impossibility' model because it acts as one mode of redress for the power imbalance between adult and child so characteristic of the discipline.

Crucially however, I am not arguing that this is enough to counter Rose's assertion - particularly as, as will be discussed in chapter five, the presence of the adult researcher and the invariably unequal power dynamics stemming from this in reading group discussions, create their own problems, and once again serve to reinforce Rose's view that a 'gulf' exists between adult and child in children's literature. However, one of the aspects of Rose's work that I find problematic is her seeming lack of faith in the abilities of child readers to communicate their thoughts and feelings in relation to literature. For Rose, the 'child's own experiences of the book' are 'more or less impossible to gauge' (9). What this actually suggests however, is that child readers may not articulate their thoughts and feelings about books in a way that 'fits in' with adult objectives, and in this way she is unconsciously reinforcing her own argument that adults continually expect children to comply with their own didactic agenda. However, she subsequently argues for the need to privilege the 'integrity of the child's self-expression' (136), even *within* the complexities and ambiguities of the discipline. This, for me at least, is why I believe reader-response can be such a crucial

tool in the children's literature critic's toolbox – because it allows opportunities for children's 'self-expression'.

Crucially though, I would argue that it is not a question of how much we can 'gauge' or 'measure' from children's responses (although, as will be shown in chapter five, in contrast to Rose, I actually felt that the readers communicated a considerable amount in relation to 'their own experiences of the book'). Rather, it is about listening to and valuing their responses in whatever capacity they choose to offer them, because as adult critics we genuinely believe in their importance and validity, instead of disregarding or diverting discussions if they do not appear to correlate with our (adult) understandings or expectations. Ultimately, my argument in this thesis corresponds with Ciara Ni Bhroin and Patrick Kennon's assertion that, notwithstanding Rose's arguments pertaining to the 'imbalance between adult writer and child reader', this 'need not necessarily be malign and young people are far from powerless in the reading process' (1). With this in mind, my personal stance is allied more firmly with critics such as Ni Bhroin and Kennon, in addition to Marah Gubar and her 'kinship' model of children's literature (introduced presently) than Rose's 'impossibility' model. However, Rose remains such a central 'voice' in the critical canon of the discipline, that further 'echoes' of her work will, perhaps inevitably, be felt in this thesis. This occurs, for example, in relation to Jacqueline Wilson and the notion of 'conflict of address' (something that Rose devotes an entire chapter on in *The Case of Peter Pan*), that exists in her work between author and narrator (chapter three).

Accompanying Rose in terms of holding a dominant critical position in the discipline is Perry Nodelman. A recurring preoccupation with Rose's 'impossibility' arises frequently in his work which draws predominantly on postcolonial theory. For example, in his pioneering

1992 article entitled 'The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's literature', Nodelman argues that children's literature is not only *itself* inherently Other from the preeminent genres and styles of writing that comprise modern English literature, but in addition, adults writing for children, *necessarily* construct the child as Other because, to use Rose's term, it would be 'impossible' not to:

Children are not the ones who write either the texts we identify as *children's* literature or the criticism of those texts [...] Our attempting to speak for and about children will *always* confirm their difference from, and presumably, inferiority to, ourselves as thinkers and speakers [*my emphasis] (29).

Nodelman illustrates his case with reference to Edward Said's *Orientalism* - a text that is explored in more depth in relation to 'foreignness' in chapter four of this thesis. Orientalism, Nodelman asserts, is 'inherently and inevitably a study of what theorists call *the Other-of* that which is opposite to the person doing the talking or thinking or studying' (29). The relationship between adult author and child reader is one of 'opposites' - of Otherness then. Just as Said viewed Orientalism as a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (3), so adults exist within comparable hegemonic frameworks in relation to children. In attempting to 'speak' *for* children, adults inevitably become complicit in 'silencing' them: 'Representations imply the *right* of he who observes and interprets to observe and interpret; he who can fix others in his gaze, and thus define who they are *as* no more and no less than what he sees, has authority over them' (29).

In the discussion here of 'rights', 'observation' and 'authority' there are clear echoes of Michel Foucault, a theorist that underscores much of Nodelman's writing as well as Edward Said's. Nodelman's work, (not only this article, but also *The Hidden Adult* [2008] and sections in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* [2003]), is frequently concerned with the

idea of the child existing in children's literature studies as a body that is constantly 'moulded' and 'regulated' by adults. Where however, Nodelman considers this primarily in terms of discussions surrounding the nature of the field, my thesis also considers how the notion of the child or adolescent existing as a malleable 'body' (one that is wholly vulnerable to adult control), is explored in terms of literary representation itself. This is demonstrated most pertinently in, for example, chapter three, in terms of novels such as Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies* and Jacqueline Wilson's *Dustbin Baby*. Foucault, as we will see, continually returns to the metaphor of the prison in his work, and this metaphor is particularly useful in considering how conceptualisations of young people are frequently seen to be 'imprisoning' both in terms of children's literature studies as a discipline, replete with its characteristic sense of curtailment and control of the child's voice, but also in terms of the representations of Otherness in literary texts with which this thesis is concerned.

Like Foucault's prison guards or Said's colonists, Nodelman's article envisages adults as children's literature's 'gatekeepers', and this is where attempts to give the child's voice greater agency in the field may be said to fall short. This is because, in the process of, for example, carrying out the kind of reader-response research this thesis engages in, the adult researcher remains the proxy (the 'gatekeeper') through which responses are filtered. The adult's presence in discussions may result in readers positing their responses in ways that they feel most successfully fall in line with this authority figure's expectations – a phenomenon sometimes known as the Hawthorne Effect. Indeed, the fact that reader-response discussions typically take place in schools or other educational environments that, as Foucault illustrates, function through the imposition of power hierarchies, does little to alleviate this issue.

The adult researcher records and edits responses and ultimately, embeds them into their own narrative. There remains a sense then, that through the adult's intervention, the responses may be manipulated to fit their agenda. In chapter five, I will demonstrate how my awareness of this situation resulted in my use of certain strategies, such as 'non-guiding' discussion prompts, to attempt to engage with this issue more equitably and effectively. This is key because my research over the past four years has not revealed any other reader-response researchers in children's literature utilising this particular method. However, it would be dishonest to claim that the research methods employed in this thesis are not impacted upon by the key tensions underpinning both the discipline of children's literature itself, and reader-response theory. Indeed, as Nodelman argues, even as we try to minimise the adult's voice in favour of the child's, it inevitably remains present, albeit hidden in the background of both children's books and their associated body of criticism.

For Nodelman, adults lurk consistently in the shadows of children's literature, contaminating the corpus with their 'assumptions about childhood' (30) potentially existing at odds with how children may choose to represent themselves. Specifically, this thesis owes much to *The Hidden Adult*, in relation, for example, to Nodelman's preoccupation with adults' habitual complicity in Othering processes affecting young people. Where, he argues: 'an outsider's perspective focus[es] on the mysterious unknowability of the alien other' and 'so too, do the constructions of childhood found in adult thought about children, and consequently, in children's literature' (165), Nodelman establishes the idea that children's literature is inherently borne out of what Lisa Isherwood and David Harris term 'an interaction with Otherness' (22). Therefore, I would argue that it is challenging to perform any scholarly 'reading' of this genre of fiction *without* gesturing, to some degree, to the multidimensional role the concept of Otherness plays in both text and context. My thesis

develops this idea where, in chapter four for example, we see how Jamila Gavin's status as a non-white British author, positions her outside of the dominant cultural narratives surrounding children's literature publishing in the UK. Gavin and other non-white British writers discuss how foreignness and exoticism essentially becomes commodified in a publishing culture with a growing appetite for narratives of difference, and the result of this is the arguably Othering forms of cultural appropriation displayed in, for example, the depiction of the Grandpa Chatterji character in *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye*.

Another key aspect of the cultural work achieved by Nodelman in *The Hidden Adult* centres on the importance of the role of the child reader in terms of having an interpretive ability that differs substantially from that of adults, and holds value not in spite of, but *because* of this distinction: 'Convention would suggest that child readers understand only the simple surface, adults the complex depths. But as my discussions of sublimated and unconscious material suggest, children must have access to some of the complexities' (207). Drawing on this, my thesis asserts that part of the importance of giving greater credence to the voice of the child in the discipline is, as Nodelman suggests, to counter the 'conventional' view that children are only capable of superficial interpretations of literature – an assumption that is itself, clearly Othering. One of the key outcomes of the reader-response project detailed in chapter five, is that the child readers I worked with can be routinely observed exposing and articulating the 'complex depths' of texts, in ways that prompted me to question and re-evaluated my own perceptions and interpretations of the primary material.

Comparably to Nodelman, Jo Lampert also adopts a Postcolonial gaze in her study of *Children's Fiction About 9/11* (2008). Although situated outside the immediate concerns of this thesis due to Lampert's predominant focus on American fiction, its examination of the

‘way identities are constructed’ with reference to an ‘us and them’ (39) duality that exists in the post-9/11 world, is pertinent in terms of my own framing of the primary texts. The chronology this thesis functions within (2001 – 2012) is often identified by contemporary historians and cultural critics as being ‘post-9/11’, the emphasis here being on the ability of an event to influence the *zeitgeist* of the proceeding era.

9/11 was a turning point for the west generally - the shockwaves it created not being confined solely to American soil. In this way, 9/11 had a considerable impact on the way in which new ‘cultural perspectives’ and ‘processes of Othering’ (39) were beginning to occur in twenty-first century Britain as well. Indeed, it is notable that in addition to the American young-adult authors Lampert’s study examines, the spectre of 9/11 notably also lurks within the pages of novels by contemporary British writers for young people including Alan Gibbons, Anna Perera and Catherine Bruton. 9/11 is crucial in understanding twenty-first century Othering mentalities, particularly with regards to culture, race and ethnicity, Lampert suggests, because the event ‘produced an environment where some identities are now preferred over others’ (39). As such, she posits that the post-9/11 period has prompted a renewal of ‘such practices as stereotyping [...] sensationalizing and demonizing’ (39), practices this thesis examines in terms of their depiction in the primary texts, unfolding in relation to young people.

Moreover, Lampert argues that the event has triggered a return to Saidian² Postcolonial ideas concerning identity, in which, (again, utilising Foucauldian language) ‘Oriental’ cultures are viewed in the west as being threateningly ‘abnormal’ - inherently Other to a ‘dominant’ Western identity (39). Comparably to the post-9/11 world in general then, the children’s

² Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is introduced in chapter four.

literature of this period is frequently concerned with the 'politics of identity', and specifically the way in which 'identities are produced and gain privilege in relation to social, cultural and political conditions' (39). The centrality of this idea in my own thesis is also evident in my decision to draw on the writings of Foucault as a theoretical lens, this theorist being consistently concerned with the way in which notions of identity are inextricably linked to socio-historical contexts.

In *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book* (2008) Christine Wilkie-Stibbs also demonstrates a preoccupation with the circumstances underpinning the way 'identities are produced' in relation to young people. Indeed, comparably to the other critics introduced so far, Wilkie-Stibbs' work is also grounded in Foucauldian terminology, in discussing how children become 'interstitial' beings 'caught up in a cycle of power and subjection by adults' (54). Wilkie-Stibbs further elucidates Rose and Nodelman's arguments however, exploring not only how the power dynamic between adult and child characterises children's literature itself, but also how this dialectic is reflected in terms of many of the key 'child figures' (54) in her selection of primary texts. As discussed, my thesis also draws on the way that children's literature can be viewed as a self-reflexive literary form; one in which the genre's structural and contextual challenges can often be seen to 'play out' in the challenges presented to many of the key protagonists of this fiction. In short, conflict between child and adult becomes a representative theme in contemporary fiction for young people. For example, this can be observed in terms of *Dustbin Baby* and *Kill All Enemies*, where age becomes a key component in terms of how characters envisage each other's Otherness, and Wilkie-Stibbs also alludes to the notion of adult 'hypercriticality' (98) as perceived by young people;

something that will be explored in relation to Christopher's perception of his father in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* in Chapter One.

The Outside Child is the work which bears the closest resemblance to my own study and, broadly speaking, I see my thesis as helping to 'fill the gap' in what Wilkie-Stibbs suggests is a 'space in the critical field and contemporary socio-political climate for a study that brings together a disparate range of fictions featuring a wide range of child figures that could be represented and theorized under a collective terminology of outsidersness' (13). With this in mind, Wilkie-Stibbs provides a crucial foundation for my study in, for example, her use of Foucault as a key critical / theoretical voice through which to examine Otherness (or 'outsidersness' to use her preferred term). Wilkie-Stibbs refers primarily to Foucault's *Abnormal* in suggesting that the notion of 'liminality' (22) is key in understanding constructions of child Otherness. Considering, for example, how 'displaced' or 'ignored' children (a subgroup and theme I explore in chapter three of this thesis), become a 'nuisance to the host culture' (22), Wilkie-Stibbs considers how 'boundaries' between 'inside and outside' – 'ingroup and outgroup' may be transgressed by the individual characterised as Other, in a manner that would be unlikely for a member of what she terms the 'normal centre' (22), and uses the example of Foucault's 'incorrigibles' (16) to illustrate this.

For Foucault and by proxy Wilkie-Stibbs then, Otherness possesses a kind of social fluidity, and she gives various examples of this in relation to children's literature, demonstrating how the Other becomes an almost omniscient presence in certain texts, citing the example of Christopher in *Curious Incident* (49) and the insights that the 'existential and subjective effects of Asperger's Syndrome' (50) ultimately provide him. Extending this idea in chapter two, I explore how a lack of belonging can be seen to result in characters adopting

exceptional perspectives that would not be possible as members of an 'ingroup'. With this in mind, Wilkie-Stibbs shows that it is often Othered characters that present the reader with the greatest degree of truth and insight in these texts (99). Developing this argument however, my thesis suggests that it is the very *fact* of these characters' Otherness that results in this particular way of seeing.

As discussed previously, Foucault also serves to highlight certain key societal constructions of Otherness in my own thesis too. However, whilst, like Wilkie-Stibbs, I also allude to *Abnormal*, my thesis introduces certain crucial metaphors (for example, the image of the 'Panoptican' and the way that this becomes characteristic of surveillance culture in relation to young people in contemporary British culture), with their origins in Foucault's seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Wilkie-Stibbs' main argument in *The Outside Child* is that western society's construction of young people as the Other is as the result of various social, political and cultural processes that have reached an apotheosis in the *fin de siècle* period, and that contemporary children's literature serves to hold up a mirror to this historical moment.

Given the similarities in our overall theses then, my study aims to continue and update the conversation that this critic started. There are however, certain fundamental differences between our work. Perhaps most notably, the introduction in my thesis of qualitative research (reader-response) involving young people is a key differentiating factor. This is particularly the case given what Wilkie-Stibbs asserts is the 'struggle for expression, representation, recognition and understanding' (50) that continues to define young people in terms of both their presence in society generally, and as participants (or perhaps more accurately, non-participants), in the field of children's literature studies. My work therefore takes Wilkie-Stibbs' assertion in relation to young peoples' habitual lack of agency into

account, in advocating for the use of a strategy such as reader-response research, in part to demonstrate a sense of (adult) critical solidarity with this 'struggle'. Wilkie-Stibbs' methodology, textual chronology and text choices differ from my own work. While I have focused primarily on social realist fiction, Wilkie-Stibbs has drawn from other genres that do not play a role in my study, for example, fantasy, dystopia and horror. I opted to explore realism in terms of representations of Otherness in relation to young people, because I see this as being tangibly reactive to the tone and mood of the contemporary period. Similarly, while I have examined British literature for young people, Wilkie-Stibbs' selection is more divergent and includes writing from, for example, North America and Australia. The one primary text our studies have in common however, is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*.

My work builds upon and develops Wilkie-Stibbs' analysis of *Curious Incident*, further exploring, for example, the 'codes of social engagement' (54) alluded to in her chapter on 'erased' children, whilst in addition putting a Disability Studies emphasis on this text to contribute to the discussion engaged in by Wilkie-Stibbs in relation to non-normative bodies and minds in her chapter on 'erased' children (47). In particular, her discussion of the child 'performing embodiment' in 'social spaces' (49) is, as I will discuss presently, of particular relevance to my readings of the three autistic protagonists in chapter one.

Drawing on Wilkie-Stibbs' prior work on 'displaced and marginal' (21) young people; with specific reference to the refugee experience, Julia Hope's study *A Well Founded Fear: Children's Literature about Refugees and Its Role In The Primary Classroom* (2015), is one of few studies comparable to mine in its combination of an overall focus on literary representations of Otherness with a qualitative / reader-response component. Hope draws

on Beverley Naidoo's critique of children's literature focusing on racism (*Through Whose Eyes?* [1992]) involving secondary-school aged children, designing a study similar in scope, but with a slightly different thematic focus and involving participants drawn from across the primary age-range. Hope's primary argument is that children's books 'have a role to play in understanding and validating the circumstances of refugees' in addition to 'giving voice to the voiceless' (4). My research takes a slightly different tack, considering refugees and migrants (for examples, in chapter four) alongside other 'types' of Othered young people whilst also exploring the contextual factors fuelling Othering processes in the UK (such as those outlined in the penultimate section of this chapter), which are of less immediate interest to Hope. However, the idea that children's literature has the potential to be a force that results in a greater sense of agency for young people (both 'in and out of the book', to quote Wilkie-Stibbs' [13]) clearly resonates with my own project aims.

Hope's work again makes reference to Rose's contention that 'children's literature is a misnomer' (90) but demonstrates faith throughout her thesis in the ability of young readers to work effectively within the confines of the genre and become arbiters of meaning(s) shaped by 'personal belief systems' (90) that exist outside of adult influence. Therefore, for Hope, children themselves become the key agents in 'tackling' Rose's 'impossibility' because, as Hope asserts, although adults may indeed be 'present' in the various stages of the composition, consumption and interpretation of children's books, children's responses (replete with their own 'ideological saturation' [90]) may actually *allow* for the circumvention or 'side-stepping' of the characteristic adult oppression in the discipline. Citing Charles Sarland (2005), Hope makes the case for how young people's "'dialectical relationship between determinism and agency'" can be viewed as a motivating factor for 'the ongoing study of children's reader-response' (91). This is an opinion that my thesis

wholly supports. Having faith not only in children's abilities as readers, but also in their inherent talent for eluding the fetters of their adult 'colonisers' (90) (again, Hope relies on Nodelman for this metaphor); through their own readerly 'determinism' is an underpinning idea in both of our thesis. Essentially this suggests that one can avoid oppression by not complying with the expectations imposed by one's oppressors and in this way, children's reader-responses can be viewed as an act of resistance.

Through reader-response, Hope suggests that young people are able to take power back into their own hands, to interpret texts in ways that make sense to them, even when such responses are clearly external to what is suggested by the adult-authored 'implied reader'. Indeed, this thesis will later show how reader-response complicates the notion of the 'implied reader' anyway, suggesting that this concept can, in certain circumstances, itself be viewed as exclusory and Othering (Matheson 57). In terms of the theme of Otherness specifically, another notable aspect of Hope's thesis is its consideration of the question of 'whether an outsider can legitimately tell the story of a group to which they do not belong' (29). Indeed, this is a concern that this thesis also considers in a number of different contexts. For example, in chapter one we will consider the complexities inherent to a neurotypical writer – Mark Haddon's depiction of an autistic character such as Christopher in *Curious Incident* and consider the dangers of such writers straying into potentially Othering stereotypes in their attempts to locate a voice and identity for a character that is so far removed from their own subjectivities.

Comparably to Hope, Clementine Beauvais' *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature* (2015) is also interested in occasions in which children can be seen to resist adults' 'authoritarianism and repression' (95). Perhaps unsurprisingly with this in mind,

Beauvais' book begins with a foreword relating to Rose's (the 'Socratic gadfly' [15] of the field) contributions and assessing them in the light of what she terms 'the temporal Otherness of childhood' (18). Where Rose views the 'gulf' she sees existing between the adult and child in the discipline as being characteristic of 'a troubling of attention and address' (21), Beauvais suggests that 'their differences' actually have the potential to result in the child's empowerment, in the establishment of what she terms 'might'. Beauvais' rebuttal of Rose is based on subverting Maria Nikolajeva's notion of 'aetonormativity'³. This term, coined by Nikolajeva in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (2009), refers to the notion of the adult position in children's literature studies, continually being representative of a normative / dominant stance. However, for Beauvais, the child has the potential to become 'richer than the adult; more powerful in some sense', as a result of 'time' – 'the currency which allows [her] to call the child party of the didactic discourse of children's literature mighty' (18). Again, this can be related back to Hope and Sarland's recognition of the child's value in the discipline being based, in part on the very *fact* of their Otherness from adults. In *The Mighty Child* however, Beauvais goes further than this. Drawing on Rose and Nodelman, Beauvais suggests that the adult's 'hidden' presence in children's literature, relates to their establishment of children's literature as a fundamentally 'didactic' (3) form.

She suggests that the 'agency' of adults, in terms of their role in the discourse of children's literature, plays out through 'the authoritative adult and its desired addressee, the mighty child' (3). Although, the adult may not consciously wish their role in the production of fiction

³ Children, in their divergence from this must necessarily therefore be framed as the Other. For more on this concept, and its relation to my reader-response research, see pg. 34.

for children to be that of the 'dictatorial planner of the future, a controller of child minds and a supporter of adult normativity' (3), it is challenging for them to extract themselves from this dynamic because, as Nodelman suggests, children's literature is characterised by such a tension. Ultimately however, Beauvais argues that the might of the child in relation to children's literature lies in their ability, through the almost chimerical Otherness the nature of the form has attributed to them, to subvert this:

Adult 'power' over children may be more tangible – expressing itself in the form of orders, classrooms, corporal punishment, marks. But the mighty child is all the mightier because it belongs to the realm of the imagination, to the symbolic sphere, and is inseparable from contemporary constructions of childhood; it therefore invades every representation of childhood, every instance of dealing with a child, every reflection on childhood. In that respect, the adult cannot help seeing the child as mighty, to the detriment of their own power (57).

Indeed, consistently throughout this thesis, we will see examples of the child's might interrupting and diverting adults' attempts to exercise power upon them. Often, as alluded to in the extract above, this takes place in one of the traditional arenas of power relations between child and adult, such as the classroom; for example, in novels such as *Curious Incident*, *Seriously Weird*, *Up On Cloud Nine* and *The Unforgotten Coat*. However, we also see examples of young peoples' might thwarting adult attempts to maintain control in texts like *The Boy From France*, in which Vix's burgeoning independence and transition, through her romantic relationship with Xavier, from a state of childlike innocence to adult experience, is perceived by her mother as a threat to the traditional influence she has had over her child. Similarly, the adolescent protagonists in *Kill All Enemies* habitually resist adult domination, and this is certainly shown to be to the 'detriment' of those who attempt, as discussed in chapter three, to exert control over them.

Beauvais' argument is also instructive in supporting my reasons for undertaking reader-response research with young people as part of this project. Here, in the role of researcher, I wanted to 'harness' (57) the child's might and make a concerted effort, through the strategies described in chapter five, to allow their interpretive 'power' to be exercised and take precedence over mine. As we have seen however, such a project remains 'imperfect', and arguably leads to another example of what Beauvais views as 'the adult desire to control and channel the rhythms of childhood' (58). This is because, although the 'voice' may be the child's, the selection, framing and contextualisation of reader-responses remain, as Sandra Beckett argues, outside of 'children's hands' (88). As adults, even as we may attempt to redress such tensions at the heart of the discipline, we remain 'divided' (Beauvais 59). Being a children's literature critic then, is an inherently 'ambiguous condition' which cannot help but 'highlight the contradictory desires, fears and modes of behaviour that it engenders' (59). However, this thesis argues that awareness of such a 'condition' is the first step on the road towards managing its influence more equitably.

Beauvais concurs with another key contemporary children's literature critic Marah Gubar, making the argument that 'we can and indeed ought to talk about real children in children's literature theory' (15). Here, she is alluding to what Gubar terms her 'kinship' (2016) model of children's literature. Stemming from her article 'The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies', Gubar argues that, in an 'aetonormative culture' (297), part of the Otherness of children stems from society's habitual 'devaluation' of childhood, with adulthood existing 'as the preferred state of being' (297). This perspective is closely mirrored by Chris Jenks' assertion in *Childhood*, that in the west in the contemporary period, there is a tendency to view children as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings'

(167). In chapter three, I will examine how certain writers for young people, for example, Melvin Burgess, negotiates this dynamic in his representation of the Othered protagonists in *Kill All Enemies*, and will also consider the complicity of different institutions, for example, school, in fostering such a mindset.

Gubar makes the case for what she terms the 'elemental similarity' (300) between children and adults' interaction with children's literature. Whilst I do not entirely agree with this position, believing that these different phases of life come replete with different contextual implications that inevitably affect the transactional relationship between text and reader, the article is a crucial influence in this thesis primarily because of her argument for the need for children's literature studies to design a more effective 'paradigm characterizing youth involvement' in order to 'create a more capacious critical framework that affirms our respect for children's agency as participants in culture' (306).

Gubar suggests 'charting' what she terms 'a middle course' (291) through the dichotomy suggested by Rose, shifting our attention from a focus on the inevitable differences that exist at the heart of the discipline between adults and children, and instead exploring their 'kinships' (291). Gubar sums up her 'new manifesto' as existing, not as a repudiation to Rose, but instead offering a 'positive alternative to Rose's approach that situates children's literature studies as one of the disciplines that together make up the broader field of childhood studies' (305). For me, and certainly in terms of the cultural work I wish to achieve in this thesis, such a consideration allows for a more nuanced perspective than Rose's preoccupation with adults and children occupying binary positions at opposite ends of the spectrum, in which interactions must necessarily be laced with oppression, exploitation and power imbalances. Childhood, and by proxy the study of childhood, has

changed so substantially since 1984 and the publication of *The Case of Peter Pan*, that there is, both Gubar and I would argue, a need to update and re-evaluate some of Rose's premises.

With this in mind, I would argue in concurrence with Gubar that, as children's literature critics, we must now consider how we can best work *with* young people, in 'kinship'; to increase their agency in terms of this fiction's production, consumption and interpretation because through such 'kinship', our critical approach to the study of children's literature can be achieved with a greater degree of equity. My reader-response project therefore becomes a form of 'test case' for this approach.

Gubar's earlier work is also worthy of note. In the book for which she is best known; *Artful Dodgers* (2009), Gubar attempts to provide a 'reconception' of children's literature's 'golden age' through reference to the Victorian 'cult' (149) of the child. Gubar examines instances in the production and reception of such literature in which children appear to sublimate or 'dodge' (3) adult attempts to define, represent or oppress them. Countering Rose, Gubar argues that Victorian and Edwardian children's writers *were*, in fact, overtly concerned with the question of children's agency and how to privilege it. Contrary to Nodelman's 'colonisation' (30) theory, Gubar argues that Victorian children's authors actually 'acknowledged the pervasive and potentially coercive power of adult influence while nevertheless entertaining the possibility that children can be enabled and inspired by their inevitable inheritance' (5).

Gubar's rebuttal of Rose and Nodelman once again helps to support my case for the importance of the inclusion of reader-response research in this thesis. She argues that Rose's implication that 'child readers invariably succumb to adult efforts to regulate and

exploit them' automatically Others children because it suggests that their 'literacy skills are too primitive to be able to cope with the aggressive textual overtures of adults' (31). Indeed, as will be shown in chapter five, comparably to Hope, Sarland and Gubar's argument in this regard, the level of reflection, maturity and complexity of the reader's responses demonstrates that child readers, or at least, the particular group of child readers I was fortunate enough to work with, not only 'coped' but *thrived* in their performance of meaningful literary analysis.

Notably, Gubar also considers the manner in which Victorian children's literature can be characterised by its conception of 'child characters and child readers as socially saturated beings, profoundly shaped by the culture, manners and morals of their time' (4-5). This perspective is not unique to Victorian writing for children however. Indeed, I also build on this view of young people as 'products' of a particular historical epoch - specifically in the context of this thesis, Britain in the early twenty-first century. My work suggests that the 'culture, manners and morals' of this particular time period has conspired to Other young people as a result of its habitual fear, vilification, abandonment and disengagement in relation to them, partly as a result of the socio-political factors explored in the 'contexts' section of this introduction.

There is also an apposite comparison to be made between Britain as it existed during the 'golden age' of children's literature, generally considered to be the *fin de siècle* period of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, that Gubar's *Artful Dodgers* is concerned with, and today's Britain. Just as in the present day, Victorian and Edwardian Britain also bristled with fears surrounding terrorism⁴, and anxieties concerning foreign migration, in addition to

⁴ Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent* provides an insightful account of this.

the potential dangers and alienating effects of increased industrialisation, technology and modernity.

Methodology.

Attempting to define the concept of Otherness and explore its relationship to the human condition is one of the central preoccupations of Poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is a school of European thought that developed in the 1960s and 1970s primarily as a response to Structuralism, which advocated the idea that human culture and history can only be fully understood through reference to the role of various societal 'structures' surrounding the individual, that impact upon human thought, feeling, action and behaviour.

Poststructuralism is broadly concerned with exposing the inadequacy of labels and destabilizing singular, static notions of 'truth'. In the process of this, Poststructuralism continually attempts to demonstrate that the version of reality that we, (as individuals living in the social groups we term 'societies'), have been conditioned into accepting, is essentially a construction, a 'social order' that evolved historically to serve the purposes of the elite. With this in mind, theorists such as, for example, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler are concerned with the relationships between the structural binaries that exist at the heart of how we understand ourselves and our relationships to those around us. These include, but are not limited to: Power and control, language and meaning, history and the present, and, notably in terms of this thesis, sameness and Otherness. Different theorists explore different concepts within the movement's broader project. However, there is much overlap between them and, throughout this thesis, I will refer to the work of various Poststructuralist critics.

Primarily however, as mentioned previously, I will utilise Foucault's writing as a crucial secondary voice, because it helps to illuminate several of my own concerns regarding the figure of the Other in literature for young people. This stems from the centrality in Foucault's work on historical, social and cultural contexts,⁵ and their role in explaining what has motivated cultures, communities and societies to position certain individuals outside of dominant social orders. What, Foucault's writing asks, is at the root of society's need to define certain individuals (or groups of individuals) as 'abnormal', or Other to the normative social sphere? Moreover, how are the institutions that preside over so many aspects of modern life, from the workplace to the school, complicit in Othering processes, and what historical precedents underlie this? Foucault's work is known in particular for its preoccupation with the nature of power, and the manner in which, in tandem with war, the functioning of power acts as what Leon Trotsky once termed 'the locomotive of history' (249). The manner in which power functions in social groups is an integral component in Foucault's writings on Otherness, and, as will become evident presently, is also a recurring theme in my analyses of the proceeding texts.

Throughout this thesis, I will refer to a selection of Foucault's published *oeuvre*, however, two works are returned to frequently enough in the following chapters to warrant a brief introduction here. Both *Abnormal* (2004) (explored previously in relation to Wilkie-Stibbs' readings of it), the published transcription of Foucault's eponymous series of lectures at the Collège de France that took place between 1974 and 1975, as well as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, the work for which he is best known, play an important role in this thesis due to their examination of the concept of Otherness. They are also born out of

⁵ Factors that, as this introduction and subsequent chapters seek to demonstrate, are inevitably important in a chronologically-bound literary study.

roughly the same period in Foucault's life in which he had been invited to join the prestigious Collège de France as a teaching fellow in a new subject area he named 'the history of systems of thought'. With this in mind, both books can be viewed as an examination of the evolution of two distinct 'systems of thought'. Notably too, there is much overlap between them. *Abnormal* is concerned with how communities are complicit in creating the category of the Other, as well as the historical provenance of this process. With this in mind, Otherness in *Abnormal* is viewed primarily with regards to 'deviance', specifically in terms of historical accounts of criminality, sexuality and madness (2004). *Discipline and Punish* is ostensibly a work of social history, an examination of 'the birth of the prison'. Here, Foucault engages in a series of discussions explaining the 'systems of thought' and their historical evolution, that underpin our contemporary understanding of criminality, punitive intervention (in terms of incarceration and rehabilitation), and the manner in which shifts in societal attitudes to Otherness have impacted upon this.

Both books are concerned with how the Othered individual has historically served a societal need to scapegoat, project fears and contemporary anxieties upon, or simply to exist as a benchmark to define normativity against. Specifically, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that Otherness as a sociological condition stems from the need of the ruling elite to maintain control. In the process of this, Foucault argues that certain individuals or groups who either represent a threat, or who possess the ability to disrupt the power of the ruling elite, must be exiled to settings in which they can be controlled and molded into what he terms 'docile bodies' (135). The primary example of such a setting is the titular prison, which functions in Foucault's work as a microcosm for society, as well as existing as a point of comparison to other societal institutions discussed in the book, for example, schools, barracks and factories.

Foucault argues that society, and by proxy, the institutions that operate within it as described above, habitually define disruptive individuals who fail to adequately comply within its governing power structure, as Other. They, by virtue of their Otherness, necessitate 'discipline and punishment'. Moreover, Foucault describes how institutions such as prisons are designed around systems in which power is reinforced through 'surveillance' (77). Here, the authoritarian individual's all-powerful gaze can immediately detect and 'correct' (122) transgressors. Power in this way is enacted in, to cite Foucault's example, the central guard tower in nineteenth-century 'Panoptican' (195) style prisons. Here, one guard could observe over one hundred prisoners in their cells from a central position, due to the building's architectural design. Crucially of course, the actual presence (or otherwise) of the guard is of little consequence. This is because individuals only have to *believe* they are being observed, or to know that such surveillance is *potentially* occurring, to adapt their behaviour accordingly. Comparable to this is the typical classroom layout, in which a single teacher can keep watch over thirty or so pupils, whose desks have been arranged to maximise visibility from the teacher's own 'guard-post' at the front of the classroom. I will return to schools and their inherently Othering attributes in subsequent chapters, specifically in relation to *Seriously Weird* and *Kill All Enemies*.

Foucault's work routinely demonstrates how 'deviation' from a societally sanctioned 'ideal' body or mind results in the imposition of various forms of exile - all of which can be viewed as processes of Othering. He illustrates this through various examples, ranging from the banishment of lepers to leper colonies, the committing of criminals to prisons and the 'mad' to asylums. Stemming from this, his writing demonstrates a continual fascination with dualities: Community and individual, normality and abnormality, power and control, inclusion and exclusion. Notably, my readings of the primary texts are also frequently

associated with such themes. Similarly, Foucault's work is clearly historicist in nature and underscored by frequent sociocultural and sociohistorical allusions. This corresponds to the reference this thesis makes to the cultural and historical contexts contained within its titular chronology (2001 – 2012), and the manner in which I draw on these, where relevant, in my analyses of the twelve primary texts. Ultimately then, these aspects of Foucault's writing result in this theorist providing, in my opinion, a particularly fruitful critical gaze through which to frame my research.

In addition, Foucault is an apt theorist through which to examine specifically social realist literature because, comparably to much of Foucault's writing, social realist texts are concerned with the impact of historical and contextual forces in defining the social dynamics of the contemporary period. As Mark Olssen argues, Foucault's writing consistently demonstrates how social 'practices' are 'materially embodied in culture' (72). Foucault himself further elucidates this in *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963), the only volume of literary criticism he published: 'In the play of history and existence, we discover the general law of the game of significance, in which is pursued our reasonable history. Things, words, vision [...] and language make a unique form, the very same one that we are' (168). For Foucault, then, the subject of art is 'formed' from these defining facets of the human experience. In this way, they provide what Lilian Furst views as the 'window' through which social realist writers endeavour to comprise a 'textual web of discourse' through their portrayal of 'a social situation at a particular time in a particular place' (2). In terms of my thesis, this 'social situation' refers to Britain at the start of the twenty-first century.

It is also necessary to consider how Foucauldian ideas translate to the way in which we might conceive of both children and childhood itself. Children's inherent Otherness from

adults relates to the manner in which every aspect of their 'being' is regulated by adult-imposed structures. As discussed previously, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault considers how institutions are designed around mechanisms of control that allow for the regulation and surveillance of their inhabitants, and the key metaphor in this regard is the 'Panoptican'-style prison. Schools can also be seen to work in this fashion, mirroring the functioning of the type of punitive social space characterised by these Victorian prisons. The space of the classroom is designed with the teacher's (the primary 'exerciser of power' in this setting) need to have absolute control over their 'subjects' -the pupils. Chris Jenks illustrates this further:

Children can be placed in rows, classes can be broken down into tables or groups, specialized into activities, individuals can be put in the 'reading corner', made to stand in the symbolic corner of isolation and public scrutiny, required to stand by the teacher's table or come out to the front, and everyone can be evacuated, that is sent out to exercise in the playground. None of this speaks of the child's experience as being the experience of a 'neutral' space (80).

However, the relationship between adult control and children's experience of this control expands to more than just spatiality. Like Foucault's soldiers in their barracks whose daily lives play out in accordance with a strictly timetabled regimen, disciplinary power is also present in the manner in which children's lives are choreographed by adults. Essentially, children must play, learn, sleep, wake, eat and drink at specific times which are mostly outside of their control. As we will see in novels such as *Dustbin Baby* and *Kill All Enemies*; by adolescence one of the key causes of rifts between young people and adults centres on the way in which teenagers typically begin to question such levels of adult control and involvement in their lives. However, as novels like *Tribes* show, there is often simply a shift in who is enacting the control and who has the ability to exploit what Foucault terms the 'docile body' (*Discipline...* 136). It is often peer groups that take on influential levels of

control, making this a ripe period for issues such as peer pressure and bullying, explored in novels such as *Tribes* in chapter two and *Dustbin Baby* in chapter three.

Ultimately then, Foucauldian theory allows us to consider and problematise some of this thesis's central ideas in a more contextually situated and nuanced manner. It should be noted however, that Foucault remains a controversial theorist, and contemporary detractors highlight certain fundamental problems in relation to his central arguments. For example, Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges suggest that whilst, on the surface, Foucault's work routinely appears to be making the case for emancipation from societal expectation(s) governing the behaviour of individuals, he never fully outlines *how* this might be possible. Although Taylor and Vintges acknowledge Foucault's approach 'allows him to *question* the normalising function of norms from within a situated social and historical context' (*my emphasis) (218), they argue that it ultimately fails to show how or if such binds may be *transcended*.

In addition, critics such as Lois McNay (1994) and Caroline Ramazanoglu (1993) have suggested that he consistently neglects to consider the ethics and ideology that underscore discourses. One concern of feminists for example, is Foucault's failure to adequately tackle the gendering of power. His critics have also argued that individual 'resistant voices' do not play enough of a role in his work, which focuses more typically on the dynamics of larger groups and communities. Ultimately then, I am not suggesting that Foucault is, by any means, the final 'voice' on the matter. Instead, his theories are intended to contribute to, and underscore the wider cultural work this thesis engages in, rather than define it.

In tandem with Foucault, reader-response theory provides this thesis's secondary methodology. Reader-response theory positions the reader as the text's main arbiter of

meaning. As Louise Rosenblatt, one of the initial 'founders' of this movement in literary criticism, along with critics such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins contends: 'The individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations [and] a particular mood of the moment' (30). The theory, with its commitment to processes of shared reading and interpretation, as well as the egalitarian idea that no single 'correct' interpretation can ever exist of a literary text, existed partly in opposition to the New Criticism that preceded it. New Critics argued that texts should be understood as an aesthetic whole and, as such, all the 'tools' necessary to decode them existed entirely within the text's pages. As such, for New Critics concerned with the sanctity of texts, external (human) contexts 'muddied the waters' of literary analysis. As is evident throughout this thesis, I believe that, whilst meanings can, of course, be extracted solely from the text in question, the more secondary voices we enter into dialogue with, the richer the variety of interpretations, and ultimately the more pertinent the meanings we draw from texts can be.

This is particularly the case in balancing a wholly adult-authored collection of critical material with the offerings of the primary literature's young readers. Young readers are typically less constrained by the measured academic approaches to texts that we, as adult critics occasionally let cloud our more heartfelt attitudes and ideas. Young people, by contrast, are primarily interested in how books make them *feel*, seeking themselves within the pages, whilst sensing the emotional resonances texts have, as well as how real bonds with characters can be. Such facets necessarily invoke the kind of personal relationship to texts that reader-response criticism encourages.

This underscores my decision to establish a series of school-based reading groups, aimed to explore young people's readings and responses to Otherness in selected primary texts. This could, however, be construed as a somewhat ambitious and optimistic project. With young people specifically, it is important not to underestimate the ability of school to produce blinkered, overly guided and objective-focused perspectives on literature. Indeed, as we will discuss in chapters four and five, because as Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish*, the school teacher is an 'all-powerful' figure; a 'master of discipline' (166), the natural order of the classroom rests upon the pupils or, 'disciplined individuals' (166), complying unquestioningly with a teacher's 'orders' (166). As such, the notion that there are 'correct' or 'school-sanctioned' readings of texts is still, perhaps inevitably, maintained to a degree, even within the most progressive environments.

This thesis's interpretation of a reader-response methodology was intended to demonstrate that all responses have weight, merit and value. We are reading in an exploratory capacity, to share ideas and learn from each other. I was emphatically not attempting to extract *definitive* readings of the texts. As such, I also realised the need to avoid positioning myself as an inherently powerful, 'teacher-like' figure within the group, to ensure I was not simply reproducing the dynamic of a typical 'guided-reading'⁶ session the participants would likely encounter on a day-to-day basis. The reading sessions were intended to be 'special', existing outside of routine day-to-day classroom practice, and I aimed to establish myself as a listener first, and participant second.

⁶ A strategy for teaching reading comprehension that has been particularly popular in recent years in primary schools in England and Wales. Some of the inherent issues associated with using this type of prescriptive, overtly objective-based strategy in the teaching of reading are highlighted in Irene Fountas and Gay Pinnell's article 'Guided Reading: The Romance and the Reality' (2012).

For Maria Nikolajeva (channelling Rose), in children's literature, the notion of adult normativity is non-negotiable, and she coins the term 'aetonormativity' to refer to this concept. I would argue that acknowledgement of the existence of 'aetonormativity' does not mean that critical studies of children's literature are necessarily working to perpetuate it however. Indeed, this is no more the case than the idea that the representations of normativity in the primary texts this thesis examines are there to demonstrate that such normativity is, or should be, a desirable asset that the Othered protagonists are 'lesser' for not complying with. Rather, as David Rudd suggests in his article 'How does children's literature exist?' (2005):

Children's literature consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child, or metaphorical equivalents in terms of character or situation... the commonality being that such texts display an awareness of children's disempowered status (whether containing or controlling it, questioning or overturning it (26).

Of the criteria alluded to in the extract from Rudd then, this thesis is primarily interested in how reader-response can function to 'question' and confront 'aetonormativity'. My utilisation of reader-response research achieves this by demonstrating how children's responses can often provide divergent (and occasionally, as discussed previously, more pertinent, nuanced or insightful perspectives) than adults. This works to challenge 'aetonormativity' then, such responses providing evidence for Beauvais' view of the mighty child resisting adults' dominion.

With this in mind, this thesis's originality, in addition to its contribution to knowledge, stems partly from the duality of its methodological approaches. Although Foucauldian and reader-response theory are two distinct methodological positions which on the surface appear disparate, they have key areas of commonality that complement each other. As noted, Both

Foucault's work and reader-response criticism are examples of Poststructuralist theory. Although clearly a multifaceted and conceptually 'slippery' term, this thesis's primary interpretation of Poststructuralism is in line with Michael Peters and Nicholas Burbules' definition in which they view the Poststructuralist project as ostensibly seeking to 'decentre' structures through 'critiquing [their] underlying metaphysics' (8). Foucault's writing dovetails neatly into this definition because his work consistently illustrates the 'underlying' contrivances upon which seemingly inarguable truths rest. Foucault's work provides what he terms an 'archaeology of knowledge' (1969). To elaborate on this metaphor, it attempts to excavate the foundations on which key societal structures are built, as a means of better understanding the guiding narratives that have contributed to their construction. In this way, Foucault is concerned throughout his *oeuvre* with destabilizing singularities, and, as explained previously, his seminal works, such as *Discipline and Punish*, draw upon historical examples to demonstrate how 'regimes of truth' (19) are inevitably manipulations of the 'ruling elite' or dominant order.

Reader-response theory is similarly concerned with the concept of a 'decentred structure' (Peters and Burbules 8). Here, the idea of the text itself as the primary structure comprising a 'regime of truth' is destabilised - the responsibility for 'meaning making' shifting from text to reader. Similarly to Foucault, reader-response criticism is also concerned with counteracting hegemonies. Rejecting singular interpretations of fiction, the theory instead draws on the multitudinous perspectives that different readers offer to collaboratively elicit meanings from texts. Drawing on this, Marah Gubar's work also makes the case for a child reader who, as a result of what she terms their specific brand of 'acculturation', has agency to enter into a dialogue with characters in a way that may differ from an adult reader's negotiation of this interaction.

In *Artful Dodgers*, Gubar considers this a form of 'active literacy'; suggesting that 'children are greedy sponges who have absorbed a huge amount from the culture at large [...] this undermines the notion that a significant distance separates them from the narrator' (28). The child's perspective therefore impacts on the nature of the interaction set up between child reader and the narrator or the other protagonists; their 'acculturation' and specific ways of viewing and experiencing the world, becoming key in their 'readings' of characters. This, as Gubar suggests, is particularly the case because of their proximity to child narrators / characters, which adults do not share. I felt that such a proximity impacted on the responses to the texts the children provided. This, as we will see in chapter five, was particularly the case in terms of the first-person narratives of, for example, April in Jacqueline Wilson's *Dustbin Baby*. Wilson constructs narratives so that they intentionally break down barriers between narrator and reader, forming the characteristic 'confessional' register for which she is well known, and this strategy prompted a distinct sense of unease for some of the readers. However, this was not something that I, as adult researcher, had experienced during my own reading of this novel, so this narrative effect was only revealed to me through dialogue with readers of the novel's target age. I will explore these ideas further in chapter five, in relation to Lawrence Sipe's theories on child readers and what they can 'bring' to reader-response research.

Notably too, in a thesis focusing upon the concept of Otherness, both Foucauldian and reader-response theory are concerned with marginalised (Othered) voices. For Foucault, these take the form of 'deviant' outcasts such as the lepers, criminals, madmen and onanists that he describes so compellingly in texts such as *Abnormal* and *Discipline and Punish*. In terms of reader-response however, specifically in relation to its application in this project,

the marginalised voices to whom it seeks to restore agency, are the young people itself. This is because, as discussed previously in relation to, for example, Rose and Nodelman, children's voices have habitually been silenced in academic studies of children's literature.

George Brooke and Jean-Daniel Kaestli view Foucault as a key theorist for critics interested in 'exploring the relations of power within narrative' (229), something this thesis consistently returns to in both the chapters focusing on 'pure' literary analysis, and the penultimate one on reader-response. Brooke and Kaestli continue to argue for Foucault's efficacy as 'a strategic resource for resistance' (229), and notably, a comparable claim could be made for reader-response theory. Ultimately, I view reader-response as a force, not only for 'resisting' (Brooke and Kaestli 229) however, but also for questioning Rose's claim of the 'impossibility' (1984) of children's fiction. To re-iterate then, the cruciality of the qualitative / reader-response aspect of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, to allow, as much as possible within the structural confines of the genre, child readers to gain a greater sense of agency and empowerment than has typically been the case in previous critical studies of children's literature. Secondly, to demonstrate that, in the process of listening to children's responses to literature, we stand to gain crucial insights (focusing, in the case of this thesis, on children's authors' representations of Otherness); that, as adult critics, we would not otherwise be privy to.

Thematic concerns: Children's literature and social realism.

One of the major shifts in the conception of childhood in the twentieth century was between its lingering Romantic image as a site of inherent innocence in the opening years of the century, to what Chris Jenks describes as 'childhood coming of age' (2005) in its latter

years. In *Childhood* (2005), Jenks suggests that this shift reached its apotheosis with the 1993 murder of James Bulger (which will be examined in greater depth in chapter two), and the wider realisation that children are as 'capable of violence' (128) as adults. Texts are inevitably shaped by context. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that children's literature in the second half of the twentieth century would begin to reflect, not only such changing perceptions of what children and childhood *are*, but also the kinds of themes and ideas this audience are capable of absorbing and engaging with.

Nevertheless, one of the key reasons children are often viewed through the lens of Otherness relates to their lingering status as 'innocent', or as continually being 'in need of protection'. As Nodelman states in *The Hidden Adult*: 'Children's literature exists to offer children protection, to exclude things they ought not to know about' (158). This clearly creates challenges for texts that aim to explore the sorts of Otherness that exist outside of the 'safety zone' of the kind of 'protection' children's literature has historically provided (texts dealing, for example, with issues such as addiction, poverty, homelessness, crime and LGBTQ issues).

However, Philip Pullman (1997) argues for the need to ensure that, as adult 'gatekeepers' of children's literature, we do not fall into the trap of viewing childhood as something so sacred that it essentially becomes untouchable. With this in mind, part of an author's role when writing for young people, he argues, involves ensuring their access to a comparable level of 'artistic truthfulness' to that encountered in literature aimed at adult readers. This however, has not always been the case. Indeed, as we have seen from our earlier consideration of Rose, writers for young people have struggled to escape the traditional expectations of children's literature as a genre characterised by agenda-bound and didactic

underpinnings. Certainly, when, in my undergraduate children's literature seminars, I ask students what the genre 'means to them', attitudes typically centre around the role of children's books in either teaching children moralistic 'life lessons' (often focusing on binary concepts such as 'good' and 'bad' or 'right' and 'wrong'), or providing them with pure escapism. Rarely do they gesture towards any expectation that children's literature should both represent and engage with what Patty Campbell terms the 'gritty reality' (18) of everyday life in a manner that is nuanced, non-judgemental and, potentially ambiguous.

There is, as Pullman's assertion suggests however, an uneasiness with which some adults approach such literature, viewing it as what Sue Walsh describes as a potentially 'corrupting and corruptible' (29) form. The ultra-realist work of contemporary writers such as Melvin Burgess and Kevin Brooks has met with a considerable amount of criticism in the media. For example, in one notoriously scathing review, Anne Fine (2003) attacked Burgess's 'latest assault on teenage morals' (again, note the reference to 'morals'), the sex-themed novel *Doing It* (2003). Fine described *Doing It* as 'vile and disgusting', and went as far as suggesting it should be 'pulped'. Lorna Bradbury voted in favour of removing Kevin Brooks' *The Bunker Diary* (2014) from bookshop shelves due to its depiction of a child abduction, arguing 'why wish this book on a child?' (1).

Drawing on personal experience as a teacher, I have even encountered resistance from parents when I have introduced books by, for example, Jacqueline Wilson. Even though the level of controversy generated by Wilson is mild compared to Burgess and Brooks, the frankness with which she describes topics including addiction, homelessness and family breakdown in her novels nevertheless has the potential to alarm adults who question the need for such themes to have any place in children's literature.

As the nature of the text selection and approach to analysis I adopt in this thesis demonstrates, broadly speaking, I conform to the opinion that children's literature needs to engage with as diverse as possible a range of life experiences. Indeed, as chapter five of this thesis demonstrates, young people are highly capable of engaging with challenging ideas and concepts with a great deal of understanding, nuance and sensitivity. However, some of these discussions are likely to require some form of facilitation. This may be viewed as problematic given my extensive previous discussion of adults' typical status as repressive figures in children's literature studies, dominating and controlling readers through their role in the production and consumption of this fiction. I would argue however, that adults also have the potential to be an enabling influence in terms of reading and responding to literature.

In this way, as children's literature critics, I suggest that we should be engaged in countering gatekeepers' attempts to 'ringfence' or avoid engaging with challenging or subversive fiction. Instead, we should be using it as an opportunity to open up, rather than shut down, discussions with young readers about potentially difficult and discordant topics. My choice of texts and exploration of these with young people in chapter five is testament to my belief in this regard.

Increasingly in the twenty-first century, such texts demonstrate a recurring interest in exploring the causes and effects of what Kylo Patrick Hart terms 'social Otherness' (1) in relation to young people. They typically portray young protagonists themselves as Other, although they may also show how secondary characters are Othered, or explore young people's relationships with, and responses to, older Othered characters.⁷ With this in mind,

⁷ For example, in the case of a novel such as Jamila Gavin's *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye*.

this thesis will show how Otherness can be interpreted as a liberatory experience (for example, in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*), a humorous one (in Jamila Gavin's *Grandpa Chatterji and the Third Eye*) and even a romantic one (in Hilary Freeman's *The Boy From France*). The concept can take both positive and negative forms and significantly, may be viewed from different perspectives even within the same text. This is the case in, for example, Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*. In the latter example, the full multiplicity of Otherness is exposed through Burgess's signature heteroglossic style. For a writer like Burgess, Otherness acts as both a cause and effect in characters' lives, it becomes simultaneously empowering and disenfranchising, oppressive and emancipatory.

The primary texts' representations of Otherness routinely derive from their authors' recurring preoccupations with certain constructs. For the purposes of this thesis, I have categorised these as: 'community', 'belonging', 'abandonment' and 'foreignness'. Due to their centrality as themes in the primary texts, these categories are referenced in the chapter titles. Within these delineations however, further concerns integral to literary constructions of Otherness become evident. Such recurring concerns can be broadly defined as: 'ingroups and outgroups', 'power', 'exclusion' and 'normativity' and will also be made reference to continually throughout this thesis.

Otherness: Definitions and authorship.

To proceed further, it is necessary to expound upon the nature of Otherness itself. The letter 'O' in 'Otherness' or 'the Other' is capitalised throughout this thesis to denote its application as, not just a *term*, but a *concept*. Otherness (or 'the Other', in its personalised

singular form), is superficially straightforward to define. It is a synonym of 'difference'⁸ and an antonym of 'sameness'. Conceptually however, the term is notoriously ambiguous, defined and utilised in different ways depending on the academic discipline in question.

Otherness is a central tenet in Freudian psychology, in which the development of 'self' is necessarily both 'mirrored' and further defined by the presence of Otherness.⁹ From a theological standpoint however, Emmanuel Levinas suggested that the Other comprises a higher power than the self - the concept being related in his work to the dimension of the divine. For Levinas, Otherness therefore has the ability to transcend purely 'social relations' (78). From a linguistic perspective, in *Ecrits* (1966) Jacques Lacan argued that the Other is an individual who is excluded from what he saw as the 'symbolic' (11) code of language - linguistic communication being the primary social apparatus around which societies function. For Lacan and, as will be discussed presently, other Poststructuralist theorists who were active (primarily) in France in the second half of the twentieth-century, the concept of Otherness is fundamentally bound to the notion of a social order, and in particular the way in which power within such an order can be seen to function.

Foucault suggested that Otherness as a social construction is designed to subordinate those who fail to comply with the agenda of the ruling class. Comparably to Foucault, I am interested in Otherness primarily as it exists as a social force, as both fuelling and emanating from the forces underlying communities and societies, as well as the effects of Othering processes such as abandonment and exclusion, on identity construction.

⁸ Alternate recurring terminology pertaining to Otherness in this study includes: 'stranger', 'alien', 'outsider', 'foreigner' and 'migrant'.

The extent to which the Other is inseparable from 'the outsider' is, as I discussed in relation to Wilkie-Stibbs' work previously, somewhat of a moot point. As will become evident in this thesis, the terms are frequently employed interchangeably, including in my own analysis on occasions where the differentiation between the terms is of little consequence to the discussion taking place. The figure of 'the outsider' is, as Colin Wilson suggests in *The Outsider* (1956); a trope traditionally associated with literature, whereas Otherness is a broad and recurring concern relating to various strands of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Both however, are routinely invoked in literary studies, and, as such, it is useful to consider ways in which the Other and the outsider may be differentiated from each other, specifically within the parameters of this discipline. Although, in the course of my research, I could locate few examples of critics successfully distinguishing between the terms, Lilia Melani provides a reasonable attempt at this, aimed at her undergraduate students of literary theory at the City University of New York:

The Other is an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way. Any stranger becomes the Other. The group sees itself as the norm and judges those who do not meet that norm (that is, who are different in any way) as the Other. Perceived as lacking essential characteristics possessed by the group, the Other is almost always seen as a lesser or inferior being and is treated accordingly. The Other in a society may have few or no legal rights, may be characterized as less intelligent or as immoral, and may even be regarded as sub-human [...]

The outsider frequently overlaps with the Other, but they are not identical. The outsider has the possibility of being accepted by and incorporated into the group [...] the Other, however, is perceived as different in kind, as lacking in some essential trait or traits that the group has (1).

For Melani then, the outsider appears to possess a 'milder' form of Otherness which carries with it the possibility of redemption, of ultimate acceptance back into a dominant group. As implied in chapter three of this thesis however, this may be construed as being a somewhat optimistic theory. Melani's discussion of the importance of the 'group' however, in defining both the Other and the outsider, is indicative of one of the central arguments of this thesis, essentially that social groups are inherently Othering because of their inevitable organisation into what the social psychologist Henri Tajfel termed 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' (34). For Tajfel, 'ingroups' are indicative of mainstream normativity, where 'outgroups' contain those marginalised or excluded from the 'ingroup' - those essentially rendered Other. He suggests that, as individuals, our sense of identity is inextricably linked to the 'ingroup' or 'outgroup' to which we belong.

The issue here is that, as Jeremy Punt contends: 'ascribing social categories to marginalized groups impinges on their self-understanding as well as on their description by other groups' (82). Essentially, this process, implicit in the way in which societies organise themselves, constitutes an Othering mentality that can contribute to what Robyn McCallum terms 'internalized Otherness' (75). Here, a sense of Otherness is 'ascribed' (Punt 82) to a group (or individual) purely by virtue of how a *dominant* social group (an 'outgroup') has chosen to define them. A character in Siobhan Dowd's *The London Eye Mystery* (2007) comments eruditely on this:

Being socially excluded is a bit like being excluded from school. Instead of a head teacher telling you you have to leave, it's more that everybody in the rest of society acts like you don't exist. And you end up with all the other people who are being ignored (10).

Discussions of Otherness centring on such exclusion by an 'ingroup' are prevalent in various novels explored in this thesis, for example, *Tribes* and *Kill All Enemies*. Notably however, such novels also contain examples of individuals moving *between* these categories (the 'social fluidity' associated with Otherness considered in the literature review previously). In addition, where there is an alteration in the dynamic of a group, some of the novels examined in this study also demonstrate how an 'ingroup' can, in fact, *become* an 'outgroup' and vice-versa.

In terms of authorship, the suggestion of what Paul Kameen has termed a 'readerly relationship' (86) occurring, between authorial constructions of Otherness and the reader is notable. Two young-adult authors¹⁰ I interviewed commented further on such a relationship. Kevin Brooks, author of *Lucas* (introduced in chapter two), discusses his personal perspective on what he terms the 'outsider-narrator':

From the story-telling perspective, it allows me to step back and look in at the world (through the eyes of the outsider-narrator), which to me is much more interesting and enlightening, than if you belong to the world you're writing about. But also, on a personal level, it's just very natural for me to take the outsider's point of view (qtd. in Screech 2014).

For Brooks then, the Othered protagonist allows for a stronger critique of the 'world' of the novel, because 'through their eyes', a truer, more compelling perspective can be sought.

This is because due to 'belonging' to an 'ingroup', insiders may lose the ability to fully reflect on their community, 'to step back and look in'. A personal preoccupation with Otherness

¹⁰ Throughout this project, I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to interview Kevin Brooks (author of *Lucas* [2002] – a primary text featured in this thesis) and Hayley Long (author of *What's Up With Jody Barton?* [2012]). Although these interviews were intended to be published as short, general interest pieces for children's literature journals, both of these writers also commented eruditely on some of the themes and issues at the heart of this study. As such, they are alluded to in various sections of this thesis. In addition, both interviews can be read in their entirety in the appendix (1 and 2).

also underscores Hayley Long's writing. In an interview I conducted with her, I questioned her about the extent to which writing for teenagers inevitably involves engaging with Otherness. Her response was as follows:

Any sense of Otherness that's created mirrors [the way] I feel. Fiction is a way to explore those less ordinary and less commonplace perspectives [...] People come in all sorts of variations – whether that's ethnicity or religion or sexuality or whatever – and it's not helpful to pretend that they don't. I feel I have a duty to reassure my readers that it's OK to be different (qtd. in Screech 2015).

Long then, feels she has a specific 'duty' to depict alternate 'perspectives' for the readers' sake, this having the ultimate effect of 'reassurance'. This is suggestive of Ann Camacho's argument that 'we read to know we are not going through this life without others who have also experienced some of what we are going through' (3). For Long then, authors who attempt to represent Otherness in their work, may find they are speaking directly to young people who are *themselves* experiencing feelings of Otherness, and have therefore sought out specific character portrayals with which they feel they can identify.

The dynamics of this kind of 'readerly relationship' have previously been highlighted in relation to, for example, Jacqueline Wilson's enduring popularity. Speaking about this in an interview with Lucy Pearson, Wilson discusses how her writing encourages readers to identify 'with the strangest characters' (206). Indeed, some real-life examples of such processes of readerly identification and empathy will be examined in chapter five in relation to readers' responses to April, the protagonist in Wilson's *Dustbin Baby*.

Similarly, for Rudd, 'favourite characters', who importantly, may themselves be 'demonized Others' (196)¹¹ are central to what he terms 'socially grounded' readings. Such readings, he

¹¹ Arguably because, as we will see, readerly empathy has the power to 'override' demonisation.

argues, are frequently associated with 'social' questions the reader may be encouraged to ask themselves in relation to continually developing notions of 'identity' (196), for example: 'Where do I belong? What is [...] appropriate behaviour? Who am I?' (196). These are recurring questions that play a crucial role in the cultural work accomplished by this study's twelve primary texts and, by proxy, this thesis.

The 'historical moment'.

Because, as Joanne Golden argues, narrative is 'inseparable from context' (241), an introduction to this study necessitates an initial engagement with what the political commentator Tom Engelhardt terms the 'helter-skelter world' (2014) of the early twenty-first century. Engelhardt asserts that the start of the new millennium has been characterised by considerable 'division and fragmentation' (2014), for which the September 11th 2001 ('9/11') terrorist attacks on the United States were a stimulus. The effects of 9/11 were not purely confined, it should be noted, to the country in which they occurred. Rather, 9/11 was an event of global significance and its shockwaves were felt particularly in Britain, possibly due to our historically strong 'special relationship' with America. Indeed, as discussed in the 'social, political and cultural contexts' section of this introduction, four years later Britain suffered its own 9/11-style event in the form of the 7th July 2005 ('7/7') terrorist attacks on London.

9/11 prompted a subsequent decline in relations between certain factions on the east and west of the globe, as well as the demonization in the media of those whose provenance, however loosely, and based on vague and often inaccurate understandings of religious

practice and ethnic origin appeared to share an affinity with 'the terrorists'. If every century needs a 'bogey-man', a villainous Other intent on playing havoc with the moral fabric of a previously stable and functional society,¹² the terrorist more than fulfils this role at the start of the new century. With this then, an era of 'in' and 'out' groups is born - of renewed 'them' and 'us' mentalities and prejudices. Moreover, and most crucially in the context of this thesis, a period in which what it means to be Other, to be outside of the mainstream social order, is in the process of redefinition.

In his study of *9/11 Fiction*, Tim Gauthier highlights the role of the terrorist in creating a 'contemporary world' in which there is a palpably 'increased sense of Otherness' (23). He also however, encourages us to consider 'the role fiction can play in delivering interactions with that Otherness' (23). One of the strengths of the novel form is its ability to constructively highlight the complexity of such 'interactions'. However, the scope of this thesis lies beyond the singular trope of the 'foreign Other'. Indeed, whilst the nature of foreignness and its association with Otherness is certainly explored in depth in chapter four, the majority of this research is not preoccupied with internationalism. Rather, on the occasions where my study is concerned with the nature of nation and nationality at all, the focus lies on Britain and the domestic politics of these islands. Chiefly, I am concerned with the representation of this specific place in time, and its insidious brand of introspective provincialism.

Particularly indicative of the 'helter-skelter' of twenty-first century life in Britain,¹³ I would argue, are the years 2001 to 2012. During this period of eleven years, this thesis's twelve

¹² With this in mind, we need only reflect on the 'red scare' hysteria focused on the perceived Communist invasion in the post-World War Two United States.

¹³ At least, for the purposes of this research.

primary texts were published, and many of these have since been lauded for their innovative contributions to children's literature. These include Mark Haddon's Whitbread Award-winning 2003 novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Frank Cottrell Boyce's Guardian Children's Fiction Award-winning *The Unforgotten Coat* (2011) and Anne Cassidy's Booktrust Teenage Prize-winning *Looking For JJ* (2004). In addition, this specific eleven years gave rise to a variety of notable social, political and cultural events which underscore the authors' representations of Otherness. These will be introduced in the subsequent section which examines the social, political and cultural contexts that necessarily impact on the perspectives on Otherness I adopt in this study.

Otherness in the twenty-first century is, as Ronald Arnett and Patricia Arneson contend, 'a commonplace rhetorical interruption' (9) existing in opposition to mainstream narratives that tend to promote current societal 'ideals'. Specifically however, contemporary literature for young people displays a particularly dynamic 'textured understanding' of what Arnett and Arneson term 'the variances that define this historical moment' (9). This is often borne out of a frustration certain writers feel, regarding the treatment and (mis)representation of young people in this period. Indeed, as will be seen in chapter four, in a contextually important 'afterword' to his novel *The Unforgotten Coat*, Frank Cottrell Boyce describes how his own sense of injustice relating to the treatment of migrant children in the UK, was the stimulus for this novel.

Although, like Jenny Daniels, I certainly wish to posit the idea that, for young people in the twenty-first century 'fiction has never been so challenging and exciting' (162), it is nevertheless necessary to realise that Otherness in the fiction this thesis examines is not

purely bound to the vagaries of this specific historical moment. Rather, the theme highlights concerns that have been central in literature for both adults and young people, certainly since the inception of the novel form, but arguably in earlier forms of story-telling too. In this regard, in its 'reading' of the theme of Otherness in twelve novels for young people, this study necessarily draws upon broader social concerns that have played a recurring role in English literature. These include, among others, criminality, migration and homelessness.

2001 – 2012: Key social, historical and cultural contexts.

Within the eleven-year period that comprises this thesis's chronology (2001 - 2012), various historical and political events unfolded that I would argue, contributed to the increased sense of Otherness attributed to young people in Britain at the turn of the Millennium. Literature, as Foucault contends in *The Order of Things* (1970) is fuelled by context, by the events taking place in the background to a novel's conception. Similarly, if as the popular slogan attests, 'the personal is the political'; the reverse might also be said to be true. Indeed, as will become evident during our discussions of the primary texts presently, the political can be observed routinely intruding into the private sphere. We need only consider the manner in which Chingis and Nergui in *The Unforgotten Coat* are relentlessly pursued by the immigration authority's implementation of the inarguably Othering immigration legislation that was borne out of this period. Similarly, *Kill All Enemies* is concerned with the implications of harsher school exclusion policies introduced as a result of the 2002 Education Act.

What follows is a brief chronology indicating several noteworthy events within the period 2001 – 2012, and the impact of these on both notions of Otherness viewed in relation to

young people in early twenty-first century Britain, as well as on some of the primary texts examined in this thesis. A version of this chronology presented as a 'timeline' is available in the appendix (3).

In her introduction to *Children's Fiction about 9/11*, Jo Lampert states: 'the idea that the world will never be the same again has become commonplace' (1). 9/11 is arguably the most crucial event of this chronology because, as Lampert suggests, it certainly did change the world. 9/11 is also key in establishing the context for this thesis because it sets the scene for the emergence of new Othering, exclusionist mentalities that play out in the West at the start of the new millennium. Although this thesis does not contain any fiction specifically examining 9/11 and its impact in terms of young people (although, as discussed in the literature review in relation to Jo Lampert's study of *Children's Fiction About 9/11* these are becoming increasingly manifold), the spectre of 9/11 in terms of, for example, the mood of suspicion, paranoia and marginalisation surrounding the ethnic Other, does nevertheless loom heavily in texts such as *The Unforgotten Coat*.

In terms of schools, the setting for many of this thesis's primary texts, the 2002 Education Act (section fifty-two governing 'exclusion') is worthy of note. In addition to mainstream schools, this act also bestowed powers of 'exclusion' upon 'the teacher in charge of a pupil referral unit'. As a result of this, they could 'exclude a pupil from the unit for a fixed-period or permanently' (52). This is suggestive of a greater culture of 'exclusion' being legitimated in terms of young people and their interaction with the education system - even notably, those parts of the system apparently intended to support young people *originally* excluded from mainstream settings. As novels such as *Kill All Enemies* demonstrates, this has concerning implications on the increased sense of marginalisation and Otherness attached

to young people who are negatively engaged in the process of what John Smyth and Robert Hattan term 'falling through the cracks' (175) of British society.

2003 marked the re-introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders ('ASBOS'). This legislation was one of various attempts by Tony Blair's government to curb the increasing tide of anti-social behaviour. ASBOs had originally been introduced in the UK in 1998 to prosecute incidences of petty, socially disruptive activity and low-level crime. In his discussion of the issues surrounding the application of the 'anti-social label' (19) in *ASBO Nation* (2008), Peter Squires has written at length about the Othering effects on young people of the Blair government's heavy-handed and, largely ineffectual approach to such behaviour control. Specifically, he contends that the primary issue with this legislation is that it contributed to the marginalisation of an 'underclass' (346) of young white males living in poverty-ridden environments, who, as a result of such government initiatives were effectively 'excluded from respect for their basic human rights and for societal responsibility for their well-being' (329).

Crucially Squires also argues that the 'ASBO' moniker is Othering to such a degree that it provides a threat to affected young people's 'essential humanity' (329). Rather than the constant vilification and demonization that such young people receive in the media, Squires articulates the need for greater compassion and attempts to 'reach' (90) and 'understand' (154) young people who have effectively been written off or 'abandoned' (321) by society and the legislature that governs it. This he suggests is because 'behind the constructs of Otherness usually lie lives with profound unmet psycho-social needs' (329). As I will show, this is certainly the case when we consider characters such as Salom in *Tribes*, Jennifer Jones in *Looking for JJ* and Billie in *Kill All Enemies*.

The July 7th London bombings in 2005¹⁴, further contributed to the prevalence of demonizing and vilifying tendencies in the UK. As William Dalrymple states:

Every act of al-Qaeda terrorism brings to the surface a great raft of criticism of Islam as a religion, and dark mutterings about the sympathies of British Muslims [...] Islamophobia is replacing anti-Semitism as the principal Western statement of bigotry against 'the Other' (2004).

This is further evidence of a developing culture of Othering 'us' and 'them' attitudes, and exclusionist ideologies generally in Britain during this period and beyond. However, Cahal Milmo makes the case for this having a 'significant' effect on young people specifically, due to a marked increase in Islamophobia in schools:¹⁵

Teachers unions and anti-racism groups recorded an increase in Islamophobic incidents with the 400,000 Muslim pupils in British schools increasingly likely to be taunted as "terrorists", "paedophiles" or "immigrants". The NASUWT said the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment is causing "uncertainty and fear" in schools (2015).

Although the primary texts selected for this thesis do not overtly tackle such issues, certain novels, chiefly those explored in chapter four examining 'foreignness', do 'tap into' this sense of 'uncertainty and fear' regarding the 'foreign Other' in the UK during this period. It should also be noted that some recently published novels for young people, including Benjamin Zephaniah's *Terror Kid* (2014) and Karis Stainton's *Spotlight on Sunny* (2015), approach this issue rather more directly.

Partly as a response to the London bombings two years earlier, and partly as an attempt to rectify some of the issues that had been exposed by the 2006 'Foreign National Prisoner'

¹⁴ Or '7/7' as it is sometimes known - a comparison to 9/11.

¹⁵ By 2015 and the publication of Milmo's *Independent* article, this was also re-enforced by the *Charlie Hebdo* Paris attacks in January of that year.

(FNP) crisis,¹⁶ the 2007 UK Borders Act took a hard-line approach to both immigration and the detention of 'foreign offenders' in a manner that some of its detractors argued was inherently Othering (de Noronha 12). The act, Luke de Noronha asserts, contributed to the image of a figure that was gaining increasing momentum at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that of the 'bad migrant' (12) who acted as the 'bridge between criminality and foreignness' (5). Legislation such as this, de Noronha suggests, is damaging because it inevitably groups migrants among such 'internal Others' (12) in the British popular imagination as 'criminals and welfare-scroungers' (12). Similarly, because the act removed the 'indefinite right to remain'¹⁷ clause (at least, in its previous form), one of its inherent outcomes was the idea that 'any misbehaviour proves that which was always feared about their foreignness, that it renders them a threat to the nation's values' (12). To re-iterate once again, the formation of this type of legislature is suggestive of a period in which who *does* and who *does not* belong, in addition to what constitutes contemporary 'in' and 'outgroups' in British society, has become a topic of increasing national interest.

Also stemming from this period in which discussions of 'belonging' are becoming a 'hot topic' of national debate, is the groundswell of 'ephebiphobia', reported on by various publications in the British media in March 2009. This phenomenon, stemming from a Greek compound phrase meaning 'fear of youth', was attributed by the writer and psychologist Tanya Byron to a 'distorted' public perception of young people formed due to the 'violent, aggressive and antisocial' actions of a minority, presumably the same minority targeted by Blair in his reintroduction of ASBOs in 2003. The result of this, she argued in *The Guardian*, is

¹⁶ On 25th April 2006 the media revealed that over one thousand foreign offenders who, upon sentencing, had been recommended for deportation following the completion of their custodial sentences in the UK, had been released.

¹⁷ In previous immigration acts, this allowed migrants to remain in the UK indefinitely after a period of five years had elapsed.

the creation of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy [...] Why bother to try when you are told you are a failure? Why bother to strive when your existence is seen as a nuisance?' (2009). The ability of some of Britain's most vulnerable young people to progress successfully through school and into work is effectively 'blocked', she argued, by a society that behaves in an endemically discriminatory fashion towards its young, in addition to an education system that is 'riven with elitist and narrowly defined notions of academic competence' (Byron 2009). As a result of this, young peoples' occasionally 'anxious and aggressive' behaviour may be viewed as a manifestation of their vulnerability - a response to their feelings of Otherness in this place and time. This situation is clearly observable in certain YA novels examined in this thesis, such as *Tribes* and *Kill All Enemies*. However, as Charlene O'Kane contends in her doctoral thesis entitled *Boys with Sticks: A Study of Ephebiphobia in Contemporary Literature* (2012), it is also a phenomenon increasingly documented in contemporary adult literature depicting adolescence. Examples she gives include: Alexander Stuart's *The War Zone* (1999), Lionel Schriver's *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (2003) and D.B.C. Pierre's *Vernon God Little* (2003).

An attempt by government to encourage more community cohesion and inclusivity reached its zenith in 2010 when David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, gave an address in Liverpool. This became known as 'The Big Society' speech:

It's about [...] businesses helping people getting trained for work. Charities working to rehabilitate offenders [...] It's about liberation -the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street (Cameron 2010).

Among its various intended outcomes, as the extract from David Cameron's speech demonstrates, one of the missions of his 'Big Society' agenda was to 'redistribute power' from government to communities and individuals in order to reinstate notions of 'society' -

the loss of which was arguably one of the casualties of the Thatcher era and its aftermath. In her discussion of the ulterior reasons behind certain social policy agendas and their relationship to social control, Brown contends that agendas such as ‘The Big Society’ necessarily rest upon an image of ‘the Otherness of the vulnerable’ (48) that has been ‘map[ped] onto notions of citizenship’ in a manner that is designed to disguise a governmental ‘dislike of dependency’ (48). One of the central issues of this agenda, Brown argues, is that it involves ‘reductions in the responsibilities of the state to accommodate the “vulnerable”, with this obligation moved from a public duty’ (48). Again, one of the outcomes of this is the tendency for individuals from certain ‘vulnerable’ groups (such as the unemployed and ex-offenders, to cite Cameron’s examples), to find themselves ‘falling through the cracks’ (Smyth and Hattan 175) of society. This is due to their inability to access vital services that had previously been state-provided, as a result of an increased governmental reliance on philanthropic resources which may not be reliably available. Perhaps inevitably, the relationship between Otherness and vulnerability is a recurring theme in this thesis, and the realities of life as a ‘vulnerable party’ are explored in terms of, for example, homelessness in *Lucas*, the rehabilitation and treatment of ex-offenders in *Looking for JJ*, and the challenges faced by young people following school exclusion in *Kill All Enemies*.

Attempts to forge a more cohesive version of ‘society’ in Britain had not, by the summer of 2011, been noticeably successful. That summer riots broke out in London and other major UK cities. The majority of the rioters were adolescents, but some as Sandie Taylor describes, were ‘as young as eleven years of age’ (206). Ken Livingstone, the then Mayor of London described the offenders as “disaffected youths” who are marginalized and without future

prospects due to the austere policies of the coalition government' (qtd. in Taylor 206). Civil unrest broke out following the police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham where a small local protest developed into a series of clashes with the police throughout London, as well as in various provincial cities. Notably, a large proportion of those involved in the riots were young people between the ages of eleven and eighteen. This prompted a number of questions and concerns being raised relating to the social status of young people in the UK, as well as efforts to understand what had provoked such unprecedented levels of violence and discontent among this demographic. Many contributory factors had been highlighted, mostly involving the manner in which an increasing number of young people appeared to view themselves as existing outside of traditional community structures. As Tottenham MP David Lammy suggested in his damning report and subsequent book on the riots, these young people viewed society as being 'pitted against' them, due to ongoing battles with unemployment, housing and an increasingly under-funded welfare system that failed to adequately meet their needs (2011). In addition to this general sense of social exclusion, isolation and disaffection among young people, it is also important to consider certain young peoples' willingness to engage in socially unacceptable behavior purely to satisfy peer demands - a factor that some commentators also believed played a crucial role in the riots (Lammy 2011). From a fictional perspective, young peoples' responses to peer pressure is explored pertinently in *Tribes*, introduced in chapter two.

Similarly, the manner in which young people interact with institutions in which they feel, or are made to feel, like outsiders is a recurrent theme in the novels of Melvin Burgess - notably in terms of this thesis, in *Kill All Enemies* introduced in chapter three. Appropriately, this novel was also published in 2011, the same year the riots took place. In a similar

manner to the reporting on the re-introduction of ASBOs a decade earlier, the riots contributed to the general tone of vilification and demonization adopted by the media in relation to young people in this period. Even in newspapers such as the comparatively moderate *The Independent*, the rioters were depicted as a single vast, unruly unit - a masked 'mob' spreading anarchy across Britain's cities (see appendix 4). Such reporting has inevitably contributed to rising ephiphobia, and generally impacted on the increasingly negative manner in which young people *en-masse* are viewed in the UK. Arguably, it has been an integral component in terms of what Goram Sundstrom et al argue are changing 'assumptions about young people and democracy developed over the last decade' that has had the inevitable result of 'defining youth in terms of Otherness' (28).

Partly as a result of this, in 2012 a report advocating 'Fair press for children and young people' was submitted to the Leveson Inquiry.¹⁸ This document is prefaced by a quotation from the then deputy prime minister Nick Clegg, in which he expressed his concern that the British press had long been complicit in constructing Othering representations of young people in twenty-first century Britain, born out of its 'demonising' and 'stereotyping' practices (qtd. in Giner and Jones 2). Signed by seventy-three children's charities, agencies and other organisations (including the British Youth Council, Scouts and UNICEF), 'fair press' aimed to bring the press's habitual vilification of young people to the attention of the Leveson Inquiry that sat between 2011 and 2012. The inquiry's primary objective was to examine the 'culture, practices and ethics of the press' (2011) and in so doing, invited testimony from parties who felt they had been misrepresented by it. This document is

¹⁸ Notably, the final report of the Leveson Inquiry (2012) *does* acknowledge the manner in which young people had been 'subjected to' press reporting that was 'damaging' and 'sensationalised' (volume ii: 448). Ultimately, the recommendations it made to the government highlighted the need for greater regulation of the press, particularly with regards to its reporting of stories involving young and other 'vulnerable people' (volume iv: 1797).

particularly useful in terms of this chronology, because it suggests that, by the end of the historical period covered by this thesis, official attempts were being made to challenge negative Othering practices affecting young people.

Perhaps inevitably, given the fact that the document was prepared in the aftermath of the 2011 London riots, many of the examples presented in it relate to the nature of the reporting of this event, with one page devoted to nine scanned newspaper headlines (4) demonstrating the nature and extent of the Othering language routinely being utilised (appendix 5) in relation to young people. The document also includes empirically presented data recording incidences of specific terminology used. Within the thirteen words in the sample, those with the highest frequency of press usage when measured across one year of reporting, were the terms: 'yobs' with 591 occurrences, 'thugs' with 254, 'sick' with 119 and 'feral' with 96 (5). Ultimately, this document petitioned the Leveson Inquiry to legislate for fairer and more balanced representations of young people. This it argued, is necessary because children and young people are 'a particularly vulnerable group in our society' who have little access to institutional power, and therefore 'journalists should exercise a duty of care and avoid negative generalisations' (7). The document also continued to advocate that 'age be included as a classification of discrimination into the Editor's Code' (7). This would effectively make it just as discriminatory for journalists to publish content featuring pejorative generalisations based upon an individual's age, as it would their race, colour, religion, gender or sexual orientation. I will return to news-media representations of Otherness in chapter two, with reference to *Looking For JJ*.

Roderick McGillis argues that 'our sense of value and coherence' is 'unstable' (12) in 'such changing times'. In his collection examining *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle* (2003),

he comments further on the impact periods of 'transition' (105), such as those between an old century and a new, inevitably have on cultural life: 'Century's end brings out fear and hope, idiosyncrasy and convention, introspection and activism' (12). Books for young people, he suggests, inevitably 'reflect' (12) such concerns. The concept of Otherness is pertinent in this regard, relating as it does to the sense of flux, 'instability' (12), fracture and disruption in social life arguably inherent to all historical epochs, but none more so than the cusp of the twenty-first century, replete with 9/11 - its almost 'apocalyptic' (12) 'opening act'.

Chapter structure and integral arguments.

Each chapter focuses on different, albeit interrelated, strands of Otherness, and is intended to progress sequentially into the following chapter. The chapters combine to argue that novels depicting Othered characters are a crucial component of a contemporary corpus of writing for young people, born from and reflecting a number of divisive shifts in the changing socio-political landscape of Britain in the early twenty-first century.

The primary texts are grouped together into the most appropriate chapter in terms of theme, with three texts allocated to the first four chapters that deal wholly with literary analysis. These texts were shortlisted for inclusion in this thesis from my reading of over one hundred other children's and YA novels published in the twenty-first century, that I collated in the first year of my research. They were selected because of the innovative and pertinent ways in which I felt they approached the study's central theme and subthemes.

Chapter one extends the initial discussions of Otherness I have engaged in during this introduction, examining how writers for young people 'construct Otherness and define difference'. It discusses three texts focusing on young male characters with autistic spectrum conditions. Examining the notion of 'normativity' through interpretations of the writings of Foucault, as well as disability theorists such as Lennard Davis, this chapter argues that the notion of 'normativity', as it exists in contemporary society, necessarily exists in opposition to a marginalised 'outgroup'.

Chapter two builds on the first chapter's examinations of Otherness viewed primarily in terms of the individual, but makes the transition to exploring its wider implications in terms of 'community and belonging'. This chapter argues that Otherness due to an individual's inability to locate a secure sense of belonging to a community or 'ingroup', has a fundamentally disruptive, discordant influence. Underpinning this chapter's core arguments is Foucault's work on communities as comprising inevitable sites of Othering mentalities and practices.

The third chapter considers the consequences of failed attempts to belong to 'core' communities such as school, family and nation. I argue that outcast and abandoned young people have been perennial tropes in children's literature (from *Hansel and Gretel* to *Harry Potter*) and proceeds to examine how Otherness stemming from experiences of abandonment impacts on young peoples' developing senses of self. Developing the theme of foreignness as a subcategory of Otherness, chapter four explores this with regards to the figure of the foreign Other. This chapter draws on aspects of Postcolonial theory, engaging, for example, with Edward Said's writings on *Orientalism* (1978). This chapter argues that the

foreign Other is a character trope utilised by authors to comment on and critique the dominant (local) social order.

The final chapter introduces my reader-response research through what I have termed 'reading Otherness' with young people themselves. Prompted by my conviction that children's literature research should acknowledge and engage with the voice of the genre's intended readership, this chapter presents responses to four primary texts (one from each of the preceding chapters), collected in a series of reading focus groups comprised of Year 6 pupils. This chapter also considers key methodological issues arising from undertaking reader-response research, in addition to evaluating the ultimate successes and challenges stemming from this aspect of the project.

Chapter One – ‘On The Margins’: Constructing Otherness and Defining Difference.

This chapter draws further on the initial explorations of Otherness contained within the introduction. Specifically, it aims to consider how authors depicting protagonists who exist in their different ways, ‘on the margins’, attempt to construct Otherness and define difference in three novels focusing on young male characters with autistic spectrum conditions. Throughout this chapter, I will engage in discussions centring on the notion of ‘normativity’ with reference to key aspects of Foucauldian theory, in addition to the writings of disability theorists such as Lennard Davis. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the concept of ‘normativity’ is routinely defined in these novels in opposition to a marginalised ‘outgroup’ - individuals who are depicted outside of, for example, the social ‘code’ of language.

Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (2003), Anne Fine’s *Up On Cloud Nine* (2002) and Gene Kemp’s *Seriously Weird* (2003) all contain representations of characters, who, it is strongly implied, are living with an autistic spectrum condition.

Autism is a developmental impairment that affects an individual’s ability to communicate with and relate to other humans. It occurs due to both environmental and genetic factors and, for most individuals, is diagnosed in childhood. Describing traits associated with autism and its associated ‘spectrum’, Uta Frith, the preeminent researcher in this area, asserts: ‘It is hard to imagine what it is like *not* to have a social sense, *not* to be tuned in to other people, their actions, reactions and the signals they give out to you and each other. As it is, autistic children are not tuned into these things’ (3). Asperger’s Syndrome, indicated by the behaviour displayed by the boys in the novels, is a ‘high-functioning’ form of autism. It is typically characterised by intense, exceptional or unusual interests often displayed in terms

of pattern recognition, mathematics or abilities involving memory. Communication difficulties and lack of a 'social sense' also often accompany the syndrome. Indeed, it is at least partially the characters Christopher, Stol and Troy's inability in the novels to 'tune in to' normative human traits described by Frith that contributes to their Otherness. As such, in discussing the manner in which these characters are presented as Other throughout this chapter, I will also be considering these three authors' depictions of autistic signifiers. Ostensibly, these texts construct Otherness in terms of how the various characters who interact with the novels' protagonists, perceive them. In addition, they suggest unique, and often abstract, perspectives and opinions explored either directly through the gaze of the Othered child, or as related to the reader through the eyes of an omniscient observer. As will be discussed, siblings are utilised effectively in this way as third-person commentators in *Seriously Weird*.

Wilkie-Stibbs discusses how such a difference in perspective results in a shift between an emphasis on first-person 'experience' (as in, for example, *Curious Incident*), compared to the manner in which different texts with Othered protagonists are liable to be 'told in the third person and focalized through a main character emphasiz[ing] events' (30). I would concur with this assertion at least as far as it would relate to the texts discussed in this chapter. *Curious Incident* as will become clear, primarily deals with the self-narrated 'experience' of the 'existential and subjective effects of Asperger's Syndrome on the fifteen-year-old character Christopher, whose mind-body mechanisms disconnect' (Wilkie-Stibbs 50), in contrast to the manner in which in *Up On Cloud Nine* and *Seriously Weird* the reader must attempt to interpret and understand characters from a third-person narrator's depiction of them interacting and engaging in the 'events' of their day-to-day lives. In as much as we

must be aware of the potential for unreliability in relation to the first-person narrator in *Curious Incident*,¹⁹ we must also consider the subjective constraints of third-person narration in our reading of the Othered protagonists in the other two novels discussed in this chapter.

In any study of Otherness in contemporary fiction for young people, I think that it would be remiss to avoid discussion of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. The book is, on the surface at least, a 'murder mystery novel' (Haddon 5). Fifteen year-old Christopher Boone stumbles across a dead poodle, stabbed to death with a garden fork, on his neighbour's lawn. It eventually becomes clear in Christopher's narrative that his perspective on the world around him is highly individualised and characterised by a fascination with patterns, numbers, routines and repetitions. As explained in the introduction, Haddon never explicitly mentions the Asperger's Syndrome that Christopher's behaviour seemingly fits the symptoms of. Rather Christopher defines himself as Other in regards to his identity as, among other things, 'a mathematician' with 'some behavioural difficulties' (Haddon 59). On his quest to locate the dog's murderer, the specifics of Christopher's Otherness are gradually revealed, explored and questioned in relation to his immediate family, his neighbours and local community in Swindon, and ultimately, his own understanding of himself. This is an understanding that is continually maturing and gaining in insight as the narrative unfolds.

What we might term the 'narrative appeal' of autism in cultural texts is that it easily signifies possibly the most radical form of personal Otherness. Indeed, it is the personification of difference and Otherness: a person, just like you or me (so the argument runs), who is in fact nothing like you or me, but rather subject to a condition that supposedly defies logic and understanding (Murray 25).

¹⁹ Although, as discussed later in this chapter, Christopher's 'unreliability' or otherwise as a narrator can certainly be problematised.

Stuart Murray's discussion of the 'narrative appeal' of autistic characters in texts concerned with Otherness is an apt entryway into a discussion of *Curious Incident*. As we will see, Christopher's Otherness as presented by Haddon is both deeply 'personal', in terms of his own understanding of himself, and more general, when considered in terms of the secondary characters, who represent normative attitudes and behaviours in the novel. At the heart of Christopher's narrative is a deep concern with questions of 'logic and understanding', from his over-literal interpretation of the world around him, to his attempt, Sherlock Holmes-like, to solve the mystery of the eponymous dog, through the implementation of his own brand of 'logic'.

Christopher is anxious from the start of his narrative to demonstrate the aspects of his identity that he perceives mark him out as being 'different' or 'special' from his peers: 'I'm the first person to do an A-level from my school because it's a special school' (Haddon 71). Pertinently, Christopher believes that 'special' in this context acts as a patronising euphemism and seeks to differentiate himself from his classmates, many of whom evidently possess learning disabilities, by demonstrating what he perceives to be his intellectual superiority in terms of, for example, his precocious knowledge of Latin: 'Terry is stupid, so *quod erat demonstrandum* which is Latin for *Which is the thing that was going to be proved*, which means *Thus it is proved*' (Haddon 33). With this in mind, although Christopher, whose Otherness stems primarily from the difficulties in communication he suffers as a result of his autistic spectrum condition, is seen receiving confused and ignorant treatment by various parties throughout the novel, his preoccupation with logic and rationality also allows him to

expose and comment upon the illogical and often humorously absurd aspects of adult behaviour:

When Father got up in the morning he always put his trousers on before he put his socks on and it wasn't logical but he always did it that way, because he liked things in a nice order, too. Also whenever he went upstairs he went up two at a time always starting with his right foot. [...] I was just noticing how things were, and that wasn't clever. That was just being observant (Haddon 31-32).

Christopher's Otherness provides Haddon with an independent lens through which to 'observe' and frame the world in which he is writing. At one point, Christopher says of himself, 'I see everything' (Haddon 174). Indeed, although he regularly misreads or misinterprets situations, he is, nevertheless, a scrupulous observer of the world around him. This is reminiscent of the narrator in Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye To Berlin* (1939) whose tale of expat life in Weimar Berlin begins with the line 'I am a camera with its shutter open, [...] recording' (Isherwood 1). In *Curious Incident* Christopher's gaze works in a comparable way to Isherwood's 'camera'. He depicts or 'records' the world exactly as he sees it and in this way, his perspective has a particular clarity of vision. The extent to which this perspective of 'seeing' is unique to characters in fiction (such as, for example, Christopher or Isherwood), who are Othered due to their outsider status in the contexts in which they are described (Christopher in suburban Swindon and Isherwood as an 'Englishman abroad' in Germany before the Second World War), is arguable. However, the Otherness of these characters do provide a privileged insight into a specific time and place.

For example, Haddon's representation of London in *Curious Incident* is particularly visceral. The immediacy of the sights, sounds and colours that hit Christopher upon arriving at Paddington Station is depicted through his fractured stream-of-consciousness, with a

particular focus on the onslaught of textual information, in the form of shop signs, business logos, ticket information etc, that is suddenly present in this environment (appendix 6). In one of the novel's most effective and disorienting sequences, the reader is manipulated into seeing what Christopher sees - the signs blur out of cohesion. Thus, the reader becomes, albeit temporarily, as alien in the fictional station environment as Christopher, as they struggle to make sense of this chaotic litany of letters and shapes. Semiotics, in terms of words, typography, letters and signs, play an important part in this novel, from the cryptic letters Christopher finds in his father's closet, to the London Underground map he must fathom in order to travel to his mother's new home in Willesden. It is central, I would argue, to the way in which Haddon constructs Christopher's Otherness, because these are part of the everyday 'codes' that the non-autistic characters in the text negotiate with simplicity, but which Christopher habitually fails to recognise and understand. Susan Petrilli asserts:

In the framework of semiotics of interpretation, Otherness emerges at the very heart of identity, as a constitutive part of it. Identity is configured in the dialectic and dialogic dynamics of the relation between interpreted sign and interpretant sign in the thought processes of a single subject (597).

In relation to what Petrilli views as the othered individual's inability to access and interpret the 'signs' that govern everyday life, Christopher's status as Other can be viewed as stemming from his inability to read and participate in such pedestrian semiotic codes. In this case, this is presented as a breakdown of understanding between signifier, the item or 'thing' that is central to the communication process of information, and the signified or 'interpretant' sign - the concept or information itself, and the intended effect of this on the reader.

Christopher's failure to understand life's quotidian language is another strategy Haddon uses to demonstrate the manner in which Christopher is Othered in the text. This is pertinently illustrated in the following exchange: 'I asked the policeman, "How much does it cost to get a ticket for a train to London?"... And he said, "About 20 quid." And I said, "Is that pounds?"' (Haddon 187). Vernacular and slang is another form of 'coded' language for Christopher, often failing to precisely describe the item in question. Notably as well, Christopher also appears to have difficulty differentiating between, and using synonyms interchangeably, and it is this linguistic preciseness that, as we have discussed, Christopher relies upon to make sense of the world. In this manner, Haddon demonstrates how Othering a process language use can be for certain individuals.

Haddon's use of the Othered child to question and critique the mores of those who hold positions of power and authority over him in the novel, for example, his mother, father and the various policemen he encounters throughout the book, has its precedent in English writing as early as Shakespeare. Here, 'fools',²⁰ Othered as they are by class, position in court and perceived limited intelligence, routinely offer sage words of wisdom, as well as exposing the moral anachronisms of the powerful. 'Only fools and children calculate' (I.iii.74) asserts Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599), and it is Christopher's 'calculations', his literal sensibilities and perceptions of how and why the people around him behave as they do, that results both in his marginalisation in the novel, as well as his insightfulness, self-reflection and honesty. It is also why, when Christopher claims

20 There is an interesting link to be made here when we consider the term *idiots savants* (referring to those who inhabit one extreme of the autistic spectrum, who display uncommon and unusual talents - consider Christopher's ability to memorise, for example) literally translates to 'foolish wise ones'.

'everything I have written here is true' (Haddon 25), the reader has less reason to immediately question this assertion in the manner in which they may be attuned to in response to a traditionally unreliable narrator such as Huck Finn in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), whose narrative is characterised by a litany of tricks, lies and deception.²¹ As literary critics, our guards are automatically raised when encountering any narrator who insists that their narrative is wholeheartedly 'true'.

However, Christopher, as we are now aware, presents merely the facts as he sees them, and these facts are sometimes shared in minute detail, on occasion down to the time to the nearest minute when an event took place. For example: 'It was 1:12 a.m. when Father arrived at the police station. I did not see him until 1:28 a.m.' (Haddon 21). The irony of this novel is that, of course, calculation, logic and rationality – the tools Christopher has at his disposal, prove to be wholly inappropriate in terms of trying to decode the often cryptic behaviours of the people that surround him. Humans, Christopher begins to realise, are not predictable in the way for example, sequences of prime numbers are. However, whilst Christopher's interpretation of facts may be flawed, they are at least 'the truth' in as much as the concept can exist at all in a work of fiction.

Autistic children often fail to understand the artifices and contrivances on which lies are built. To cite Bryna Siegel: 'imagination is an area of development where children with autism often have difficulty' (39), and this is certainly the case with Christopher. He even bluntly asserts at an early stage in the text, 'I can't tell lies' (Haddon 24), a statement which

21 The novel even commences with the protagonist discussing, in a much emulated coup of meta-fiction, the manner in which Twain the author, upon telling previous tales 'told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched...' (Twain 49).

works to his advantage, and arguably, the reader's, to seal a relationship of honesty and openness between the story's teller and receiver. This is not to say, however, that Christopher is incapable of dreaming and imagination. In various episodes in the novel, Christopher is depicted in a state of ponderous repose, often having wedged himself into the nearest crevice or cubby. 'I really like little spaces' (65), he tells us, and this is confirmed when Christopher seeks refuge from the policeman on the London train by squeezing himself onto the luggage rack and, on being revealed, is nicknamed the 'train elf' (206) by a fellow passenger. Indeed, it is interesting to note Haddon's choice of an 'elf' in terms of this comparison to Christopher. Like Christopher, elves in folklore are traditionally equivocal in terms of their association with 'ordinary' people, and also have the ability to either cooperate with and guide them, or alternatively, severely hinder their progress.

This is something we witness happening on various occasions to humorous effect in relation to the police in the novel. Also, likening the experience in the luggage rack to 'being on my own in a tiny spacecraft' (65), Christopher explains: '...sometimes when I want to be on my own I get into the airing cupboard in the bathroom and slide in beside the boiler and pull the door closed behind me and sit there and think for hours and it makes me feel very calm' (65). In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault considers the 'oppositions' (46) that exist between various 'human sites and spaces' (46). These 'oppositions', he argues, are delineated in terms of: 'Private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred' (46). For Foucault, 'Othered spaces' exist for 'things to find their natural ground and stability' (46). Therefore, when Christopher 'slides in' to the airing cupboard then, he is entering a place that is, for him, sacred – a place that

allows him to feel 'stability' and 'calmness', and ultimately to escape a world that is stressful and confusing.

Although Christopher's decision to leave Swindon to search for his mother cannot be ascribed to one of the more traditional reasons young people run away from home (primarily drugs, alcohol and abuse – reasons we will encounter in later chapters), from a socio-cultural perspective and, given the argument I made at the beginning of this thesis that, like all literature, these novels are born out of a specific historical moment, it is worth noting that the new millennium in the UK saw unprecedented levels of child runaways. Notably too, given the case presented in this novel, is that the vast majority of these were travelling to London. This is evidenced by data collected by *The Children's Society* (in a five-yearly document they produce entitled *Still Running* [2011]) which makes for uncomfortable reading. It is suggestive again, of a country in which family breakdown is on the rise, and the notion of childhood as a 'safe space', are, among certain sectors of society at least, breaking down.

Christopher attempts to reclaim a sense of 'stability' (thrown out of balance by the killing of the dog), in his investigation of the 'curious incident' at the heart of the novel. As such, the novel invokes aspects of the 'detective' genre and this, as Ruth Gilbert explains, resonates with Haddon's broader project in the novel:

The narrative is nearly always one of isolation, misunderstanding, investigation. In order to understand his own narrative the teenage hero must piece together the clues that lie scattered around him and eventually develop a fuller and more mature picture. Or, to put it another way, these are detective stories in which the teenage boy discovers who he is and who he might become. Christopher's story shows that detective fiction can be about more than murdered dogs, dead parents and spiralling deceptions. They are stories about identity (242-243).

As we have seen, the process by which Christopher interprets or 'pieces together' such 'clues' or 'signs' if we employ the language used by critics interested in semiotic approaches, are at the root of Haddon's construction of Christopher as Other. This is because, as in the 'quid / pound' example discussed previously, they are often shown to be pedestrian and widely-accepted everyday 'codes' that, through his lack of understanding, re-enforce Christopher's Otherness. The theme of reading problematic signs, clues and codes, is a central concern for detectives. Ultimately, this is what Christopher becomes in his attempt to locate the dog's murderer, but also, as Gilbert argues, as he seeks to explore and understand his own identity as a young man with autism. This theme is introduced in the initial chapter in which Christopher introduces himself and explains the difficulties he experiences in interpreting human faces as signifiers of emotion (appendix 7):²²

When I first met Siobhan, she showed me this picture [...] and I knew that it meant "sad", which is what I felt when I found the dead dog. Then she showed me this picture [...] and I knew that it meant "happy", like when I'm reading about the Apollo space missions. Then she drew some other pictures [...] but I was unable to say what these meant (Haddon 2).

The novel therefore opens by priming the reader with an expectation that the proceeding narrative will *not* contain traditional representations of emotional experience as a result of the protagonist's evident disassociation from the typical signifier of human feeling, the face. Gilbert suggests that this sense of emotional dissonance in a novel which is, by its very nature an emotionally charged creative medium designed to induce feelings of empathy in the reader, means that Christopher's status as emotionally marginalised necessitates the reader taking on an active role as detective.

²² The page featuring the images referred to in the text is available in appendix 7 and represented in the passage by ellipses [...].

With this in mind, they are forced to respond to clues and indicators in order to decipher Christopher's emotional state at any given time in the text. The detective process that is focused on developing a 'fuller and more mature picture' (Gilbert 242) of the textual landscape is one that is shared then, between Christopher himself, and the reader.

Geoff Hamilton and Brian Jones state also that, in their opinion, the novel is 'an exemplary work of metafiction' (80). This is due, not only to Haddon's adoption of the detective genre's structural underpinnings, but also through his portrayal of Christopher discovering the famous works of this genre himself - specifically Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of The Baskervilles* (1902), Christopher's 'favourite book' (88). He discusses its resonance with him:

Doctor Watson says about Sherlock Holmes
*...his mind...was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these
 strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted.*
 And that is what I am trying to do by writing this book (92-93).

As Gilbert attests (247), the affinity between Christopher and Holmes could be said to be pertinent, not only because of the parity between the two characters' missions as 'detectives', but also in terms of Haddon's alignment of Christopher with Holmes, a perennial Other. Holmes' 'bohemian' (Doyle 97) habits and behaviour position him as an outsider in middle-class late-nineteenth century Marylebone in which the novels are set. Similarly, Christopher's eccentric behaviour, from his unwarranted and somewhat accusatory visits to his neighbours' homes in order to question them about the dog's death, to his insistence on having his pet rat accompany him on his excursions, appear incongruous with the prevailing atmosphere of bland conformity of the Swindon housing estate where he and his father live.

Whilst a character's Otherness can be re-enforced by setting then, an arguably more

important authorial concern relates to the nature of narrative itself. In *Curious Incident*, part of what characterises Christopher as Other are the difficulties experienced in locating and negotiating a secure 'narrative' for his life. Individuals with autistic spectrum conditions may perceive life to be more chaotic and harder to navigate than their non-autistic counterparts and forming a 'narrative' from these disordered and fragmented parts is a continual challenge, as Haddon's novel demonstrates. Similarly to the problems that Christopher faces in terms of interpreting the signs and symbols that we discussed previously, his advocacy of the 'Occam's Razor' principle, which he accurately translates from its Latin roots as meaning 'no more things should be presumed to exist than are absolutely necessary' (Haddon 113), is understandable in his case, because it implies a literal sensibility in regards to solving problems. Ultimately however, Haddon demonstrates the failings of an 'Occam's Razor' mentality in terms of Christopher's attempt to bring order to life's inherently chaotic nature. This is because the 'things that exist' have not always been fully or accurately interpreted by Christopher, or he has dismissed them as superfluous, instead obsessively focusing on the 'red herrings' (90) that add further layers of confusion to his narrative. Essentially then, as Gilbert indicates (244); the 'obvious things' (Haddon 92) in the novel are only 'obvious' to those with the capacity to 'read' that which is not made explicit. Sherlock Holmes famously excelled at this, in a way that Christopher, unfortunately, does not. If Christopher can be read, as Allen argues, as a 'heroic' (167) character, then this inability to infer and 'read between the lines' is shown to be, if not exactly a 'fatal' flaw, a flaw nonetheless.

Otherness, as I have shown, relies on being situated in opposition to preconceived notions of what constitutes normativity in a given context. Although Poststructuralist theorists such as Jacques Lacan have problematised the very nature of 'normativity' anyway (1966), some

awareness of normativity as a stable concept, as indicative of mainstream behaviours and concerns is useful in our attempt to 'read Otherness' in this chapter. As Foucault established in *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) and *Abnormal* (1974), notions of normativity evolve out of particular social, historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the hegemonic labelling of certain groups or individuals as Other reflects and re-enforces power relationships. In terms of *Curious Incident*, such power relationships are reflected in language, which has, among its many powers, the ability to organise the world into hierarchies. Christopher, as we know, is inherently suspicious of language, having previously been exposed to its vilifying effects as a result of other people's mockery of him. He also begins to learn, through his father's teaching, the manner in which language has the ability to suggest ulterior reasons for behaviour or mask complex emotions such as jealousy:

Terry [...] said I would only get a job collecting supermarket trollies or cleaning out donkey shit at an animal sanctuary and they didn't let spazzers drive rockets that cost billions of pounds. When I told this to Father he said that Terry was jealous of my being cleverer than him (Haddon 33).

Similarly, Christopher realises that language may add a further layer of confusion to his understanding of the world that is already compromised by the nature of his autistic spectrum condition. Citing various examples (19), he discusses his particular confusion with regards to metaphor and the absurdity of 'describing something by using a word for something that it isn't' (20). He goes as far as interpreting this deliberate manipulation of language as 'lying' (20) and resulting in something reductive ('confusing' [20]) that excludes those who do not possess an adequate knowledge of how this 'code' of communication works, from participating in discourse. Again, in Foucauldian terms, Haddon thereby explores how language is used to re-enforce the power of the dominant normative group, whilst denying agency to the Other.

The extent to which Haddon presents Christopher's autism as a 'disability' is arguable. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we are never explicitly told the specific nature of Christopher's condition. This is perhaps partly due to Haddon's belief in the reductive nature of labels due to their potential imposition of a pre-cast identity. In this way, the authorial perspective can be viewed through a Disability Studies lens, and this is certainly born out in Haddon's representation of Christopher.

In her seminal 2013 article on the novel entitled 'Normalcy, Knowledge, and Nature in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*' Jaquette Ray explores a Disability Studies approach to 'reading' *Curious Incident*. She begins by offering an instructive outline of this strand of sociological theory: 'the scholarly field questions the very term 'disability' [...], and the social structures that rely on consolidating power by defining disability as a deviant category—as "Other"' (N.P.A, 2013). As Ray's article has been such an integral part of my research for this chapter, I wish to examine it in greater depth; particularly in relation to how she embarks upon a reading of *Curious Incident* through a Disability Studies lens. Ray's interpretation of Christopher through a Disability Studies lens, is, I would argue, particularly pertinent in terms of my wider exploration and understanding of this character's Otherness.

Throughout her article, Ray continually refers to a seminal theorist in Disability Studies - Lennard Davis. One of the founding individuals of this reasonably recent theoretical discipline, Davis asserts that integral to disabled people being positioned in society as Other, is the notion of such people posing a 'problem' to notions of 'normalcy' in society:

I would like to focus not too much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. I do this because the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person (1).

Here then, Davis invokes the Poststructuralist contention that 'normalcy' is an arbitrary construct used to satisfy the agenda of a certain group, class or rank of individuals. This ensures that the powerlessness of those deemed to be Other (or 'abnormal' to refer to Foucault), is maintained. The notion of 'normalcy' can be seen to be disempowering where individuals 'internalise' such norms and try to change or 'correct' behaviour accordingly. They are penalised if they fail to do this and become objects of stricter societal control. This, Davis goes on to discuss, is likely not to be a conscious process in the contemporary period, but rather, as a result of historically-held fears in respect to those who do not possess an 'ideal' mind or body (2).

Davis's seminal volume *The Disability Studies Reader* (1997) describes a 'model' of disability known as the 'social model'. This, Ray explains in her article, suggests that the main 'disabling' factor is society itself, due to its systemic disenfranchisement of those who fail to conform to normative behavioural and aesthetic modes (N.P.A, 2013). She discusses how the 'social model' holds that disability is simply another aspect of human identity, i.e.: something that contributes to a person's uniqueness in the same manner as hair or eye colour. Ray goes on to contrast this with the 'medical model' of disability, which views the human body as a system that, on encountering the disruption of anything disabling, must be 'mended' in order to function 'normally' (N.P.A. 2013). Relating this to *Curious Incident*, Ray considers how, through avoiding the medical term for Christopher's disability and demonstrating, through his interactions with secondary characters in the novel, much of the disabling nature of Christopher's Asperger's Syndrome is due to the lack of understanding and negativity shown towards him by others, Haddon's sympathies appear to be in line with the social model (N.P.A, 2013). With this in mind, Ray shows how Christopher's 'disability' is

routinely depicted as the opposite of disabling, as something in fact, *enabling* - that makes him 'special' (N.P.A, 2013). Indeed, Christopher believes in himself and his abilities implicitly - 'I think I would make a very good astronaut' (65) and 'I can do anything' (268), he asserts. He also rarely appears concerned about how others perceive or approach him. In this way then, Ray makes the case for how Christopher's 'disability' can be perceived as being, to an extent, liberating. Haddon however, as Ray suggests (2013 N.P.A), is too perceptive an author not to consider the pejorative connotations of the term 'special', particularly when used as a euphemism for somebody to whom the label, 'special needs' is, as in the case of Christopher, often applied. In a particularly astute passage, Christopher considers the contradictions of the term:

All the children at my school are stupid. Except I'm not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I'm meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning difficulties because learning to speak French or understanding Relativity is difficult, and also everyone has special needs, like Father who has to carry a little packet of artificial sweetening tablets around with him to put in his coffee to stop him getting fat (56).

Ray (2013, N.P.A) considers how language can be manipulated to provide a positive gloss on otherwise negative terminology or attributes. The impreciseness and myriad meanings of words confound Christopher. Due to the disassociation he experiences as a result of his autistic spectrum condition, in addition to the difficulties he experiences negotiating empathy, he cannot comprehend that the term 'special' is designed to enable a sense of dignity and respect that his preferred word ('stupid') obviously lacks. Indeed, as Ray goes on to assert (2013, N.P.A), socially appropriate use of language is presented as being a pertinent aspect of normativity here then, and Christopher's Otherness is ascribed to his inability to negotiate this.

Susan Wendell, another key Disability Studies theorist that Ray's article introduces (in addition to Lennard Davis), in relation to her reading of *Curious Incident*, considers how preconceived boundaries between terms such as 'disabled' and 'non-disabled' are inherently problematic because of the way in which *all* human bodies are subject to entropy and ultimate disablement (qtd. in Ray, 2013, N.P.A), not *just* those whom society has labelled 'disabled':

We are all disabled eventually. Most of us will live part of our lives with bodies that hurt, that move with difficulty or not at all, that deprive us of activities we once took for granted or that others take for granted, bodies that make daily life a physical struggle (Wendell 263).

As Ray explains in her interpretation of the quote from Wendell (2013, N.P.A), the term 'disabled' is exposed here as being inadequate then, because everyone necessarily experiences physical fluctuation as we progress through life. In fact, what emerges from both Wendell and Ray's thinking here is the idea that disability inevitably exists in a 'normal' life trajectory. Therefore, *Curious Incident*, Ray's article suggests, achieves comparable 'cultural work' to the writings of Disability Studies theorists such as Wendell and Davis, because, like them, Haddon's novel demonstrates a devotion to interrogating the concept of normativity (2013, N.P.A). Through Christopher's gaze, Ray shows how the reader is presented with an absurdist vision of normalcy as it relates to mainstream societal understandings of the concept (2013, N.P.A). Rules, Christopher realises, are designed to reinforce 'normal' expectations around which society attempts to organise itself. However, there is little point to them, Christopher suggests, when 'people break rules all the time' (Haddon 38). Christopher cites examples of this, which increase in extremity:

Father often drives at over 30mph in a 30mph zone' [38]) to the evasion of Biblical commandments in wartime: 'In the Bible it says *Thou shalt not kill* but there were

the Crusades and two world wars and the gulf war and there were Christians killing people in all of them (38).

Against this interpretation, Christopher himself is positioned as a paragon of normativity in terms of his desire to abide by the rules that other people routinely ignore. Indeed, also highlighted by Ray, is the way in which Christopher's primary desires are to fulfil reasonably *traditional* societal expectations and values (N.P.A, 2013). These are summarised by his desire to 'get a degree, and a job, earn lots of money and [...] get a lady to marry me' (Haddon 58). Such emulation of a path routinely attributed to a 'normal' life, Ray suggests, clearly demonstrates that Christopher's goals and values situate him within a 'normal' frame of reference, whilst simultaneously being branded Other, as a result of the stigma associated with his condition (2013, N.P.A). In addition, Ray's article discusses how such a 'stigmatization' is viewed as a form of oppression or 'tyranny' in the work of Disability Studies theorists such as Davis (who coined the phrase: 'the tyranny of normalcy' [2005]). She explains how such theorists view it as a form of 'tyranny' because it is suggestive of the manner in which those who have the power to decide what constitutes 'normal' in any given circumstance, conversely are the arbiters of what constitutes 'abnormal' (2013, N.P.A).

Ray considers how Christopher perceives those around him who are ascribed with traditionally 'normal' characteristics (notably adults), as being inferior (2013, N.P.A); or 'stupid' to use his favoured term. They are, in his eyes, routinely blind in the face of truth, irrational, superstitious and even, as in the case of the murdered dog, cruel. Her article shows how, as the novel progresses, the reader is apt to find themselves becoming increasingly biased by Christopher's mode of thinking. Indeed, if 'normality' encompasses such negative characteristics, then, as Ray contends 'perhaps normal is *not* ideal' (2013, N.P.A). Here then, she acknowledges the manner in which Haddon implores the reader to

view Christopher's Otherness as something positive, because of how it allows him to negate and counteract the folly of normativity (2013, N.P.A).

Crucially, in her article, Ray makes a key link between a Disability Studies perspective and Haddon's negotiation of narrative voice, and specifically his authorial choice of a first-person perspective to grant agency to Christopher's singular experiences of, and interactions with the world. This contrasts with what she terms the 'normalizing gaze of a third-person narrator' (2013, N.P.A). Indeed, Christopher's first-person narrative is key, I would contend, to this novel's construction of Otherness and interrogation of 'normalcy' more generally.

One of the main tenets of Poststructuralism is the destabilization of that which we might broadly call 'truth'. This, Poststructuralist theorists argue, is because 'truth' is inherently subjective and our understanding of what constitutes it is invariably influenced by those in positions of power. In *Power / Knowledge* (1980), Foucault envisages truth as itself comprising a 'form of hegemony' (133). He considers how a 'regime of truth' (131) exists in societies where those in power employ artifices of truth to both re-enforce their power and further oppress those who fail to comply with these constructions – those essentially, deemed to be Other.

Theorists such as Foucault and Lacan believe that singular perspectives on the world, and the supposition that these comprise a 'true' stance, only serve to negate the expression of exceptional groups and beliefs. Through Haddon's privileging of Christopher's Othered gaze, the reader is encouraged to adopt a similar critical stance and evaluate their own understanding of truth in relation to subjectivity and normativity. Ultimately, comparably to Ray, I would argue that Haddon utilises Christopher's Otherness as a vehicle through which

to encourage readers to critique dominant definitions of normativity, and to understand its potential to be manipulated, to suit the objectives of the mainstream social order.

Anne Fine is a writer, who, throughout her nearly four decades of writing for children has returned consistently to the theme of Otherness, and specifically how people engage with and react to characters who are portrayed as being at odds with the world in which they live. Fine's 2002 novel *Up On Cloud Nine* opens with Stol, the protagonist, lying comatose in a hospital bed. Following a 'fall' (as the novel progresses, the extent to which this 'fall' was, in fact, deliberate is increasingly questioned), from a high window, Stol is initially described as 'just a slab of dead meat' (Fine 3). Stol's narratives then shifts between the past and present, as Ian, the narrator, muses on the various facets of his character that result in his 'peculiarity' (66). Stol's Otherness in the novel is frequently born out of his status as a fantasist and dreamer. He is, to quote Brian O'Shaughnessy, an example of 'a phantasizing' [sic] character 'of the Walter Mitty kind' (220). This is explored by Fine in relationship to Stol's alignment with angels and devils:

'I talk to God quite often,' Stolly informed no one in particular [...] 'In fact, when I grow up, I would quite like to be an angel' (42-43).

He had something else on his mind too – the devil he believed to be living on his shoulder. 'Stol, this is nonsense!' howled my dad. 'What sort of devil?' (46).

Fine characterises Stol in relation to what Wilkie-Stibbs terms the 'angel-monster child' (4) then. Citing examples from Foucault's treatment of the 'marginal' or 'interstitial' (qtd. in Wilkie-Stibbs 4), figures who inhabit the 'thresholds' (13) of existence examined in *Abnormal*, Wilkie-Stibbs asserts that a recurring representation of the child as Other is focused on what she terms an 'angel-monster' (4) paradigm:

If the monster is inscribed in the 'abnormal', we might confidently assume that in a class at the other end of this spectrum is inscribed 'the angel'. The term is already familiar to the disciplines of both women's studies and children's literature, in the 'angel-monster' instantiation of women, and more specifically in this context, the 'angel-monster' child (4).

This 'angel-monster' binary is overt in *Up On Cloud Nine*, Stol's wish to 'be an angel' (Fine 43) coexisting with the 'devil [...] on his shoulder' (46). The status of this as a central theme in the novel is re-enforced by the image on the jacket design of the 2006 Corgi reissue (appendix 8). Here, the blend of halo and forked tail represents Stol's status as what Foucault would consider a 'threshold dweller', existing on the boundaries of two states of being. If, as the title of this chapter suggests, the Other is a peripheral individual, inhabiting 'margins' or 'thresholds', then Stol is certainly indicative of this.

The idea of the 'innocent and playful' child contrasting with the 'wicked and sinful' one (Rogers 29) – (again, these polarised modes of being could be said to symbolise Foucault's 'thresholds' that are transgressed in the process of identity building), is traceable in various works of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature. For example, in the poetry of William Blake, childhood represents innocence until it is compromised by the inevitable 'experience' of age and environment. In this way, Blake conforms to a Lockean understanding of the child existing as what Lois Kuznets terms 'a blank slate on which environment could make its mark' (35). Contemporary literary critics updated the terminology surrounding such a 'split image' of the child in fiction, with Chris Jenks discussing the alterity between the 'Apollonian and the Dionysian child' (166) in his seminal work *Childhood* (1996). Similarly, Ellen Pifer discusses dolls versus demons in *Images Of The Child in Contemporary Writing* (2000), and Kimberly Reynolds presents the same phenomenon as the difference between the child as either 'demonised' or 'idealised' (2001). I would argue that Stol's occupation of this

interstitial landscape is a crucial contributing factor in terms of his Otherness, although notably, as the novel progresses, his 'demonic' qualities seemingly outweigh his 'idealised' ones.

Indeed, the novel reaches its crescendo as Stol becomes increasingly, as he terms it: 'tempt[ed] by oblivion' (162). The second half of the book is darkened by his preoccupation with suicide, and attempting to find a 'fool proof method' (180) of accomplishing this. Prior to the 'fall' that results in his hospitalisation, Stol speaks one of the most telling and unsettling lines in the novel: 'What I mean is, I feel I have another self hiding inside me. I know him well because he's with me all the time, everywhere I go. But it's like being haunted' (146). This notion of 'haunting' is re-enforced by Jason Finch and Peter Nynas who, writing in *Transforming Otherness* (2011) assert: 'Otherness prevails as a haunting [...] shadow in our experiences of people, texts and images' (5). Arguably, it is this sense of a 'haunting shadow' that truly characterises Stol, foregrounding his Otherness. In addition however, there is a prevailing sense of ominousness attributed to this character. To illustrate this, where Christopher in *Curious Incident* is regularly encountered in various states of repose 'thinking' (Haddon 65), Stol is described as 'brooding' (Fine 181).²³

In their discussion of what they term 'schizophrenic' children in *The Psychology of Demonization* (2006), Nahi Alon and Haim Omer state: 'this is a special kind of "monster" whose extreme destructiveness is only matched by its equally extreme deviousness' (16). Alon and Omer posit the centrality of notions of 'monstrousness' in terms of constructions of Otherness and certainly, the 'destructiveness' and 'deviousness' that they argue are

²³ Notably however, this could be also be interpreted as a facet of narration. I.e.: Where Christopher tells his own story, Stol's is narrated by his sister.

inherent characteristics of the 'monster', could appropriately be ascribed to a character such as Stol. Indeed, as indicated in the chronology of events that occurred during the period with which this thesis is concerned (2001 – 2012), the period sees an increase of media reporting that vilifies young people (as 'destructive' and 'devious'), centring particularly on the London riots and the associated 'ephebiphobia' that occurred in their aftermath.

Notably, however, Stol's 'monstrousness' is rarely directed at others. Ian describes Stol's dramatic act of self-destructiveness as follows:

'He was being very careful', he says. 'All he was doing was getting balanced on the windowsill when -' I stopped. Stol's eyes were closed, but I could see the glint of tears beneath the lids. I couldn't carry on. I just felt awful. After all, behind this tower of lies there is some truth he'll have to tell me and we'll have to face. Mum is quite right. Each day Stol stays alive and safe is practically a triumph for everyone around him. My voice was trembly. 'And then he fell' (196).

Much of the effectiveness of Fine's novel stems from the absence of dialogue surrounding this episode that would enable the reader to determine whether Stol's 'fall' is accidental or deliberate, one of his litany of daredevil escapades ('mad ideas' [32]), or a serious attempt to take his own life. Moreover, the extent to which Stol *himself* is aware of the deliberateness or otherwise of the act, is also in question throughout the novel. Stol's Otherness is firmly rooted to this indecipherability of character, and the fact that he remains as enigmatic and misunderstood by the narrator, reader and secondary characters at the end of the novel, as he is at the start. In *Invisible Natives* (2002), Armando Prats coined the phrase: 'Otherness is absence and absence Otherness' (5). This would certainly appear to be the case in regard to Stol, the 'absence' of whose voice in the present sections of the novel has the mythologising effect associated with someone who is firmly situated 'outside the rules' (97), wholly 'on the margins' of experience.

Fine further explores Stol's status in relation to 'rules' in the following extract, exploring his Otherness in the context of school:

It is as if he doesn't even notice some people are older, or stiffer, or more important. I've heard him ask headteachers if they want to swap yoghurts, and excuse himself for being late to lessons by explaining he and the janitor were discussing Mesopotamia. And no one puts him down for 'being smart'. Even way back in nursery, he'd be trailing round asking the minders, 'what is the exact difference between a goblin and a hobgoblin?' Or rooting through the box of odds and ends. 'Which ones are odds and which are ends, please?' By primary school, anyone who drifted in his sights was risking a lecture on any of his passions: dinosaurs, astronomy, arctic expeditions, insects (144).

Here again, we observe a character inscribed with traits suggestive of an autistic spectrum condition. In his failure to 'tune in' (3), to cite Frith, and modify his behaviour to interact with different people, (those who are 'older, stiffer or more important'), Stol appears incongruous. Similarly, we might recall Christopher's difficulty in understanding and appreciating metaphors and idioms²⁴ in *Curious Incident* and compare it to Stol's question regarding the 'odds and ends' that he can only envisage literally. Similarly, autistic children often have various fascinations or obsessions, (referred to by Ian as Stol's 'passions'), about which they may have an unusually large cache of knowledge. Dodd states that: 'People with autism tend to focus purely on their interest and have little, or no awareness that others may not share the same interest' (94). This is evident in the extract above, in which Stol's 'passions' are not exactly shared with others, rather Ian describes them as being essentially forced onto 'anyone who drifted in his sights' in the form of a 'lecture'. The latter term implies a monologue lacking in socially appropriate, 'pragmatic language', rather than a dialogue.

24 Those he finds particularly confusing are listed on p.19 .

As in many of Fine's novels, for example, *Goggle-Eyes* (1989) and *Madame Doubtfire* (1987), the disruption of the family unit by an Othered individual is particularly pertinent in *Up On Cloud Nine*. Ann Alston suggests that 'what is particularly telling about Fine's work is its constant return to the family; certainly despite the variety of families presented, all her texts seek to resolve family problems, to strengthen the family' (61). It is against the context of family life that Stol's Otherness is constructed then. In tandem, Fine suggests that any sense of 'resolution' to the 'family problems' of which Stol's behaviour and actions are an undeniable catalyst, are as a direct result of the strength of the family unit. Although the family appears somewhat shambolic, and Fine's signature dark humour is regularly present in this section of the novel, for example, when Stol's mother suggests sending her husband a note simply stating 'Should we switch off your dear son's life support? Tick Yes or No' (7), it ultimately evolves into the narrative's guiding strength. Indeed, the poignant last line of the novel is particularly telling in this regard: 'Onwards and upwards. But that's how we go' (201). Here, Ian suggests that the 'family problem' of Stol is by no means 'resolved' at the end of the novel, rather it is a case of small steps, of gradual movement 'onwards and upwards' towards a deeper understanding of Stol and what *they* can do as a family (the use of the inclusive 'we' evidencing this), to support him. With this discussion in mind, Mark Osteen's assertion that 'the Otherness of autism [...] can be most negated, made most familiar, by incorporating it into the family structure' (253) is particularly pertinent. Families assimilate and 'own' the differences their members possess. They adapt to them, moulding themselves around them, and in doing so, 'negate' the individual's ultimate Otherness.

Murray considers how certain contemporary novels depicting autistic characters portray them as embodying 'difference and Otherness', by symbolising 'the alien within the human [...] the ultimate enigma' (25-26). Julia Kristeva further elucidates this, arguing in *A Stranger*

To Ourselves (1990) that the Other exists as the 'hidden face of our identity' - it is the 'stranger [who] inhabits us' (9). This suggests that the aspects of one's identity that may be *hidden* and are therefore the least controllable, may be contributing factors to an individual's Otherness. This idea is broadly significant in terms of this chapter's primary texts. Certainly Stol is characterised by something 'alien' and 'strange' that remains 'hidden' throughout the narrative, and he remains an 'enigma' even to Ian - his closest friend. The secondary characters discuss and attempt to 'decipher' this 'enigma'. This is pertinent because, in considering the perceptions of Stol articulated by the third parties in the novel, we are able to explore further dimensions of the manner in which his Otherness is represented. In this way we need to consider the secondary voices, or 'heteroglossia' to refer to Mikhail Bakhtin (1934), and the view of Stol they present. Niko Besnier argues that 'Otherness involves heteroglossia by default, because voices from the outside are always potentially in opposition to native voices' (86). Where, in a novel such as *Curious Incident* the 'native voice' is privileged through Christopher's first-person narration, this is not the case in *Up On Cloud Nine*. Here the reader's perception of Stol is filtered through the narrator's gaze that includes extracts of dialogue between secondary characters, such as Stol's family, teachers and classmates, as they converse with, or about Stol. If we concur with Besnier's argument that a 'voice from the outside', in this case, that of Ian's narrative, must exist 'in opposition' to the 'native voice', i.e. Stol narrating *his own* story (evidently not Fine's intention with this novel), and that a character's Otherness may be further reinforced as a result of this opposition, then we can observe the way in which even a well-meaning narrator can contribute to a character's Otherness.

Indeed, a narrator's inevitable misunderstandings, misinterpretations and subjective judgements are likely to result in a more fragmented and enigmatic representation of the

Othered subject. In short, they may contribute to what Stephen Farenga and Immanuel Ness term a 'process of Othering' in which the Other is 'render[ed] as silent and spoken for' (290).

This is the case, to an extent in *Up On Cloud Nine*, and is evident in the following extracts:

'Stol claims he's not a liar but a fantasist' (16) Ian explains in the third chapter,²⁵ his use of the verb 'claim' distancing him from, and revealing a lack of trust in Stol's assertion.

Similarly, Ian's reminiscence of their time in primary school begins with the line: 'Stol had mad ideas in class as well [...]' (32). Whilst 'mad' is obviously used here in a whimsical manner, it does imply that Stol's 'ideas' were out of the ordinary and lead the reader to presuppose, accurately as we later learn, that this had a marginalising impact on him in the context of school. Ian also recounts Stol's father's similarly playful, but nonetheless pejorative comments regarding his son: 'You know that friend of yours is touched with the feather of madness, don't you? The teachers say he's "just a little bit eccentric". Teachers are paid to be polite about other people's children, Ian. You mark my words. That boy is bats.' (23) Compared to Christopher, who the reader is likely to feel they know intimately by the last pages of *Curious Incident*, Stol remains as enigmatic at the end of the novel as he is at the beginning. The ultimate effect of the 'silences' (to cite Farenga and Ness), the gaps in dialogue and details left unsaid, such as those surrounding the ominous 'fall' around which the narrative hinges, is to render Stol unknowable. Whereas the specifics of Christopher's Otherness become not only familiar to the reader, but actually empowering and worthy of celebration in the novel's conclusion ('I can do anything' [Haddon 268]), the aspects of Stol's

²⁵ Presumably in an attempt to counterbalance the series of events he has described in chapter two which appear to provide reasonably solid evidence for Stol's notoriety in school achieved by being 'the most shocking, most dedicated liar' (Fine 16).

identity central to his construction as Other, for example, his preoccupation with suicide, death and destruction only become deeper, darker and more perplexing by the final chapter.

Incidentally again, comparable to the statistic relating to child runaways discussed earlier in regards to *Curious Incident*, it would appear that, another indicative facet of this thesis's chronology is its increasing suicide rate among young people which, according to the Office for National Statistics, has been 'consistently' high, for both male and female teenagers, from the late 1990s onwards, although with adolescent females demonstrating a 'significant increase between 2013 and 2014' (2014). Again, this can be interpreted as evidence that the mental health of Britain's young people also appears to be faltering in the initial years of the new millennium, yet another contributor to their overall sense of disenfranchisement, and general lack of contentment and wellbeing during this period.

As in *Curious Incident* and *Up On Cloud Nine*, Gene Kemp's depiction of Troy in *Seriously Weird* has clear indicators of an autistic spectrum condition - specifically again, Asperger's Syndrome. Troy's father believes his son is what he terms an 'idiot genius' (118), the phrase alluding to the phrase *idiots savant* discussed in footnote four. The novel is narrated by Troy's older sister Claire and centres on, to cite the description on the back-cover of the Faber edition, 'how families and the outside world respond to people who see things differently' (2003). Troy, also comparably Christopher in *Curious Incident*, is obsessed with Mathematics and, when we first meet him, is ensconced in the process of solving a numerical puzzle. 'What were you writing out all those numbers for?' Troy's perennially interfering neighbour Morris asks him, 'you're always writing out numbers. You nutty or something?' (Kemp 10). With this in mind, each chapter in the novel is prefaced by a

different mathematical problem, of the sort that routinely fascinates and challenges Troy throughout the book. This is a unique strategy for encouraging the reader to empathise with Troy's uniquely numerate perspective on the world - he does, after all, treat the obstacles life places before him as if they are mathematical problems to be solved.²⁶

From this point on in the characterisation of Troy, synonyms for Other proliferate. These include but are not limited to: 'nutty' (10), 'wicked' (13), 'mad' (12) 'barmy' (15), 'crazy' (15) 'bonkers' (23) and the eponymous 'weird' (15). In the opening paragraph of Chapter Two, Claire reminisces on the moment she 'realized Troy was different' (15):

It was one day when he sat on a wet pavement in front of the fire station's yellow hydrant signs and refused to be shifted. Four over five, he kept murmuring, four over five, lovely lovely. Over and over and over. He screamed horribly as Mum and I tried to drag him away and a policeman came up to ask what we were doing to the little boy and some woman said that cruel people like my mother didn't deserve to have children. Quite a crowd gathered before we could get away with Troy, smiling at last in his buggy, Mum white-faced and me shouting. He did this with all the hydrant signs in town. Yet Mum still wouldn't listen to us when we said he was crazy, mad, nutty, barmy (15).

Interestingly here, it is the other children, Troy's siblings, who first allude to his Otherness, while their Mother desperately attempts to rationalise his behaviour: "'Boys are different. Boys will be boys" she'd murmur proudly as he did something awful. Again' (15). Claire's emphatic use of 'again' suggests the recurrent nature of Troy's transgressions, the frequency suggesting a presumed abnormality in his behaviour. The extract suggests Troy's need to be given both total control of his environment, and adequate time and freedom in which to autonomously indulge his numerically-based obsessions is crucial because without this he is apt to transform into something, in Claire's words, 'awful'. Sue Rubin, in an article drawing on her own experience, asserts that 'autism is not a social way of life. Many times

²⁶ On the final page of the Faber edition (122), Kemp reveals the solutions and explanations to some of these.

solitude is one's best friend' (89). This is certainly evident in terms of Troy who, at one stage in the novel disappears, in order, it is later revealed, to evade his father's attempt to send him to a 'mind doctor' (117). He returns several days later having been hiding in the loft alone and working on a new 'project' (116) - attempting to devise a mathematical algorithm to represent infinity (116). In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard speaks of the 'rationality of the roof' (18). Certainly, for Troy, this space does indeed represent such 'rationality', whilst, for his family, the decision to abandon the comfort and order of the domestic space to spend days alone in an uninhabited part of the house musing upon the nature of infinity, would appear to signify an overt deviation from the 'rational' world. Troy's loft acts as a liminal space in the novel, a 'heterotopia', to use the Foucauldian term.

Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia', a term first used in his eponymous 1967 essay, refers essentially to an 'Othered space', existing as somewhere liminal, defined by the transgression of the boundary or 'threshold' between a physical and mental experience of the world. In *Of Other Spaces* (1967), Foucault describes what he terms 'heterotopias of deviation' as being the sites in which 'individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (5). English Literature has a lengthy history of such heterotopias, some of which are discussed in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman In The Attic* (1979). In this study the authors consider the existence of 'heterotopias of deviation' in the domestic sphere, primarily read with regards to Victorian Literature viewed through a Feminist framework.

The titular example in Gilbert and Gubar's work refers to Rochester's banishment of his 'mad' wife Bertha Mason to the attic of their country home in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Occupied by somebody whose 'deviant' characteristic is the exhibition of behaviour that fails to conform to the normative modes of mid nineteenth-century English society, the attic

therefore becomes a heterotopia – a space of Otherness in the novel. In contrast however, to the example of an oppressive heterotopia explored by Gilbert and Gubar in terms of *Jane Eyre*, Troy's loft becomes a liberatory space, a refuge rather than a prison. This idea of the 'special place' or 'refuge' is, it should be noted, very common in children's literature. Its use as a recurring trope is observable in books as diverse as Clive King's *Stig of the Dump* (1963), Felice Holman's *Slake's Limbo* (1974) and, more recently, David Almond's *Kit's Wilderness* (1999).

Throughout the novel, Kemp provides the reader with various perspectives on Troy and the manner in which his Otherness affects those around him. His mother attributes his Otherness to that fact that: 'boys are different' (15), never quite, it is implied, having full faith in this assertion. His father responds to Troy with grim acceptance, described by Claire as 'patient' (17) whilst nevertheless admitting that 'he hadn't thought being a parent meant guerilla warfare all the time and having the neighbours hate him' (17). Ultimately however, Troy's father's 'patience' is strained to the point of a nervous breakdown, and he is temporarily exiled to the seaside. Troy's loathed next-door neighbour Morris objects to Troy because of his flippant transgression of rules: 'Mummy said you're a naughty boy and your Dad ought to give you a good hiding or you'll end up in prison when you grow up' (10). Claire, Troy's caring older-sister has perhaps the most measured perspective on Troy overall, although notably his disruption of her long-awaited sleepover in Chapter Six, by daubing numbers in paint on her newly-decorated bedroom wall, results in bitter denouncement: 'I hate my brother' (50). In one telling passage, Troy's parents reminisce about the harmonious life they once enjoyed:

'Talk to me like you used to. Before the Trojan Age.'
 'Trojan Age? What are you on about?'

'Trojan Age. You know there was a golden, happy time before we had him and everything went crazy' (45).

Here, Troy is envisaged through the metaphor of the 'Trojan', an invading force - his Otherness disrupting the order of the domestic space. Michal Rozbicki argues that 'for every established culture, a serious confrontation with Otherness is a disruption as its self-evident, shared order is destabilized' (207). If we read the 'established culture' as Troy's parent's home where previously a 'golden, happy time' had prevailed, it takes the 'serious confrontation of Otherness', in this case, the arrival of Troy, to 'destabilize' their harmony. The idea of Troy as 'invader' or 'Trojan horse' if we extend his father's metaphor, is further developed in terms of his comparability to something 'alien': 'Once Ness decided he was an alien' (7), the reader is told in the opening chapter. 'Alien' is a pertinent choice of language to describe Troy's Otherness, because it is indicative of a spectrum of difference ranging from the concept of general unfamiliarity, to an inhabitant of a different country, race or group, to an entity literally of unearthly provenance, i.e.: that of another planet. With the latter definition in mind, Troy is inscribed with aspects of what Martin Davies terms a 'Martian mind' (13),²⁷ displayed, for example, in terms of his aptitude for creating, and communicating through what Claire describes as 'codes' (80). For example, in the following extract, we observe an incident in which Troy fails to fill out school test papers with conventional responses:

'He's done exceptionally badly in everything. He's filled in the answers to the questions in numbers. His English paper was completely covered in them'.
 'It was probably written in code. One of his codes'.
 'Apparently he changed the letters for numbers, for example a = 1, b = 2, all the way to z = 26. But I don't think the English teacher wanted to spend his time working it out' (Kemp 80).

27 Referring to an interpretation of the philosopher Brian Farrell's writing (*Experience*, 1950) on the transformative nature of imaginative experience.

In our earlier consideration of *Curious Incident*, we examined how one of the ways Christopher's Otherness was represented, was through his inability to recognise and negotiate the quotidian 'codes' that surrounded him at the train station. In the passage above, this idea is subverted with the teacher failing to understand Troy's own 'code'. As well as this however, in failing to conform to the school's expectations of how the test should be completed, we witness an example of the way in which Troy routinely interrupts and fails to conform to the normalising 'codes of conduct' set down by the various overarching institutions in the book, for example, family and school.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asserts that in their gradual indoctrination of the individual to sets of prescribed rules and processes, institutions (the examples given in Foucault's work include prisons, schools, and army barracks), inevitably produce what he terms 'docile bodies' (*Discipline...* 135). A 'docile body' is, Foucault argues 'one that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved [...] through strict regimen of disciplinary acts' (136). We can see this process at work on various occasions in *Seriously Weird*, not least, as the previously extract demonstrated, in the context of school. School is obviously intended to be a site of 'transformation and improvement'. The test given to Troy could be viewed as an example of how this process is monitored or 'supervised' to reference the Foucauldian term, and 'disciplinary acts' ensue for those who transgress expectations. Troy, in his failure to 'play along' with the normalising codes of school, resists becoming a 'docile body' – moulded into the form expected by this institution. The examination, Foucault argues in

Discipline and Punish:

[...] Combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them (184).

The examination therefore becomes a way of marginalising Troy by further exposing his inadequacies in terms of the 'normative' expectations this 'surveillance' device is set up to re-enforce. Therefore, whilst he becomes Other in the school setting, the dual institutions of the family and school, both, Foucault believed, apparatuses for the production of human compliance to societal expectations and norms, continue to pursue their aim of 'normalising' Troy throughout the text. The final paragraph of the novel suggests that Troy is gradually becoming absorbed into this project: 'Every week he had to attend a class to teach him about *people* – how to talk to them, how to get on with them, how to recognise them. And he did improve. A bit' (Kemp 120). Here then, Claire articulates the perspective that difference is something in need of correction or 'improvement'. Ultimately, it is implied, the individual must learn to comply. In this way, Kemp's novel provides a less celebratory, and in many ways more problematic view of Otherness than, for example, Haddon in his depiction of Christopher in *Curious Incident*. Where Christopher, at the end of Haddon's novel realises the potential of Otherness to be envisaged as an empowering characteristic, Troy is left facing the expectation that he must ultimately 'improve' the aspects of his identity that contribute to his marginalisation. However, with this in mind, we might look to Richard Kearney's assertion for reassurance that Troy, for better or worse, will ultimately retain that which makes him unique: 'The human stranger before us always escapes our egological schemas and defies our efforts to treat him / her as a scapegoated "alien"' (67). If we consider Troy as the 'alien' Kearney describes (and, it is worth bearing in mind that this is a comparison also made by Troy's sister Ness), then we could view his attempt to communicate in code, such as in the example with his test paper, as a positive attempt to thwart the 'egological schemas' of those attempting to disenfranchise him.

Also integral to Troy's status as Other is Kemp's depiction of him as solitary and self-isolating. He states, for example: 'I don't have friends. I don't want friends. I just want you all to go away' (47), and the song he sings about the number one also emphasises his preoccupation with solitude: 'One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so' (83). In *Understanding Autism* (2005) Susan Dodd considers the relationship between autism and aloneness: 'aloneness has nothing to do with being alone physically, but rather with being alone mentally and emotionally' (149). This is certainly evident in terms of Troy, who, with the exception of his brief period in hiding in the loft, is rarely presented as being *physically* alone in the novel. In fact, as we have seen, he regularly attempts to shun the socialising influences of his family and friends, in favour of being 'left alone' (11) with his various 'projects' (116). It is notable however, that, in tandem with his attempts at self-exclusion from the social institutions of his family and school, Troy is also depicted as being a victim of processes of exclusion imposed on him by those who are in positions of power and authority in the novel. For example, in Chapter Ten, the headteacher excludes Troy from school, when he ransacks her office in the process of making a paper model to represent infinity:

'In the meantime you are excluded. Now go!
Troy looked up. He held up his eight-like shape.
'But look! Isn't it wonderful? It's infinity!
'Yes it is for you. An infinity of exclusion I hope!' (85).

If, as Glenda MacNaughton believes, 'Otherness is used to create and then legitimate practices of exclusion and inclusion' (85), and this, as we have seen, is certainly implicit in Foucault's conceptualisation of Otherness, then the headteacher's exclusion of Troy is both a *reaction* to his Otherness, his inability to comply with the 'normalising' framework of an institution such as a school, but also further *contributes* to it. Exclusion in this sense

therefore acts as a process by which the non-dominant individual may be silenced or disenfranchised. To refer back to the cultural and historical contexts of this thesis introduced in the previous chapter, this episode in the novel links pertinently to the 2002 Education Act highlighted there (specifically section fifty-two governing 'exclusion').²⁸ I will return to the theme of school exclusion in chapter three in relation to Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*.

With the publication of *Curious Incident* in 2003, Haddon prompted a surge of interest among writers for young people in attempting to depict characters with autistic spectrum conditions. In addition to the three novels this chapter focuses on, in recent years, there have been so many YA books featuring autistic characters published that such novels have become a cornerstone of the YA sub-genre termed 'sick lit'.²⁹ They include novels such as Francisco Stork's *Marcelo in the Real World* (2009), Matthew Green's *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* (2012) and, interestingly, *On The Edge of Gone* (2016) by Corinne Duyvis - a YA writer who, herself has an autistic spectrum disorder, and is therefore able to use the narrative form to reflect upon this experience from a personal perspective.³⁰

I would argue however, that it is also necessary to consider potential issues of representation stemming from the fact that the texts explored in this chapter were written

²⁸ The act, as discussed previously, legitimated the broader use of exclusion in schools than had previously been deemed necessary in the last decade of the twentieth century.

²⁹ The informal term that has come to characterise the current vogue for young-adult novels dealing with disability, illness and mental health. Some examples include John Green's *The Fault In Our Stars* (2012) (which depicts a love affair between two teenagers with terminal cancer), Jacqueline Wilson's *Katy* (2015) (about a character's attempt to come to terms with her partial paralysis) and Brian Conaghan's *When Mr Dog Bites* (2015) (focusing on a character with Tourette's Syndrome).

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/aug/17/autism-helped-me-become-author-corinne-duyvis>

by neurotypical (i.e.: non-autistic) writers. This is because, as Telory Arendell suggests, ‘stereotypes and false representations abound’ (33). It is clearly a challenging endeavour to attempt to write about, or from the perspective of, an individual with an autistic spectrum condition, if like these writers, you do not have direct experience of such a condition, *without* falling into the trap of ‘stereotyping’. As Arendell continues to explain: ‘even those who start from a place of care or concern end in a contested space of representation’ (33). With this in mind, of the three novels introduced in this chapter, no doubt partly because it is the best known and most widely read, *Curious Incident* has provoked the most criticism in terms of Haddon’s representation of Christopher. Explaining how, in his view certain ‘popular novels perpetuate negative stereotypes’, Greg Olear, the father of a child with Asperger’s Syndrome, states that:

It is telling that many of *Curious Incident*’s 73 one-star Amazon reviews (there are a staggering 1,720 reviews in all, most fours and fives) were submitted by aspies³¹. Here’s a smattering:

“Inaccurate, horribly offensive... this isn’t how it is.” “Haddon does not understand Aspergers.” “Stereotypical view of an autistic child.” “Christopher Boone isn’t like any other child with Asperger’s that I’ve ever met.” “A major disservice to the Autistic Community” (Olear 2012).

The primary issue here centres on the extent to which Haddon’s representation of Christopher is overly ‘stereotypical’ and therefore may be viewed as reductionist. The association between stereotypes and Otherness is, after all, a close one - stereotypes emphasise immutable differences whilst playing down nuances and human sameness. As indicated previously, one of the challenges of representation in the arts relates to how, as an author, filmmaker, playwright or artist you aim to represent the thoughts and feelings of an individual or group you are yourself, outside of without falling into the trap of

³¹ A self-referential term, devised by individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome.

stereotyping. However, as will be discussed in terms of Jamila Gavin's depiction of *Grandpa Chatterji*, even when characters occupy the same 'ingroup' as the author, charges of stereotyping can nevertheless apply. Notably in terms of *Curious Incident*, William Schofield, a teenager with Asperger's Syndrome, refutes Olear's argument that Haddon's depiction of Christopher is purely stereotypical in his 2004 *Guardian* review of the novel:

Mark Haddon may not have intentionally set out to write about someone with this particular condition, as he frequently just describes Christopher as having 'some sort of disability', but may have ended up doing it anyway. The similarities are very convincing between Chris and me: I, like Chris, like my food separate, I don't like big crowds, I don't like new places, I don't like new ideas and I find it hard to talk to people and make myself understood (Schofield 2004).

Schofield re-iterates a point it is easy to lose sight of when considering the accuracy (or otherwise) of Haddon's portrayal of a young person with an autistic spectrum condition. Crucially, at no stage in the novel does he explicitly name the nature of the condition with which Christopher's behaviour is seemingly aligned. In defence of the fact that he is neither an 'expert' on Asperger's Syndrome, nor did he carry out much research prior to the writing of the novel (aside from reading some of Oliver Sachs' writing on this topic), Haddon explains that, for him: 'imagination always trumps research. I thought that if I could make Christopher real to me then he'd be real to readers' (2009). In addition to this however, Haddon also iterates that despite readers' inferences, *Curious Incident* was never written as a novel 'about' autism. Rather, he explains, 'it is a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising or revealing way' (2009). My stance in this regard is broadly in alignment with Haddon's. Indeed, whilst the three primary texts explored in this chapter contain specific (albeit unstated) representations of autistic spectrum conditions, comparably to Haddon, I am primarily interested in the commentary

these texts provide in relation to difference and marginalisation as they exist more generally.

In a summative extract from *The Outside Child*, Wilkie-Stibbs contends:

Despite the call to bring them down, to silence or to repress them, these child figures who inhabit the borderland of abjection and who are the archetypes of ambivalence are also the locus of the most significant meanings relating to social, cultural and personal identity, from which questions about the collective consciousness speak most loudly (93).

With this in mind, this chapter has considered such 'significant meanings' in regards to character 'identity', and the manner in which it plays out in terms of the 'social and cultural' spheres of school, family and friends. The 'borderland of abjection' is traversed by Christopher, Stol and Troy in different ways, but these characters do share certain similarities. For example, in each case, their Otherness valorises a selfhood constructed without regard to normative societal expectations of behaviour, communication and self-presentation. Whilst, as we have seen, this has certain negative ramifications, it is also presented as being liberating at times. As evident through my readings of Foucault however, the power relationships that 'define difference' in the novels, routinely serve to re-enforce the characters' Otherness. In this regard, language itself can be perceived as Othering, and the everyday 'codes' and 'signs', such as those that Christopher encounters in Paddington Station, further serve to re-enforce power relationships, marginalising those to whom their decryption is an insurmountable challenge. Similarly, in relation to Troy in *Seriously Weird*, 'Othered sites', such as the 'loft' in which Troy seeks temporary refuge in the novel, become representative of uneven power dynamics. To support this, Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' was introduced, as well as Gilbert and Gubar's study of *The Madwoman In The Attic*. Here, liminal spaces exist as sites of oppression imposed upon the individual the authors somewhat pejoratively term the 'mad' Other (1979). Ultimately then, whilst the

Othered child is certainly of interest individually, this chapter has shown how Othering processes, particularly when considered in terms of children and young people, have a wider significance in terms of what may be perceived of as '*collective* consciousness'. Such a form of 'consciousness', as well as its relationship to the interrelated themes of community and belonging, will play a central role in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Two – ‘I can’t join your gang’: Community, Otherness and Belonging.

This chapter examines three novels where notions of community and belonging are explored with reference to their association with Otherness. I will argue that Otherness stemming from a character’s incapability of establishing belonging to an ‘ingroup’, illustrated, in the context of this chapter, through the example of community, has a visceral and unsettling effect on their understanding of personal identity. This, as I will show, is associated with the interplay between power and control that, Foucault suggests, is one of the defining facets of the manner in which communities, perhaps inevitable sites of Othering mentalities and practices, function.

This chapter’s primary literature suggests that for certain Othered characters in fiction for children and young adults, the search for belonging is a futile one. The nature of the communities they find themselves ‘up against’ present a seemingly unsurmountable challenge in terms of inclusion. For example, Lucas’s Otherness is an ‘alien’ presence on the island community of Hale in Kevin Brooks’ novel *Lucas* (2002). Brooks uses the sense of foreignness surrounding Lucas (associated with his status as a ‘gypsy’) to expose the islanders’ prejudice and intolerance of difference. In *Lucas*, community is associated with sameness, belonging a privilege withheld from those who exist outside of what Livi Visano terms the ‘historically rooted social order’ (1). Troublingly, as we will see, violence is ultimately employed to maintain this ‘order’. In Catherine MacPhail’s *Tribes* (2001), Otherness is explored in relation to exclusion from an ‘ingroup’. Kevin joins the titular ‘Tribe’ to satisfy his need to ‘belong’ in the novel’s initial stages, but ultimately must assess whether his new-found sense of security and comfort outweighs his resistance to abandoning his individuality and conforming to the Tribe leader’s dubious mechanisms of

control. Anne Cassidy's *Looking For JJ* (2004) considers how communities react to the Otherness inherent to criminality, and also explores how individuals found guilty of certain degrees of transgression are perennially denied 'true' inclusion.

Initially, it is necessary to define this chapter's overarching terminology. Caroline Bath asserts that:

Belonging is a word with multiple resonances which go to the heart of what it means to be human. It suggests deep emotion and is often discussed in the context of religious belief and need fulfilment, crossing discourses [...] It is also difficult to talk about belonging without also discussing exclusion, since communities exist by virtue of criteria for their membership [...] Forms of discrimination exist to police the borders of belonging (19).

This suggests a relationship between Otherness and belonging. If, what is, or counts as Other has a direct relationship to how 'in' and 'out' groups function in communities, 'belonging' is concerned with what it means to be part of an 'in' group. As Bath makes clear however, any attempt to understand the concept of 'belonging' is conversely inseparable from discussions of exclusion. The final sentence of this extract recalls Foucault's 'disciplinary apparatuses', for example, the assize courts he describes in *Abnormal* and the various prison systems central to *Discipline and Punish*, that function as a means of 'policing belonging'.

The second term is 'community'. At a basic level, 'community' is indicative of the behaviour and functioning of individuals in a group setting. However, there is an inescapable positivity to the concept which the primary texts in this chapter appear to reject. Barbara Kenton and Suzanne Penn assert:

Communities have a collective purpose, and pay attention to 'what is going on at the heart' of a group of people. They are based on 'desire not directives' and embrace the contribution of 'diverse and unique gifts' rather than viewing difference as an

issue of 'defiance or compliance' [Wheatley 2005]. Additionally, in a community, people 'take care of each other', they care about involvement and connection (203).

I would argue that this is a somewhat optimistic view and that, many communities, particularly of the smaller, 'close knit' variety we are introduced to in both *Lucas* and *Tribes*, do, in fact, 'view difference as an issue of defiance'. Similarly, the power dynamics at play in the various communities featured in this chapters' primary texts hardly promote the mutual 'care', 'involvement' and 'connection' suggested by Kenton and Penn. Rather, we routinely observe resentment, manipulation, marginalisation and distrust unfolding in the communities in which these novels are set.

Kevin Brooks considers the impact of personal experience on his choice of narrative perspective:

To step back and look in at the world (through the eyes of the outsider-narrator), to me is much more interesting and enlightening, than if you belong to the world you're writing about. But also, on a personal level, it's just very natural for me to take the outsider's point of view. Whatever I've done in my life, at whatever age, I've never really felt a sense of belonging (qtd. in Screech 2014).

Belonging has evidently been of interest to Brooks personally then, which perhaps explains his interest in depicting a character such as Lucas in his eponymous novel. He also attributes the perspective of the 'outsider-narrator' to Caitlin who we initially meet when she and her father are en-route home to the island of Hale following a shopping trip to the mainland. Caitlin can be viewed as an outsider in various ways in the novel, but this is particularly evident in her refusal to participate in the islanders' collective mind-set of prejudice and hatred concerning Lucas. Throughout the novel, Caitlin does display the ability 'to step back and look in at the world', and, in doing so, provides an astute commentary on Lucas's arrival and solo existence on the island, in addition to the community's overtly negative reaction to his presence.

Caitlin introduces her island home by describing its natural beauty. Its 'unmistakeable light' and 'iridescent sheen' (Brooks 13) contrasts starkly with the rather less celebratory actions of its inhabitants. She then describes how it is severed from the mainland: 'There's a high tide and the estuary rises a half a metre or so above the road and nothing can pass again until the tide goes out again, then you know it's an island' (14). By the very nature of being an island, Hale is physically 'cut off' – Othered from the mainland. In this way then, Brooks foregrounds the novel in what Maria Nikolajeva terms an 'Othered setting' (89). In this way, an island such as Hale can be interpreted as a heterotopia. As discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault defines 'heterotopia' as a space of 'deviation' (*Of Other...* 5), and with this in mind, perhaps we can understand why Brooks chose Hale as the setting for the arrival of Lucas, whose status as Other (a homeless 'gypsy' [158] traveller) certainly suggests a 'deviation' from the static, settled culture of the mainland. If however, Lucas seeks out Hale assuming that islands, due to their physical disconnectedness, will be more tolerant towards Otherness, he is unfortunately mistaken. His attempts to locate sanctuary are thwarted by a community suspicious of what Lucas describes as 'things that don't fit': 'People don't like it when they don't know what you are. They don't like things that don't fit. It frightens them. They'd rather have a monster they know than a mystery they don't [...] The fear takes hold and spreads. It feeds on itself...' (148) A clear sense of Otherness permeates here. Lucas portrays himself in creature-like tones, replacing standard pronouns with dehumanising language such as 'thing', 'it' and 'monster', and Caitlin's descriptions of him re-enforce this. For example, the first glimpse she has of Lucas at the beginning of the novel is related in the following way: 'All I could see was a green-clad creature padding along [...] with a mop of straw-blond hair and a way of walking' (9). Similarly, we are later told that he 'looked and

moved like something from a different world' (119) and had 'the emotionless look of an animal' (340).

There are strong echoes here of the Stig character from Clive King's *Stig of the Dump*. Stig shares parallels with Lucas in that he arrives unannounced, a stranger encountered by the novel's narrator, living in a thrown-together shelter outside the perimeters of the town. In Lucas's case this shelter is located in the woods, and for Stig it is in the eponymous town 'dump'. Similarly to the description of Lucas's makeshift camp, which is described as 'roofed with plastic sheeting interlaced with branches, and walled with a mixture of mud and reeds' (138), Barney first encounters Stig when he is: 'lying in a kind of shelter. Looking up he could see a roof, or part of a roof, made of elder branches, a very rotten old carpet and rusty old sheets of iron' (King 3). Again, creature-like characteristics are subsequently applied, Othering the shelter's inhabitant when Barney asserts: 'There was someone there, [...] or something!' (3). Here, the unsaid and unspecific ('someone' / 'something') contributes to the aura of unknowability surrounding the character, a device Brooks also draws upon in constructing Lucas's Otherness (148). From the outset, both Lucas and Stig exist in peripheral spaces, outside the boundaries of civilisation, and this is of paramount importance in terms of our reading of the theme of belonging in these texts.

Lucas's attempts to enter the (arguably) 'civilised' community of the island is fraught with difficulty. The islanders hurl verbal abuse at the unfortunate boy ('Gyppo! Thief! Dirty pervert!' [344]) and ultimately form a 'mob' (344) to pursue him off the island. As a result, Lucas instead finds solace in his relationship with Caitlin, the only character in the novel who treats him humanely. It is through his discussions with Caitlin that we learn the most about Lucas, who has evidently spent much of his life being forced out of places at the hands of

intolerant townsfolk terrified of having a 'gypsy' in their midst. Lucas discusses this metaphorically, again employing animal imagery:

He'd had a feeling about something, and he'd learned over the years not to ignore his feelings, whether he understood them or not. 'I've come to think of it since as the same kind of feeling that animals have – when birds know it's time to migrate, when dogs know a thunderstorm is coming, when ants know it's the right time to fly [...] All they know is that when you get the feeling you have to act on it' (96).

The pivotal episode and the point at which Lucas decides 'it's the right time to fly', occurs at the annual town regatta, that Lucas attends having been invited by Caitlin in an ill-fated attempt at inclusivity. The regatta is interrupted when a girl gets into difficulty in the sea and Lucas, once again described in Othering, creature-like tones, comes to the rescue: 'He was up over the rocks at the base of the cliff, leaping from boulder to boulder like a mountain goat, veering round beneath the rocky ledge and bearing down on the sea. He looked and moved like something from a different world' (119). Lucas succeeds in dragging the girl to shore but is interrupted by her mother in the process of 'gently re-arranging' (120) her wet clothes to preserve her modesty³². Far from being grateful for Lucas's intervention, the mother, terrified at the thought of a 'gypsy' assault on her daughter, persuades her to lie to the police and claim '[Lucas] was messing around with her' (158). Even though Lucas's rescue was conducted in full view of spectators, the girl's mother also exploits the prejudices of these 'witnesses' to 'back her up' (158) and provides fabricated evidence to the authorities.

At the root of these accusations is therefore, fear of the Other, specifically, in this case, brought about by Lucas's status as a homeless 'gypsy'. When Caitlin's friend Simon

³² One of various intertextual references Brooks' makes to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), another crucial text in the annals of literary representations of Otherness.

questions her relationship with the 'gypsy boy' (158), her response indicates her mounting frustration with the ignorance and bigotry seemingly so inherent in this community: 'So what? What's wrong with gypsies? They're not monsters, are they? God! What's the matter with people around here? It's like living with a bunch of damn hill-billies' (158). Her telling comparison to 'monsters' suggests her awareness of the towns-peoples' Othering instinct towards Lucas, given what they infer about his cultural heritage and transient lifestyle. This passage is also notable because, through Caitlin's commentary, Brooks explores how prejudice against 'gypsies', discussed here in terms of the Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the UK, appears to be the last 'acceptable' form of racism:

I've always been fascinated with gypsy / traveller culture – mainly, I think, because of its outsidersness, but also because the age-old prejudice against gypsies is not only still very much alive, it's also still very acceptable to many people. It is, if you like, the last socially acceptable form of prejudice left in the UK. It's also an excellent example of the way in which societies fear and hate cultures they don't understand, and (crucially) cultures that don't wish to integrate. I don't know why there aren't more representations of gypsy culture in young-adult fiction. To me, it's a wonderfully interesting world, almost tailor-made for stories about prejudice, fear and hate (qtd. in Screech 2014).³³

It is partly through his representation of 'gypsy' characters, that Otherness is explored and articulated in Brooks' fiction. Whilst, as he accurately asserts, there are indeed, relatively few 'gypsy' characters present in contemporary children's and young-adult fiction, Brooks' *oeuvre* has certainly played an admirable part in counteracting this. 'Gypsy' characters are also prominently depicted in *The Road of the Dead* (2006) in which, comparably to *Lucas*, their transience ('setting up camp on the edge of a town somewhere' [47]) is associated

³³ For full interview see appendix 1.

with a culturally-ingrained way of life. Indeed, 'being a gypsy', the protagonist of *The Road of the Dead* asserts, is a 'state of mind' (47).

Lucas also contains an astute depiction of 'mob' (344) behaviour. With this in mind, Caitlin's observations concerning 'the dynamic of the crowd' (123) are apposite in terms of how community is explored in this novel:

Crowds are strange things. A crowd has a collective mind of its own, a mind that ignores the sense of its constituent parts and thrives on the lowest passions. The crowd had seen what had happened, they'd seen Lucas diving in to save the girl, they knew the truth – but the truth to a crowd is soon forgotten. The passion of the woman's actions had set doubts in their mind. The collective mind was taking over (123-4).

It is this sense of a 'collective mind' with its oppressive and exclusionary behaviours that, Caitlin suggests, has such an insidious influence on the island. In Dara Goldman's *Islands and the Demarcation of Identity* (2008), the author considers the inherent 'Otherness of the island' (195) and discusses the manner in which notions of community and belonging are particularly concentrated in this 'social space': 'Within the community, shifting definitions of social space govern practices of inclusion and exclusion, internal hierarchies of privilege and access [and] codes of behaviour' (34). There is an obvious link here to the functioning of heterotopias of 'deviation' (*Of Other...* 5) we examined previously. Similarly, we might consider the freighted nature of the language used in terms of how geographical distinctions could be said to mirror 'social space'. Islands are, by their definition, separate from the land-mass termed the 'mainland'. This moniker is alluded to on several occasions in *Lucas* (pgs. 15, 279, 282), and the use of the term 'main' can be interpreted as being indicative of *mainstream* attitudes, or, to refer back to Goldman, 'codes of behaviour' that an island may be viewed as being Other from. In this way, 'main' can also be read as being

indicative of normativity. Therefore, because an island is geographically removed from the 'mainland', this removal could be said to result in the development of a different 'kind' of community, and different types of attitudes regarding who does or does not belong. Indeed, it is worth mentioning the prevalence of the island as a setting for a great deal of children's literature, both historically and in contemporary times. In particular, there is a definite tendency towards authors utilising this setting in works which deal with the themes of Otherness, identity and belonging, and by proxy, inclusion and exclusion. With this in mind, for example, we might consider works of 'classic' children's literature including Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Robert Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911). However, we should also note the continued popularity of island settings in more recent works, such as Scott O'Dell's *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960), Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore* (1975) and Lucy Eagland's *Wild Song* (2012). In addition, it would be remiss to avoid mention of William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), a text I will examine in due course.³⁴

In *Lucas*, the islanders' 'codes of behaviour' are associated with their insularity and feelings of ownership: 'This is our island McCann. We live here, most of us were *born* here. This is our home ... you don't let shit into your own home, do you? You keep it out – right?' (188) With this in mind, Brooks responds to an interview question about the island setting as follows: 'One of the main themes in *Lucas* is the way societies react to people they don't understand and the island setting in *Lucas* allowed me to focus on, and emphasise, the notion of an isolated culture' (qtd. in Screech 2014). For Brooks then, the island offers a

³⁴ It should however be noted that, whilst Golding's novel features child characters, it was never written nor marketed as children's literature.

unique microcosm through which to explore the attitudes of homogenous communities towards the Other. Hale also differs from the mainland in its lack of a functioning disciplinary force to address the behaviour of the crowd. As the novel progresses, the community's agenda becomes increasingly defined – to rid the island of the stranger in their midst. In the penultimate chapter, the 'mob', described at this point by Caitlin as a 'pack of jackals' (339), chase Lucas off the island and into the sea wherein he promptly drowns. Caitlin's attempt to halt the 'mob rule' that envelops the island is in vain and ultimately, a disciplinary force; (i.e.: the mainland police) must intervene to restore order:

As soon as the storm died out and the Stand cleared, the place went crazy. There were police all over the island [...] 'The entire Moulton police force are involved. There's a lot to sort out. Various charges of assault, attempted rape, deception, corruption, complicity' (356-357).

Foucault was fascinated by the behaviour of crowds. Indeed, *Discipline and Punish* contains various accounts of the behaviour of the 'mob' at public tortures and executions and the book opens with the notoriously graphic account of the public torture of Robert-Francois Damiens in the mid-eighteenth century. Foucault also discusses the reasons for the end to such practices, one of which was due to the danger and unpredictability associated with the vast crowds that habitually attended. Jeffrey Danaher states:

There is pleasure in being part of a heaving mob [...] Bodies seem free of disciplinary coercions. This recalls Foucault's point that one of the motivations for the abandoning of public executions [...] was that the mob who gathered was an unruly, and therefore unpredictable mass (59).

For Foucault then, participation in a 'mob' legitimates negative behaviours due to others in close proximity behaving in a similar way. There is also a sense of invisibility attached to behaviour in this setting, in that one's actions are essentially 'cloaked' by the surrounding 'bodies'. This example can be extended from the braying of crowds at public executions in

Discipline and Punish, to the rampaging 'mob' in *Lucas*. Disciplinary structures such as the police, exist in communities to maintain order by ensuring that power remains in the hands of those to whom it is legally mandated, rather than those who group en-masse with a collective vendetta. In *Lucas*, Hale is an example of a community where such a regulatory influence is absent until the intervention by the mainland police in the novel's conclusion. The way in which the community's intolerance of Lucas's Otherness is allowed to develop, unpoliced, into brazen violence, is, I would argue, the factor that ultimately leads to this character's downfall.

Lucas is concerned with the way 'in' and 'out' groups function in society generally, but, as we have seen, especially with regard to small communities. One of the defining voices in terms of Otherness, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, considers this in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) in terms of a relationship between 'friends' and 'enemies' or 'them and us' asserting: 'the enemy is the other of the friend, "them" the other of "us"' (14). Lucas certainly fulfils the role of 'enemy' in the minds of his oppressors. However, with further reference to Bauman (1991), I would argue this is, at least in part, due to his status as a 'stranger' on the island:

It is not the failure to acquire native knowledge which constitutes the outsider as a stranger, but the *incongruent existential constitution* of the stranger (76).

The very awareness of outside points-of-view (as epitomized by the stranger's status) makes the natives seem uncomfortable, insecure in their home ways and truths (78).

'Stranger', in addition to 'foreign' and 'alien', can be interpreted as another synonym for Other here. Through the character of Lucas then, Brooks critiques the hostility, inherent in human nature, towards those that present however unknowingly, a threat to what Bauman terms the 'established order' (8).

Similarly, the concept of homelessness or 'rootlessness' is an integral one in children's literature, and is explored in early examples of the genre such as Daniel Defoe's seminal castaway narrative *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In this novel the titular Crusoe must attempt to make a shelter and seek sustenance on the island whilst avoiding contact with the natives, a band of vicious cannibals. In this way, we can draw parallels between Crusoe and Lucas, in terms of the manner in which they attempt to avoid the local inhabitants. Perhaps a more contemporary perspective on this however, and arguably, one more in line with Brooks' representation in *Lucas*, is what Allen terms 'homelessness [viewed] as abjection' (144).³⁵ It is arguably a more realistic representation of the experience of homelessness, and one that is increasingly being offered to readers of what Campbell terms 'gritty' (14) YA social realism. Indeed, if we consider homelessness as referring to a process of 'abject' marginalisation, we have seen evidence, though our consideration of *Lucas*, of this concept being inherently Othering, having the ability to disrupt an individual's understandings of their identity and place in the world. The Otherness of the stranger, as well as the relationship of such a character type to this chapter's dual themes of community and belonging, remain a central focus in our analysis of MacPhail's *Tribes*.

The collective noun 'tribe' is defined as: 'a group of people forming a community' (*O.E.D* 2012). MacPhail's novel explores the allure of belonging to such a 'community' (or, as it is synonymously termed in the novel, a 'pack' [1], 'gang' [14], 'club' [23] and 'group' [10]), in terms of young people, even when such a collective is freighted with negative associations. The relationship between Otherness, belonging and collective identity is certainly not a recent concern in books written for young people. Indeed, with these themes in mind, we

³⁵ The term 'abjection' here invoking Julia Kristeva's *Essay on Abjection* (1982).

might consider S.E Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), one of the founding texts of the genre we now call young-adult fiction, which, like *Tribes*, is focused on the exploits of two rival gangs. Similarly, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) has, at its root, a fascinating and disturbing exploration of the nature of community and the consequences of Otherness, as viewed through young peoples' eyes. Given *Tribes* has *Lord of the Flies* as a firm precedent, I will briefly discuss the significance of Golding's novel before proceeding on to a reading of MacPhail's novel.

Lord of the Flies is set in the midst of an unspecified war in which, en-route to being evacuated to safety, a plane of preadolescent boys crashes on a desert island, leaving them stranded and without immediate hope of rescue. Two factions are formed, led by the two most charismatic boys on the island, Ralph and Jack. Gradually, they begin to divide the community based on the roles they believe to be the most useful in terms of managing their predicament. Ralph believes the best course of action is to work together to build shelters and also maintain a fire with the intention of sending smoke signals in an attempt to alert passing ships, whereas Jack's priority is to hunt and kill the ominous 'beast' (Golding 92) that allegedly lurks somewhere on the island. With this in mind, Ralph is often interpreted as representing civilisation in the text, whereas Jack is indicative of 'the ease with which these values can be swept away' (King 2011, *N.P.A*), to reference Stephen King's introduction to the (2011) Faber edition. Ultimately, the two groups grow increasingly opposed to each other, as 'order' (Golding 15) descends into 'savagery' (197). Otherness is explored effectively through the character of Piggy, a perennial object of mirth in the text:

Piggy was a bore; his fat, his ass-mar and his matter-of-fact ideas were dull [...] There had grown up tacitly among the biguns the opinion that Piggy was an outsider, not only by accent, which did not matter, but by fat, and ass-mar, and specs, and a certain disinclination for manual labour (68).

Piggy's status as Other then, initially results in bullying, teasing and name-calling ('fatty' [17] proliferates), by the other boys akin to that of the playground. However, as the novel develops and 'civilization' begins to ebb away, their treatment of him becomes increasingly violent, with the breaking of Piggy's spectacles (186), crucially, the only remaining link to the 'civilized' world, indicating the transcended boundary between order and chaos. In his critical commentary on *Lord of the Flies*, Harold Bloom describes Piggy as: 'never quite belonging', as 'alien or foreign' (78). This link between notions of 'belonging' and 'foreignness' with regards to this character, seems an apt entryway into *Tribes*, in which Kevin is initially depicted as negotiating similar concerns:

Everyone was in a gang here. Kevin wasn't. He didn't belong to any of the gangs that roamed the area, battling with each other, preying on each other. Was that a reason to hate him? He was new in this part of town. Fair game (MacPhail 2).

Tribes opens *in medias res*³⁶ with Kevin, who has recently moved to an unfamiliar part of the city, being dramatically pursued through the dark streets by a gang declaring themselves 'The Rebels' (2). Kevin interprets their behaviour as being a result of his status as a stranger, and ultimately, although he is warned to 'keep away from those gangs' (3) by his father, and had previously preferred 'his own company' (3), he promptly relents, joining the titular 'Tribe' (9) who rescue him from The Rebels' advances. 'To join a gang, and belong, blend in with the others' (3), appears to Kevin to be the best course of action to survive in this strange new environment. However, as becomes evident as the novel progresses, this decision will have troubling consequences. To refer back to this thesis's underpinning contextual perspectives, this novel stems from a nation in crisis in which youth gangs are 'on the rise' (Topping 2015), and joining a gang in certain urban environments has become a

³⁶ In mid-action.

gesture on a par with purchasing, for example, the latest Nike trainers. Indeed, as one former youth gang member explained to *The Guardian* newspaper, 'it's normal for kids [...] they want to feel safe, be the cool guys' (qtd. in Topping 2015).

The 'Tribe' is led by the charismatic Salom, definitely perceived as a 'cool guy' by the other boys. Nevertheless, his sinister motives are hinted at by the recurring refrain - capitalised throughout the novel: 'SALOM IS EVIL' (22). Initially, Kevin appears to trust Salom. However, his suspicions are raised when he learns about the strange disappearance of Stash, a boy who, like Kevin, had joined the 'Tribe' for the purposes of protection, but who had ultimately 'wanted out' (119) and attempted to break all ties with the 'Tribe', falling foul of Salom in the process. Similarly, Kevin receives warning regarding the dangers of joining the 'Tribe' - a local shopkeeper insists they are a 'bad lot' (22) and members of the public are described as 'watching them warily' (39).

However, initially at least, he relishes his participation in this community: 'He had a feeling he couldn't explain to anyone, a feeling of belonging (48) [...] 'he was caught up in the sheer exhilaration of being one of them' (82). This is a turning point in the novel because, although Kevin initially joins the 'Tribe' as a means of protection, as his membership in the gang continues, he begins to feel an increasing sense of belonging. This corresponds with William Segall and Anna Wilson's discussion of the 'reasons children join gangs' (291). They assert that while 'members believe that gangs are prepared to protect them from social problems' (291), certainly the case for Kevin when the 'Tribe' remove the threat of the 'Rebels' at the start of the novel, there is also the attraction of 'gaining social approval and respect from other members' (291). Arguably, the latter point could be said to be responsible for Kevin's increasing involvement in the 'Tribe' as the novel progresses. With this in mind, we might

refer back to our discussion of Foucauldian perspectives on 'mob' behaviour, and consider how the 'Tribe' in MacPhail's novel works similarly in its legitimization of anti-social or negative behaviours, such as the graffiti (9) and fights that are seemingly routine aspects of the 'Tribe's' activities. In this way, it provides simultaneously a 'sense of identity' (Borrow and Walker 67) and 'safety in numbers' (67).

From the opening chapter of *Tribes*, it is clear that Kevin is presented as Other, an obvious outsider in the environment in which he has found himself. This identifies him as a target, initially for the 'Rebels', but ultimately for Salom's 'bullying' (107) and manipulative games. The 'Tribe' itself is also imbued with a strong sense of Otherness, their wolf-like 'howling' (6) (notably, the same descriptive verb is employed on various occasions in *The Lord of the Flies*), and generally lawless behaviour, distinguishes them from the town's 'ordinary' (11) citizens.

Ultimately though, it is through the character of Salom that, I would argue, Otherness is most pertinently explored in this text. Where Kevin is initially enthralled by this character's charm and charisma, as the plot unfolds, Salom's 'dark side' (119) becomes increasingly apparent. Salom is a different 'sort' of Other to Kevin. Indeed, where Kevin's Otherness is primarily associated with his status as a newcomer, Salom's Otherness stems from his role as a bully and perennial object of fear in the narrative. He insists that new members participate in the life-threatening initiation rite termed 'the Walk of Death' (32), which involves having to cross a beam suspended above the ground in an abandoned warehouse. The terror associated with this feat is the primary strategy Salom uses to ensure that those who join the 'Tribe' cannot easily leave, because, as is explained to Kevin: 'Getting out of the Tribe is just as hard as getting in [...] If you want out, you have to do the Walk of Death

again' (119). This fact is key, Kevin ultimately realises, in terms of reaching the truth regarding Stash, who had evidently 'wanted out' (119) of the 'Tribe'. The facts surrounding the mystery of Stash are the object of conjecture in the following exchange between Kevin and his sister, Glory:

'Did you at least find out what happened to Stash?'
 'What about Stash?'
 'It happened before we moved here. He was one of the Tribe and he died, fell or something. Some people think he was pushed.'
 'Stash pushed from the Walk of Death? But who would push him?' (43)

From this point, it is implied, although never specifically stated, that Salom is responsible for Stash's accident. However, MacPhail eludes closure regarding the truth relating to this, when Salom himself disappears in the final chapter, and as a result, the 'Tribe' is disbanded. On the final page, with the distancing effects of passed time, Kevin muses on the 'Tribe' and the impact of Salom's influence:

So it was over. The spell had been broken and life became normal again [...] Yet sometimes, in the middle of the night, he'd still wake up sweating. Remembering the oath he had sworn in blood [...] Remembering the vengeance promised for anyone who broke it: 'Haunted for the rest of his life by ghosts and demons'. And he would imagine Salom in the dark corner of the room, ready to step out of the shadows with that enigmatic smile on his face, and Kevin knew then that what he had read on that wall long ago was true... SALOM IS EVIL (138).

Through a character such as Salom then, MacPhail explores the link between 'evil' and Otherness. This is an interest shared by William Connolly who, in his discussion of Foucault and identity politics (2002) contends: 'the maintenance of one identity involves the conversion of [...] otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates' (64). With this in mind, Salom's status as an 'evil' Other may also be understood with reference to the concept of the 'double' or 'doppelgänger' which is pertinently discussed in terms of its representation in children's and YA fiction by Robyn McCallum:

The double, or doppelgänger, is frequently used in narrative to explore the idea that personal identity is shaped by a dialogic relation with an other [...] main characters [have] a double or counterpart, internal or external to that character, which is crucial for the construction and representation of that character's subjectivity (74).

It is possible then, to read Salom as Kevin's 'double' in the text. For example, where Kevin behaves in a consistently friendly and considerate manner throughout the text, Salom only attracts 'enemies' (105). Where Kevin is frequently aligned with conventionality in terms of family life, behaviour / attitude and appearance, this is in contrast to Salom who, in addition to receiving the moniker 'evil', is also described as 'venomous' (124) and 'the boy who had the wickedness in him' (137). Communities, as viewed through a Foucauldian lens, are hierarchical constructions in which notions of status and power are intrinsic components. With this in mind, Paula Heino comments on the 'discourse' (31) of gangs, arguing that they function through the construction of 'normalized "truths" [that] permeate people's beliefs and dispositions, thus making them acquire a certain way of seeing' (31). This contention is demonstrable in *Tribes*, where for Kevin in the beginning at least, the privilege of belonging does indeed involve him acquiring a 'certain way of seeing'. Conversely, this 'way of seeing' however, renders him blind to Salom's (who, as 'leader' [MacPhail 113] of the 'Tribe' sets the agenda – constructing its 'truths') abuse of power.³⁷

The division between Tajfel's 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' (1982) is particularly pertinent in *Tribes*. Although the precise interpretations of these terms differ between the social sciences, a sociological definition would consider the concept of an 'ingroup' as a social group in which an individual believes they belong - either socially, psychologically, emotionally or spiritually. In contrast then, 'outgroups' exist as the Other of the 'ingroup'.

³⁷ Whereas Kevin's sister, notably, seems quite aware.

Jessica Cameron et al (2001) discuss children's conceptions of 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' explaining that they:

[...] Value their ingroup positively and maintain cooperative relationships with other ingroup members. [This] involves competitive intergroup comparisons, wherein ingroup positivity is enhanced by social comparisons with outgroups, in which the ingroup is evaluated as better than or superior to the outgroups. Finally, outgroup hostility may occur if the relationship between the ingroup and outgroup becomes antagonistic (199) [my addition].

If we read the 'ingroup' in the novel as the 'Tribe' itself and the 'outgroup' as the 'Rebels', we can observe how these assertions are evidenced in the novel. The novel opens with a display of 'outgroup hostility' as the 'relationship' between the 'Tribe' and the 'Rebels' has 'become antagonistic'. Following this, the 'ingroup positivity' of the 'Tribe' is made evident through the collective 'howl' (9) that appears as a refrain in the novel and one of the indicators of the groups' 'cooperative' instincts: "'We're the best,'" Torry told him, and there was a howl of agreement from the rest. Howling seemed to be one of the things the Tribe did better than anyone else' (9). Also evident here is the manner in which the 'Tribe' perceive themselves as being 'the best' or to cite a term employed frequently in the text, 'special' (34, 39). Previously we considered Haddon's euphemistic employment of 'special' to signify Otherness, and arguably, it takes on a similar significance in *Tribes*. 'The Tribe are special, afraid of nothing' (34), Salom proclaims as Kevin prepares to embark upon the 'Walk of Death'. It is this sense of separateness or 'superiority' (Cameron et al 199) from the various 'outgroups' that exist in the novel, such as the Rebels, the 'wary' (81) parents, and other members of the town's adult community, that Salom uses to justify the various treacherous 'tests' (20) new members must undergo to gain entry to, or exit from the 'Tribe'. The main initiation test, (the 'Walk of Death'), is described by Glory as 'not so much dangerous as terrifying' (21) and, in tandem with the 'blood oath' (46), it comprises the

main 'regulatory mechanism' (*Discipline...* 41) through which Salom is able to exercise power over the group. As Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, part of the manner in which individuals or institutions maintain power and control over their 'docile' (*Discipline...* 135) subjects is by 'regulating their comings and goings' (144). In addition to allowing potential members to demonstrate the courage necessary to be considered 'special' enough for admission to the 'Tribe', the 'Walk of Death' exists as a strategy through which Salom can 'police' (*Discipline...* 213) his members' 'loyalty' (MacPhail 102).

Tribes also explores the role peer-pressure plays in terms of Kevin's interaction with the 'Tribe'. Peer-pressure involves the relinquishing of Otherness to gain acceptance to an 'ingroup'. With this in mind, MacPhail associates belonging with conformity, with becoming in Kevin's words, 'one of the sheep' (25). Kevin's ability to withstand peer-pressure is initially depicted as strong: 'I'm not one of you. I'm not in a gang, and I don't ever want to be' (10). However, eventually relenting to Salom's persistence, Kevin begins to enjoy the perceived freedom that stems from the abandonment of his past status as an outsider. As the novel progresses however, Kevin displays a distinct sense of unease relating to the attitudes and codes of behaviour that govern the 'Tribe', anxious that they restrict individualism in favour of an imposed uniformity:

Our great leader. Kevin suddenly didn't like those words. He had never wanted anyone to be his leader. What had changed him? 'Maybe it's about time we had another election. Get a new leader?' Torry was even more amused. 'What election? We've never had an election. Salom's always been the leader (113).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses what he terms 'mechanisms of normalization' (306). For Foucault, the concept of 'normalization' is another outcome of the dual processes of power and social control that he argues is inherent to various societal and institutional

structures. 'Normalization' involves an adherence to minutely detailed or 'standardized' codes of conduct or behaviour and in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault uses the example of the soldier in his discussion in the chapter on 'docile bodies' (135). He discusses the expectation that he adopts the 'air of a soldier' (135) describing how 'movements like marching, and the bearing of the head' (135) are tightly regulated. As always in Foucault's work, failure to conform to such expectations of the 'dominant' (222) group, prompts the introduction of punitive or 'disciplinary' techniques to punish or 'correct' (224) the transgressor.

This concept can also be observed playing out in the later chapters of *Tribes*. After the initial sense of excitement and exhilaration Kevin feels as a result of 'belonging' to a gang, as mentioned, a feeling of trepidation sets in. As he explains in the passage above, 'he had never wanted anyone to be his leader' (113), and in the final section of the novel, Kevin becomes increasingly uncomfortable with Salom's, and by proxy, the 'Tribe's' collective power over him. By challenging Salom's leadership of the 'Tribe', and later attempting to leave it altogether, Kevin rejects his status as a 'docile body', and attempts to reclaim his individualism, currently overshadowed by the 'mechanisms of normalization' inherent to the peer pressure through which the 'Tribe' maintains its control over him.

Tribes then, has been a pertinent case-in-point of the manner in which communities organise themselves into 'ingroups' and outgroups' in ways that are characteristically Othering. Note again however, the slippery division between Tajfel's envisioning of such groups, and the manner in which one group may *become* the other, and vice-versa. The novel also suggests the relationship that exists between 'doubleness' and Otherness, as well

as the manner in which Foucault's 'mechanisms of normalization' can be observed playing out in the protagonist's experience of joining a gang. Also highlighted, was the association between a young character's feelings of 'outsiderness' (Wilkie-Stibbs 10) and their ensuing need to belong to an 'ingroup' representative of normativity in a particular context. Indeed, this notion of 'outsiderness' and its impact on belonging is also of great importance in Anne Cassidy's *Looking for JJ*.

Looking for JJ is an account of sixteen-year-old Jennifer Jones's attempt to re-integrate back into society living under the assumed name Alice Tully, having been released from a young offenders' institution in which she has served a sentence for murdering her childhood friend. *Looking For JJ* draws on the author's interest in the 1993 James Bulger case in which two pre-adolescent boys were convicted for the abduction and murder of a toddler in a Liverpool shopping centre. The novel questions the extent to which the 'necessary Otherness' inherent to criminality (Isherwood and Harris 3), can ever entirely be transcended in an attempt to belong once more, to a society which, through the 'disciplinary' and punitive apparatuses (*Discipline...* 136) of the court and prison system has sought to exclude the 'deviant' (*Abnormal...* 312) individual. Cassidy's novel draws on polyphonic strategies to explore the different attitudes regarding the protagonist's release, and skilfully intertwines various characters' accounts with fictionalised newspaper extracts. The use of the latter, as we will see, has echoes of the media coverage of the Bulger case, and helps to situate the concerns of the novel within the context of popular opinion and its ability to disenfranchise and vilify individuals.

The opening passage of *Looking for JJ* introduces the protagonist, Jennifer Jones³⁸ through reference to Othering, animal-like words and phrases:

Everyone was looking for Jennifer Jones. She was dangerous, the newspapers said. She posed a threat to children and should be kept behind bars. The public had a right to know where she was. Some of the weekend papers even resurrected the old headline: A life for a life! (3)

Comparably to a creature escaped from the zoo, Jennifer / Alice is described as: ‘dangerous’, a ‘threat’ and needing to be ‘kept behind bars’. From this point on, Cassidy’s novel explores the challenges that Jennifer experiences upon her re-entry to society in her new guise as Alice. The plot revolves around her attempt to keep her ‘true’ identity hidden and embark upon a ‘quiet and private life’ (Cassidy 78) working in a coffee shop in South London, whilst the media simultaneously attempt to expose her. The novel questions the extent to which belonging is perennially out-of-reach for certain individuals whose Otherness stems from behaviour that falls wholly outside of societal acceptability. Peter Morrall argues that ‘the murder of a child [...] seems to be one of the, if not the, worst crime possible’ (54). With this in mind, Cassidy is interested, in addition to exploring Otherness through the lens of criminality, specifically through the story of a person who has committed what is generally considered to be the most heinous crime it is possible to commit.

As mentioned previously, *Looking For JJ* was born out of the author’s fascination with the James Bulger case and particularly the media’s coverage and attitude regarding Bulger’s killers Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, following their trial, imprisonment and subsequent release under their assumed identities. In an interview, Cassidy discussed the

³⁸ For Jennifer Jones, read Alice Tully (and vice-versa, given this is her assumed name). To simplify this, where appropriate, I refer to the protagonist as ‘Jennifer / Alice’ throughout this section of the chapter.

Otherring nature of the media's reporting in terms of its 'demonizing' (2015, 2) effects. Lisa Sainsbury comments further on this in her 2015 volume *Ethics in Children's Literature*:

Anne Cassidy's *Looking for JJ* [...] asks whether social reintegration is ever possible for children who commit serious offences. It also scrutinizes the role of journalism in this process – the cut-out newspaper dolls on the 2005 book jacket³⁹ suggests that the media invests in the construction and de-humanization of child killers (59).

Here then, we can observe how central notions of community and belonging are to Cassidy's novel, in addition to the pervasive sense of Otherness that surrounds its protagonist. It is worth noting however that, at no stage does Cassidy attempt to offer any reductive explanations (the omniscient narrator notably withholds 'moral' [Sainsbury 60] judgements), for Jennifer's actions, and neither does she toy with the notion that this character may effectively be 'written off' as inherently malicious or 'wicked'. Indeed, the teenage Jennifer / Alice is strongly aligned with normativity in terms of her desire for the trappings of a conventional existence: to 'be among normal people' (Cassidy 57) complete with 'a home; a job; friends; a boyfriend' (297)⁴⁰. Normativity, for Jennifer / Alice involves ensuring any vestige of her status as Other due to her criminal past is concealed. Her attempts to negotiate the process of belonging, to fade seamlessly into the fabric of 'ordinary' life, is explored in the following passage:

She liked working in the café. It was all so ordinary. Serving people, making drinks, cutting slices of cake or using the silver tongs to pick up the syrupy Danish buns. It didn't bother her if the manager asked her to stay on for a short while, to help out with other things (76).

For Jennifer / Alice, having spent the majority of her life to the present in a young offender's institution, the café with its mundane, repetitive tasks symbolises sanctuary and order.

³⁹ See appendix 9.

⁴⁰ Notably, these traits of normativity are almost identical to those wished for by Christopher in *Curious Incident*.

Where her boyfriend Frankie is described as ‘hating any job he ever had’ (76), in contrast, her work at the café engenders a sense of belonging to the quotidian day-to-day activities of the community and, by proxy, its inherent normalcy. Through her depiction of this protagonist, Cassidy is able to examine the manner in which identity is inexorably associated with a sense of belonging, and moreover how one’s past inevitably has a strong impact on this.

Looking for JJ contains much discussion of what it means to be labelled a ‘criminal’ in twenty-first century Britain, and the problems associated with attempting to distance oneself from this moniker. Discussing her attempt to seek refuge in the mundane ‘routines’ of ordinary life, the narrator describes how:

Their lives, their routines, their everyday concerns; had been places where she could hide while things in her world were out of control. The newspapers had bounced stories off one another: *Jennifer Jones Flees From Her Mother; JJ Slips Out of the Media Spotlight; Jennifer Jones Goes Into Hiding Again!* There were talk shows where the issues were pored over. *Should JJ be left alone? Can people really change?* (Cassidy 292)

This relates back to the introductory chapter wherein we examined Otherness in relation to the ‘demonization’ of young people in contemporary Britain, through, for example, the lens of media reporting. In this regard, I considered how certain aspects of policy making, for example, ‘anti-social behaviour orders’, can be viewed as inherently Othering. Whilst Jennifer’s crime is obviously of a considerably higher profile than those who might warrant an ‘ASBO’, as is evident in the passage above, the effect of the media’s considerable interest in her case is similarly that of vilification or ‘demonization’. In his discussion of the manner in which communities serve to Other those they regard as ‘deviant’ with respect to ‘criminality’ (*Abnormal...* 44) Foucault contends:

We describe the effects and mechanisms of the power exercised over these categories as mechanisms and effects of exclusion, disqualification, exile, rejection, deprivation, refusal, and incomprehension; that is to say, an entire arsenal of negative concepts or mechanisms of exclusion (44).

'Exclusion' then, is a central facet of a community's reaction to criminality. Essentially, in the acting out of behaviour that is legally, morally or socially mandated as being 'unacceptable', the individual forfeits the privilege of belonging. This is certainly evident in Cassidy's novel, indeed, for Jennifer / Alice, even upon her 'release under licence' (Cassidy 10) following her sentencing in court and subsequent incarceration, her past continues to re-emerge.

Intrusive memories are triggered through the disruptive presence of the news-media / paparazzi, which continually thwarts Alice's attempts to find sanctuary through developing a legitimate sense of belonging. 'A lot of baggage from her past', i.e.: that which continually re-emerges in the pages of the tabloid press, is described as 'weighing her down' (40): 'memories flickered into life and filled her head with pictures. A trip out for three children that would live with Alice for the rest of her life' (80). In this manner, memory is presented as being a significantly traumatic presence in Alice's life.

Indeed, her experience suggests that the traumatic aspects of the past live on, occupying the minds of those they return to haunt and disturb. In this way, we may consider Jacques Derrida's notion of the 'trace' of the past. It is the past from which Jennifer / Alice is attempting to escape, but which recurs as this 'trace' continually re-emerges into her consciousness, ultimately making escape from it untenable. In *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), Derrida states: 'the self of the living present is primordially a trace' (85), a moment that has the ability to recur, returning latterly to 'haunt' and unsettle the present. Derrida's essay continues to consider how 'being temporal is never simply being present, it is always engaged in the movement of the trace' (85). This 'trace' then, in this case memory or 'the

past', is never static or contained, but rather 'engaged in movement'. This suggests that one's absence from the place in which the 'traces' of the traumatic past dwell may not provide the imagined escape, as the past is liable to transgress the 'temporal' boundaries of place. Essentially, because memories are not tied solely to exterior or geographical 'places', but are located in the mind, physically distancing oneself from a site of trauma does not necessarily rid the mind of the discomfort associated with it. In addition to this, as we have seen, the media acts as a 'haunting' presence in *Looking for JJ*, forever in pursuit of Jennifer / Alice in order to confront her repeatedly with the visceral 'facts' of her 'history' and disrupt whatever vestiges of sanctuary she has achieved. The narrator highlights this in the poignant rhetorical question: 'how could she expect the press to forget what she never would?' (80). Again, this suggests the interrelation between Jennifer / Alice's memory and the media that continues to 'weigh her down' (40), forcing her to repeatedly confront the full horror of her past.

The media, and specifically the nature of newspaper reporting in relation to serious crime (at least, where there is a clear public interest), plays an integral role in this novel. Sainsbury asserts that 'the media shape[s] public discourse and this is the point that Cassidy calls on her young readers to consider in *Looking For JJ*' (61). Arguably, Jennifer / Alice's Otherness is borne out of her description in the newspaper extracts that Cassidy intersperses throughout the narrative. In this way they act as polyphony, providing an additional 'voice' that counteracts and disrupts the primary narrative. Susan Bobby describes 'polyphonic narrative style' in terms of the 'emerging voices of ancillary characters' (19). In this way, I would argue that the newspaper extracts form an 'ancillary character' in *Looking For JJ*. They have the similar kind of a disquieting, challenging influence on the narrative that a secondary human character potentially could, inserted by the author to provide an alternative perspective on

the protagonist's behaviour and attitudes. As Sainsbury (59) suggests, the centrality of the newspaper extracts to the narrative is alluded to by the cover of the Scholastic edition featuring the newspaper dolls on which the words 'murder', 'killed', 'little girl' and 'terrifying' are ominously visible (see appendix 9).

The newspaper extracts in the text itself, although fictional, are clearly inspired by 'real-life' reporting of similar cases. In an interview, Cassidy commented: 'I get my ideas from real newspaper stories of crimes' (2011), the most notable of which is, as mentioned previously, the 1993 James Bulger case. There are definite echoes of the media reporting of this case in the fictionalised newspaper extracts in *Looking For JJ*. Consider the following passage for example: 'A face, staring at a camera. A fringe and long hair. Staring eyes that looked surprised to be there. The newspapers had called it *The face of a killer*' (275). Here, Cassidy is drawing effectively on the familiar type of stark police photographs of criminals that are routinely published. The most infamous and frequently reproduced of these is the police 'mugshot' of the 'Moors Murderer' Myra Hindley⁴¹ (see appendix 10). They are frequently accompanied by dehumanising, Othering captions, such as *The Daily Mirror's* banner-headline denouncing the boys convicted for James Bulger's murder (Jon Venables and Robert Thompson) as 'freaks of nature' (appendix 11). Similarly, in her article for *The Guardian* examining the Bulger case 'twenty years on' (Hill 2013), Amelia Hill considered the dehumanising language and overwhelming sense of Otherness that characterised Venables and Thompson in the public consciousness and that pervaded contemporary newspaper reporting regarding the boys' crime:

⁴¹ Who, along with her accomplice Ian Brady committed a series of child killings in and around the Manchester area between 1963 and 1965.

Judge Morland [...] condemned them as guilty of ‘unparalleled evil and barbarity’. *The Daily Star* asked: ‘How Do You Feel Now, You Little Bastards?’ *The Sun’s* front page stated that the ‘Devil Himself Couldn’t Have Made A Better Job of Two Fiends’. Politicians, meanwhile, damned the boys as ‘Nasty little juveniles’, ‘Hooligans’, ‘Worthless’ and ‘Evil’ (qtd. In Hill 2013).

As I alluded to previously, Cassidy’s novel does much to counteract her protagonist’s status as a ‘monster’ in the novel. She situates Jennifer / Alice in a context of ordinariness in terms of work, home life and relationships, as well as signalling to the reader the sense of remorse she appears to feel from her crime. Nevertheless, she remains inescapably Other, an abomination in the public consciousness, from whom her personal safety is at risk to such a degree that the Home Office is forced to warn the public of the illegality of ‘revenge or vigilante action’ which ‘will be dealt with in the most rigorous manner’ (Cassidy 10). Again then, as in *Lucas*, the restorative justice of the ‘mob’ exists as a threatening influence in *Looking For JJ*. In Foucauldian terms, this is an example of a community seeking to ‘punish’ the individual whose Otherness represents a threat to its order and stability.

It is useful to consider notions of community and belonging in broader terms in relation to this novel and its Othered protagonist. In a discussion of ‘demonised’ young people, (or the child as ‘monster’), we might refer back to the concepts of the ‘Apollonian’ (‘innocent’) and ‘Dionysian’ (‘wicked’) child explored in the previous chapter. *Looking For JJ* demonstrates the manner in which literature for young people is continually concerned with negotiating these binaries. Indeed, it could even be said that the primary ‘community’ Jennifer / Alice is Othered from in the novel is that of childhood itself. Educational historian and sociologist Chris Jenks explores this idea to great effect in *Childhood* (1996) in which he considers 1993, the year James Bulger was murdered, as a turning point in terms of how both children and childhood are perceived and understood in the contemporary period. Jenks asserts that,

prior to 1993, the 'conceptual space of childhood' was generally considered to be 'innocence enshrined', and, as a result, the murder of James Bulger was 'quite literally, inconceivable' (119). Developing this, Jenks goes on to explain his belief that 'it was not just two children who were on trial for the murder of a third but childhood itself' (127). This is the situation we observe playing out in *Looking For JJ*, the Otherness attached to its central character associated inexorably with her transgression of what is often viewed as the 'sacred space' of childhood. Ultimately however, Cassidy's depiction of Jennifer / Alice can also be viewed in terms of the inherent Otherness that surrounds criminality generally, as well as its relationship to notions of community and belonging. With reference to Foucauldian terminology ('social order', 'power', 'control', 'discourse', 'discipline'), Visano comments on this relationship in the introduction to *Crime and Culture* (1998):

The study of crime is an analysis of being, becoming and experiencing 'Otherness'. Crime is a challenge to a particular socially constructed and historically rooted social order. The study of crime, therefore, is an inquiry into expressions of power, cultural controls and contexts of contests. Accordingly, the designated criminal is set apart and relegated to the margins according to a disciplining discourse about differences (1).

Even having served her court mandated sentence, Jennifer is shown to be at the mercy of the 'cultural controls' of the community and its 'disciplining' influence. She is branded by her criminality and pursued shadow-like by an Otherness that continually sets her apart, 'relegating' her 'to the margins' (Visano 1) and limiting any kind of access to 'true' belonging. Indeed, this is the situation she is once again confronted with in the novel's conclusion. Following the media's revealing of Alice Tully's 'true identity', she is forced to move again, adopting a new assumed name and discarding the trappings of normality, the 'home; job; friends and boyfriend' (297) she had painstakingly accumulated. The last line of the novel: 'but there was no such person as Alice Tully any more' (299) mirrors the opening

section of the novel, in which we learn the circumstances surrounding her assumed name. In this way, Cassidy suggests this is a cycle that will continually play out for the remainder of Jennifer's life. Essentially, those 'looking for JJ' will continue to pursue her until they feel 'justice' (Cassidy 276) has been served. In the meantime, Jennifer Jones will remain hunted, a victim of her irredeemable Otherness.

Referring back to my thesis statement, I have shown how novels such as *Lucas*, *Tribes* and *Looking for JJ* have contributed to an increasing corpus of post-2000 YA realism in which notions of Otherness are increasingly evident. Furthermore, where possible, links were made to pertinent socio-cultural contexts. In this chapter's case, these related to, for example, crime, criminality and 'deviance' in general, to use the Foucauldian term. Notions of community and belonging have been shown to be inexorably associated with the primary texts' representation of Otherness. To show this, I discussed the manner in which these texts comment on the functioning of 'in' and 'outgroups' in communities and, by proxy, practices of inclusion and exclusion. Three unique forms of Otherness were considered, the cultural difference of the 'gypsy' in *Lucas*, the stranger in *Tribes* and the criminal in *Looking For JJ*. I then explored these individuals' attempts to achieve a sense of belonging in the communities in which the novels are set, as well as the reaction of these communities to them. I also discussed literary precedents, for example, *Lord Of The Flies*, for these texts and their treatment of the chapter's titular themes. Of particular support were readings of Foucault, through which I considered negative community attributes such as the formation of 'mobs', the 'disciplinary' power of communities and 'heterotopias' of deviation. From a theoretical standpoint, Derrida's notion of the past as 'trace' was instructive, suggesting Jennifer Jones can never fully escape the Otherness of her past because this 'trace' of her

history continually resurfaces in the present, disrupting any chance she has of ever truly 'belonging'.

Notably, each of the primary authors discussed in this chapter have continued to examine such themes in concurrent works. For example, Kevin Brooks poignantly explores Otherness with specific regards to the treatment of homelessness in communities in present-day Britain in *Candy* (2005). Catherine MacPhail continues to interrogate the relationship between identity and belonging in *Roxy's Baby* (2005), and Anne Cassidy has published a sequel to *Looking For JJ* entitled *Finding Jennifer Jones* (2014). In this, Jennifer is now entering adulthood whilst still struggling to reconcile herself with her troubling past.

The following chapter builds upon issues introduced in this chapter, but with an emphasis on character development *after* attempts to belong have effectively failed. With this in mind, I will now continue to consider Otherness in terms of 'outcast' or 'abandoned' child characters, the 'ones', in the words of Michael Morpurgo, 'no one else wanted' (31).

Chapter Three – ‘Ones no one else wanted’: Others, Outcasts and the Abandoned.

This chapter considers the implications of characters’ unsuccessful attempts to belong to key ‘ingroups’, for example, school, family and nation. I will make the case that outcast and abandoned children have been consistent figures in literature for young people (from *Hansel and Gretel* to *Harry Potter*), in addition to arguing that Otherness deriving from experiences of abandonment has a considerable impact on young peoples’ social development and sense of self, as demonstrated in this chapter’s primary literature. Otherness through the lens of outcast and abandoned children will be examined with reference to Jacqueline Wilson’s *Dustbin Baby* (2001), Melvin Burgess’s *Kill All Enemies* (2011) and Michael Morpurgo’s *Alone On A Wide Wide Sea* (2006). Comparably to the previous chapter, this chapter’s titular concepts are inexorably linked, and it is therefore first necessary to unpack them. ‘Abandonment’ is discussed in reference to young people by John Boswell:

‘Abandonment’, as used here, refers to the voluntary relinquishing of control over children by their natal parents or guardians, whether by leaving them somewhere, selling them, or legally consigning authority to some other person or institution (24).

Boswell’s use of Foucauldian vocabulary (‘control’, ‘authority’, ‘institution’) is particularly notable given Foucault’s writings on power and control will continue to inform my textual analysis in this chapter. The second term is ‘outcast’ for which *The Oxford English Dictionary* contains two definitions:

A person who has been cast out (of a society, institution, etc.); a person ostracized by his or her friends or social group; an exile, a homeless vagabond; a lowly or humble person.

Something which is thrown away; refuse (2015).

To be 'outcast' then, is a unique form of Otherness inseparable from abandonment and by proxy, exclusion. From the Brothers Grimm fairy-tale *Hansel and Gretel* (1812) in the early nineteenth-century, books featuring outcast and abandoned protagonists have had a routine presence in children's literature. This is in addition, of course, to the prevalence of abandoned or orphaned children in texts intended for an adult readership. Indeed, nineteenth-century fiction had a recurring interest in these character-types, for example, the young Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Mark Twain's eponymous Huckleberry Finn (1884) and various characters across Charles Dickens' *oeuvre*, including *Oliver Twist* (1837), Pip in *Great Expectations* (1861), and Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841). Nikki Gamble and Nicholas Tucker assert: 'Abandonment is not a new theme in children's literature. The story of *Hansel and Gretel* has been told to generations of children' (Gamble and Tucker 27). Here then, the provenance of the theme of abandonment in children's literature is traced to *Hansel and Gretel*.⁴² Given Gamble and Tucker suggest its essence is present in the various stories concerning abandoned children that have been published since, it is initially necessary to re-familiarise ourselves with it.

Hansel and Gretel is concerned with the defeat by two siblings of a cannibalistic witch whose home they encounter whilst lost in the woods. The witch's treatment of *Hansel and Gretel* may be read as a metaphor for adults' abuse of power over the young, itself one of the main facets of this chapter. In this way, her sugar-laden house, seemingly a safe haven (an ominous space 'too good to be true') for the lost children, ultimately becomes their

⁴² Bruno Bettelheim has also discussed abandonment in terms of fairy tales in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975). Explaining its prevalence from a psychoanalytic perspective he asserts: 'There is no greater fear in life than that we will be deserted, left all alone' (66).

prison. The tale's conclusion however, sees power shift to Hansel and Gretel themselves. Turning the tables on the witch, they bundle her into her own oven and escape.

Hansel and Gretel then, has multiple thematic similarities to the texts considered here: The figure of the abandoned child, adults failing to protect children and the inherent Otherness of children existing outside of traditional familial structures. Similarly to *Hansel and Gretel's* conclusion, as we will see in this chapter's primary texts, children, and specifically those without guardians, are forced to demonstrate their own power against adults. The *Hansel and Gretel* motif is updated in various late twentieth-century children's texts, including in a serialised form. For example, Cynthia Voight's *Tillerman Cycle* (1981–1989) features the eponymous Tillerman family and charts their struggle in the wake of their mother's abandonment of them. A decade later, Hunter Davies published his *Snotty Bumstead* series (1992 – 1995), a trio of books focusing on a child living alone and forced to fend for himself following his mother's disappearance. More recently, J.K. Rowling featured an orphaned protagonist in her *Harry Potter* series which, given its enduring popularity and impact on the contemporary children's literature canon, would be remiss to avoid mentioning.

Harry Potter is a young wizard whose parents are murdered by Voldemort, who we may interpret as an allegory for Satan. As a result, to quote Katherine Grimes, 'Potter's dead parents abandon him to the mercy of a frightening world' (93). He is sent to live with a family of non-wizards named the Dursleys, who withhold any emotional warmth, treat him as a servant and force him to reside in a cupboard under the stairs. Potter's Otherness stems from the 'magical' abilities he has inherited from his parents, as well as his abandonment in the wholly un-magical environment of the Dursley's home. Their inability to reconcile Harry's 'abnormality' and the threat they perceive it poses, with their provincial

life in suburban Surrey is a recurring tension in the series: 'I will not tolerate mention of your abnormality under this roof' (Rowling 2) Mr Dursley shouts at the unfortunate boy at one point in *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998). Harry is expected to conform to the Dursley family's conventional lifestyle and avoid mention of his familial heritage. In this way, Mr Dursley appears to believe that enforced silence will repress the disruptive power of Harry's gift. Predictably, this is not the case, and Harry's Otherness ultimately becomes his salvation. It liberates him from the Dursleys and secures him a place at the esteemed 'Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry' where he ultimately finds acceptance.

Prior to Rowling, another bestselling children's author in whose work we routinely encounter Otherness, in the form of its relationship to abandonment, is Jacqueline Wilson. Wilson has long argued for the importance of social realism in children's fiction due to a belief that children's books should reflect the sometimes harsh reality of life, whilst simultaneously providing humour and adventure. In her career, she has published over a hundred novels dealing with 'gritty' (Campbell 81) issues including homelessness, domestic abuse, divorce and addiction. Outcast and disenfranchised young people are staples of Wilson's corpus, from the *Tracy Beaker* trilogy (1991-2006) focusing on the day-to-day life of a looked-after child, to *Lily Alone* (2011) about a family of children coping with parental neglect. Wilson's *Dustbin Baby*, this chapter's first primary text, is narrated by April - the fourteen-year-old protagonist. The novel is an account of how her abandonment by her mother in a dustbin as a baby has affected her life and relationships since. Wilson explores how April's feelings of Otherness pervade her social interactions, as well as deeply influence her developing sense of identity as a teenager.

Dustbin Baby opens with April musing on her 'hatred' (Wilson 9) of birthdays because they occur on the day of her abandonment. This fact appears to situate April as an outsider in her social group, and she describes her attempts to keep this hidden:

I always hate my birthdays. I don't *tell* anyone that. Cathy and Hannah would think me seriously weird. I try so hard to fit in with them so they'll stay friends with me [...] They're the first nice normal friends I've ever had. They think I'm nice and normal too, give or take a few slightly strange ways [...] I'm never going to tell them about me. I'd die if they found out (9-10).

For April then, there is a direct link between her abandonment and sense of Otherness among her peers. Maintaining normativity is her primary concern, and her language choices ('strange' and 'seriously weird') suggests she perceives herself as abnormal within her social specific social group. In this way, Wilson considers the impact of the past on the shaping of identity in the present, and this idea is developed in a later passage:

I have these dreams where someone's lifting me up [...] Normal people don't dream about being babies. I don't know who the dream arms belonged to. Not my mother. She didn't hold me close and kiss me. She probably seized me by the ankles and shoved me straight in the dustbin (41).

April describes how the moment of the abandonment itself lingers in her dreams, and expresses concern that this recurring subconscious narrative is also inherently Othering, distinguishing her from 'normal people'. This idea is re-enforced through Wilson's frequent collaborating illustrator Nick Sharratt's cover drawing (see appendix 12) in which, rather than depicting her as a baby, Sharratt draws the *teenage* April in the bin. This suggests how this event continues to define and undermine her sense of self, from birth to the present day. In the previous chapter, we considered Derrida's perception of the past as a 'trace'. He developed this idea further in *Specters of Marx* (1993) coining the neologism 'hauntology' (Derrida 10) to suggest the past's 'haunting' impact on the present: 'What is a ghost? What is the effectivity or the presence of a specter [...] Each time it is the event itself, a first time is

a last time. Altogether other. Let us call it a *hauntology*' (10). 'Hauntology' comprises the terms 'haunting' and 'ontology' then, and this is notable because April's daily existence does indeed appear to be 'haunted' by her life's unusual beginning. The titular 'dustbin' forms, in Derrida's words 'the presence of a specter' in the novel. It is where April's story begins and, notably, where it ends. The image of the bin continually resurfaces throughout the narrative, disrupting and undermining April's attempts to pursue what sociologist Wim Meeus terms a 'conventional type of [adolescent] identity development' (72). She responds emotionally because, as Derrida exhorts, 'each time it is the event itself', when other characters allude to her situation: "'Did she *really* dump you in a dustbin, April?" I nod, hoping I'm not going to cry' (Wilson 47). Crucially however, the final pages of the novel suggest a degree of reconciliation with her 'history'. On visiting the alley where the bin once stood and meeting her rescuer, she makes the following observation: 'he gives me a real sense of my baby self. A tiny history. My beginning' (156). For April then, making amends with one's 'history' is connected with establishing a positive sense of self because, as Derrida asserts, 'a first time is a last time' – we remain the embodiment of our past. April's progress throughout the novel suggests that this is 'easier said than done' however, and her developing understanding of her identity is, to reference Kristeva, 'beset by abjection' (1).⁴³ Indeed, abandonment and abjection are conceptually bound in *Dustbin Baby*. Wilson explores this poignantly, dwelling on the details of the site of April's abandonment:

There are lots of wheely-bins, large, stinking and unattractive [...] How could anyone stuff a newborn baby in those dank depths? I've imagined it over and over and yet I've never thought about the *smell*. I must have reeked when that boy raked through the rubbish and found me (144).

⁴³ The use of the term here stemming from the Latin root '*abjectionem*' – literally, a 'dejection' or 'throwing away'.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva describes abjection as ‘Otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled’ (6). Certainly, the notion of the ‘repellent’ is characteristic in the extract above, rubbish is abject and April as a literal outcast is associated with the detritus that surrounds her. In this way, it is apt that the literal definition of ‘abject’ is: ‘to be cast out’ (*O.E.D* 2015). I would argue however that the concept of abjection underscores Wilson’s broader project in the novel, of attempting to depict the reality of life as a looked-after child.

With this in mind, In *Orphan Texts* (2000) Laura Peters discusses the ‘profound Otherness’ (65) of orphan characters in literature. In Peters’ case this is envisaged specifically through a Postcolonial lens: ‘the orphan occupies the place of the colonised subject [...] dispossessed, without rights, and embodying a difference to be excluded’ (65). Whilst I do not wish to impose a wholly Postcolonial reading onto this text, I would argue that the idea of the abandoned child as a ‘colonised subject’ is pertinent in terms of interpreting April and the power dynamics at work in her representation. Hunt (2004) discusses the analogy between children and ‘colonised’ individuals: ‘We both idealise and abject children. We want to be them and we want them to be us. Is this not the colonial state? The coloniser controls and distances the colonised’ (899). Whilst, as we have seen, the ‘colonisation of childhood’ by adults is certainly not an original theme in children’s literature studies (see Jacqueline Rose 1984, Glenda MacNaughton 2005, Lorraine van Blerk and Mike Kesby 2013), looked-after children, i.e.: those existing outside of traditional family units, arguably have a higher level of vulnerability to such ‘colonising’ influences.

Such young people are ‘subjects’ (*Discipline...* 48), a term itself indicative of ‘colonising’ processes, of child protection agencies such as social services. In this regard, unfamiliar

adults have enormous power over aspects of their day-to-day lives. In *Dustbin Baby*, Wilson alludes to the arbitrariness of situations like these, depicting the attitude of carers to their charges as ranging from indifference,⁴⁴ to genuine maternal affection, such as that shown to April by her own foster-carer, Marion. 'Each time I've gone to a new home' April explains, 'someone's coloured me in differently'. This suggests a sense of powerlessness, but also a 'battle' for narrative, a contest that is shared by other texts in this thesis in which 'who tells whose story' is routinely up for discussion. In this way, April feels she must continually alter and adapt her personality, 'who [she] is' (189), in order to 'fit in' (110) to each new setting. This idea is explored effectively in the various exchanges between April and Marion. Although Marion is depicted positively in the novel, clearly caring deeply for April and having her best interests at heart, Wilson probes this relationship's fracture-points:

"I'm sick of you telling me this and telling me that. Who are *you* to tell me all this stuff?
It's not like you're my *mother*"
"Look, I try-"
"But I don't *want* you to!" (15)

For the majority of the novel, April resents Marion's power, and her 'colonising' influence over April is evident in her attempts to encourage this confused teenage girl to emulate her own middle-class social mores: 'I'm sick of having to say please and thank you all the time and acting all prissy and posh [...] I just want to be *me*' (17). At this point, April re-asserts her power. She sets off, 'running' (34) from both Marion and the present in an attempt to understand the events surrounding her life's unceremonious beginning, and primarily to find out who this '*me*' 'truly' (41) is.

⁴⁴ One young person in the novel poignantly describes feeling 'like a visitor who's been foisted on her' (52) in her foster-carer's home.

Returning to Foucault's writing about the relationship between knowledge and power, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) he describes 'knowledge' as a 'perceptual process' capable of 'giving new definition' and establishing an 'order' (57) to history. The process of 'establishing order' is crucial to April, whose primary task in the novel is to create a tangible narrative about her past, piecing together the 'scraps' (Wilson 40) of her history. She views this as a 'moral right' (40) – a route towards 'completeness' and, by proxy, empowerment: 'it was my basic moral right to learn about my past' (40) she asserts, and is 'presented with a brimming box file. *Dustbin Baby. This Is Your Life*' (40).⁴⁵ Ultimately though, Wilson's novel suggests that April's Otherness does not stem wholly from a lack of anchoring to the past itself. Rather it is born out of the attachment issues that characterise her relationships with the individuals that comprise it. Judith Butler, further unpacking this concern, channels Foucauldian ideology:

For Foucault it is clear that one attaches to oneself through a norm, and so self-attachment is socially mediated [...] it is contingent: we will become attached to ourselves through mediating norms, norms that give us back a sense of who we are (190).

Arguably, the absent 'norm' in April's case is maternal attachment, without which her long-sought 'sense of who' she is, is withheld. John Bowlby is the primary proponent of 'attachment theory', a psychological model that attempts to explain the fundamental dynamics of human relationships, as well as to consider the impact of abandonment and subsequent separation in childhood from main caregivers such as mothers. In 'The Effects of Mother-Child Separation' (1956) Bowlby asserts: 'Children, who for whatever reason are deprived of the continuous care and attention of a mother [...] may suffer long-term effects'

⁴⁵ This is notable because *This Is Your Life* is based on the TV programme which pieces together a normative successful timeline which, in this sequence, April is compelled to mirror.

(211). In *Dustbin Baby* April articulates the idea of attachment as ‘connection’: ‘It’s silly to think a birth mother so important when the birth is the only thing that connects you. It’s weird the way I’ve loved her for all these years. Maybe I should have hated her’ (154). For April then, this ‘connection’ remains fundamental, and her ongoing love for her mother appears to her ‘weird’ and inexplicable. This is particularly the case given that, as she suggests, the obvious reaction might well be one of ‘hate’. However, as John Holmes asserts in *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory* (2006): ‘biological heritage [is] a shackle, creating inevitable conflict’ (209), and this internal and continuous ‘love / hate’ ‘conflict’ with regards to her mother is a crucial aspect of the ‘long-term effects’ (Bowlby 211) of the attachment issues experienced by April following her abandonment.

These ‘effects’ are further characterised by April’s pervasive feelings of anxiety relating to her past, present and future as well as her ongoing lack of self-worth. Even with the passing of fourteen years, as mentioned earlier, April struggles to escape the omnipresent motif of the dustbin, ‘I’m rubbish’ (122) she declares despondently at one point. To add a further aspect of challenge to April’s emotional development, her young life, she explains, involved frequent moves between sets of foster carers (86). This leaves her feeling, in her own words: ‘papery and easily crumpled’ (107). The preceding extract is part of a recurring ‘paper’ metaphor that is introduced when April describes the emotional impact of the abandonment: ‘I’d made a scrapbook of my life when I was little. They don’t like you using the word ‘scrapbook’ because they don’t want you to feel you’re like little throwaway scrappy bits of paper. Though that’s the way I *do* feel’ (45). Marion’s influence stabilises this to a degree. However, throughout the novel it is clear that April senses this relationship’s lack of traditional maternalism: ‘I think about my mother, my *real* mother’ (105), ‘Marion is *almost* as good as a *real* mother [my italics]’ (180). In Foucault’s writing, as we have seen,

the Other is defined by their existence outside, or inability to conform to the expectations of, traditional societal institutions such as community, family, school and workplace. With this in mind, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses family as being ‘the privileged locus of emergence for the question of the normal and abnormal’ (216), and this is arguably the case in *Dustbin Baby*, April’s perception of her Otherness stemming from her lack of traditional (biological) familial kinship. Whilst, on the surface, Wilson does much to promote, and, on occasion, celebrate, non-traditional families, it is also worth mentioning her propensity to revert back to ‘nuclear family’ structures whenever the notion of an ‘ideal’ family unit is explored in her work. Characters such as April, Tracy Beaker and Star and Dolphin (the protagonists of Wilson’s *The Illustrated Mum* [1999]), all appear to strive for such traditional family arrangements, and it is worth bearing in mind Wilson’s (possibly unconscious) conservatism in this regard. This is important because it demonstrates the way in which, even whilst attempting to portray Otherness as a position that can be adopted without recrimination, a sense of normativity continually *resurfaces* in her work, existing in opposition to the Otherness the novels are supposedly legitimating.

As we have seen, *Dustbin Baby* explores the impact of abandonment on burgeoning adolescent identity. Otherness underscores April’s narration, tying her to the past and disrupting the present. The ‘disruptive’ aspects of abandonment and ensuing sense of Otherness attributed to outcast young people is also explored pertinently in Melvin Burgess’s *Kill All Enemies*. Burgess’s writing has traditionally focused heavily on marginalised young people. His Carnegie Medal-winning *Junk* (1996) features a group of teenage heroin addicts living in a squat in 1980s Bristol. Similarly, novels such as *The Baby and Fly Pie* (1993), depicts children living on a rubbish tip, and *Nicholas Dane* (2009) about child exploitation at the hands of adults (essentially, a re-working of Charles Dicken’s *Oliver*

Twist), further demonstrates Burgess's commitment to documenting the lives of children in situations characterised by Otherness. *Kill All Enemies* is a polyphonic account of the lives of three troubled teenagers whose non-compliant behaviour in school results in their transfer to a Pupil Referral Unit (abbreviated in the novel to 'PRU'). In *Deschooling Society* (1971), Ivan Illich demonstrates 'the power of school to divide social reality' (12). This 'power', he argues, results in 'education becom[ing] unworldly and the world becom[ing] noneducational' (12). Education for Illich then, is a highly divisive component of contemporary 'social reality'. The divisive nature of school and the myriad dangers of viewing education as a purely academic experience (as opposed to a partly vocational one), is one of the central concerns of *Kill All Enemies*. Chiefly, Burgess demonstrates how alienating an institution school can be, particularly in regards to young people who fall outside the limits of its 'mainstream' provision. Such young people, the novel suggests, are effectively abandoned by a system that fails to manage their specific needs, talents and abilities. Instead they fall under the control of a system designed to essentially incarcerate them between eight-thirty and three-thirty each day until the end-of-day bell rings and they are their parents' responsibility once again.

Burgess criticises exclusion to the PRU as a means of disciplinary control poignantly in the novel: 'I was excluded [...] and I had to go to the Brant PRU. Or, as my dad put it, "the educational rubbish tip"' (Burgess 99-101). Chris, one of three teenage narrators in Burgess's novel, articulates the relationship between exclusion and abandonment. To be 'excluded' from school then, is to be outcast from one of the central institutions of modern life. It suggests an individual's inability (or lack of desire) to comply with society's expected trajectory, essentially that young people undergo the 'disciplinary' (*Discipline...* 138) practices of schooling to 'form' (6) them into individuals who can 'function' (146) in society

by adhering to its governing principles. Foucault suggests that Otherness from the 'confines of society' results in 'detachment' and a 'loosening of kinship' (*Discipline...* 211). This is the situation we observe unfolding in *Kill All Enemies* as Billie, Rob and Chris (the three protagonists), are each excluded from school and 'referred' to the PRU, becoming increasingly 'detached' from what Chris terms 'concepts such as "friendship" and "loyalty"' (Burgess 100) en-route. Gradually, the three teenagers develop an increasing sense of themselves as outsiders from a world that appears oppressive and capricious. This is explained to Chris in reference to the education system as the other teenagers view it: 'See what you're up against? It's like a police state. If you think for yourself, every man's hand is against you [...] You can trust no one. Your teachers, your parents – they're all just gagging to turn you in just for the hell of it' (100).

As examined in chapter one, for Foucault, individualism is routinely the object of 'punishment' because it denotes a failure to comply with normative expectations of behaviour and represents a threat to the 'ruling elite' - 'teachers' and 'parents' in this context. However, the Otherness of the individual and what Pickett describes as 'the relationship between individualism and community life' (84) is problematised in Foucault's later writing. In *The Subject and Power* (1982), for example, he explains:

On the one hand they assert the right to be different and they underline everything that makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way (210).

As suggested here and echoed in the novel, the inherent individualism and lack of conformity of the three protagonists is simultaneously liberating and 'constraining'. Indeed, like April in *Dustbin Baby*, Billie, Rob and Chris in *Kill All Enemies* struggle because they too

are ‘tied to [their] identity’ and this identity is defined by their abandonment by school, friends and family, as well as their status as “‘problem” teenagers’ (Hall 2011). The idea of the ‘problem’ child or teenager (arguably itself, a somewhat Othering moniker), is a recurrent theme in literature for both children and adults. Novels such as Dorothy Edwards’ *My Naughty Little Sister* (1959), Francesca Simon’s *Horrid Henry* (1994), Thomas Tryon’s *The Other* (1971) and Lionel Schriver’s *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) each attest to this. In his discussion of the ‘dark history of problem children’, Musick asserts: ‘Delinquents are but one type of problem child. Others include; abandoned youth [...] dependent or neglected youngsters and status offenders’ (273). If this statement could be said to apply to any one character in *Kill All Enemies* it would be Billie, who embodies each of the facets of the ‘problem child’ in Musick’s taxonomy.

Discussing her feelings of Otherness from the education system and its evangelising, but not particularly effective mission of ‘personal development’ (144), Billie states: ‘you’re supposed to realize who you are and what you want and where you’re going and take control and be responsible and make something of yourself. And – I haven’t’ (144). One of the central themes of Burgess’s novel then, is the inadequacy of the education system to ‘work’ for every young person that graces its classrooms. Billie feels wholly let down by its provision and struggles to develop the discipline (‘control and responsibility’) school demands in order to ‘make something of yourself’. As a result, she is referred to the PRU and effectively ‘written off’, abandoned by her mainstream school. Notably again, as discussed in the previous chapter, we might consider the Othering implications of the term ‘mainstream’.

As Hannah, one of the few adult voices of reason explains in terms of a troubled teenager’s ‘list’ of priorities: ‘Would you put school at the top of your list? I certainly wouldn’t [...]

When you do go in you're treated like some kind of delinquent brat [...] The whole system comes down on them like a ton of bricks' (199). For Foucault, the primary purpose of the school is to 'control and correct' (*Discipline...* 136). It is a 'machine for learning' (*Discipline...* 165), but, as Burgess's novel demonstrates, 'machines' fail to recognise human complexity and fallibility. To fall outside of such a 'system', Hannah implies, invokes a punitive response, the 'system comes down' on the transgressor.

Kill All Enemies also explores the Othering and exclusory nature of the school system in general. In particular, Burgess highlights the manner in which it rewards pupils of an academic bent, whilst marginalising those who struggle with traditional learning, or fail to see how it relates to their personal ambitions. Chris, who throughout the novel demonstrates his commitment to becoming an 'entrepreneur' by developing his internet business, explains how school fails to cater to his specific needs and interests: 'They should have let me leave and get on with it, but oh no. You have to stay until your brain melts. Instead of being at school, I ought to be out there making my first fortune. They don't do GCSEs in entrepreneuring' (13). As a result, Chris, in addition to the two other teenage protagonists, begins increasingly to view himself as Other within the school environment, a 'loser' (101), whereas the wider novel provides considerable evidence to the contrary.

Discussing the novel in an interview with Alison Waller, Burgess argued that whilst the teenage characters in *Kill All Enemies* are, indeed, 'dreadful at school', they have 'really significant *heroic* lives in a different way [*italics added*]' (qtd. in Waller 191). Billie, for example, has contended with neglect and abandonment by her mother, and subsequently has dealt with the challenges of life in foster care. Hannah, consistently the voice of empathy in the novel, discusses this: 'people see them as troublemakers, but if you knew

the trouble that's going on in their lives, you wouldn't think like that' (198). Ultimately, however, these pupils' mainstream schools decide their continued association is untenable and they are subsequently abandoned ('chucked out' [Burgess 107]) to the PRU. Harwood discusses the segregating effects of PRUs: 'Physical differentiation can function as an indicator for the supposed aberration within the interiority of the individual. From this perspective, such dividing practices both designate and reinforce the Otherness of the young person' (2006). A sense of 'reinforced Otherness' is, indeed, an integral characteristic of the PRU's occupants in the novel, as Ruth, a long-standing pupil, explains to Chris: "We're all freaks here, pal. Failures, geeks, the too tall, the too short, the too clever, the not clever enough. That's us" (Burgess 106). Ultimately then, the mainstream school's abandonment of these young people results in an increased sense of detachment and disenfranchisement.

For Burgess however, Otherness and abandonment are inherent aspects of adolescence generally. His work returns repeatedly to how adults' treatment of teenagers is characterised by intolerance, impatience and a general lack of understanding. This is depicted in Chris's parents' argument about the extent to which, as his father sees it, he has 'failed his education' (Burgess 102), by being excluded: "Don't call him failed!" "What else do you want me to call him? Succeeded?" "He's fifteen years old! How can he be failed" (102). Chris's mother challenges his father then, alluding to the absurdity of accusing a fifteen-year-old of having 'failed' in life. This also hints, I would argue, at a broader social issue regarding the perception and treatment of teenagers in twenty-first century British society. Michelle Mitchell argues that treating teenagers as 'mini-adults' is problematic because they are still in a 'developing' (86) state, and this, as is evident from the above passage, is the stance Chris's mother takes. Burgess's novel suggests that the uneasy

relationship between adults and teenagers stems from the expectation that they 'become' fully-formed adults before they are developmentally able and prepared to do so.⁴⁶ He views this as being inextricably linked with modern educational practices:

At school you study everything. To come out of it feeling good about yourself, you have to be good at everything. And can you imagine a worse time to do it? How many 15-year-olds have the patience to sit still and study a bunch of subjects, most of which they will inevitably have no interest in at all? You're only just getting used to yourself (Burgess 2006).

Adults' unrealistic expectations of teenagers can lead to them internalising a 'miserable sense of failure' (Burgess 2006) Burgess contends, and this, as we have seen, is the case with Chris. Burgess also suggests that in modern-day Britain there is an Otherness attributed to adolescents who fall outside the remit of adult expectations in terms of their attitudes, behaviour and ability. Gill discusses this novel's depiction of an 'unease which exists around youth in contemporary Western societies' (56). In particular, this sense of 'unease' can be observed in the manner in which teenage boys in particular are routinely the object of demonization and vilification in the media and described in Othering terms. Indeed, this was particularly the case following the UK riots in the summer of 2011, as described in the introduction. Following these, the Conservative Party politician Iain Duncan Smith likened the rioters to 'child soldiers of the third world' whose only role models included 'the violent and the criminal' and whose knowledge was only that of 'anger and violence' (qtd. in Briggs 71). To refer back to the typical adjectives used to describe teenage boys in the media after this event, 'yobs', 'thugs' and 'feral' were particularly prevalent (Garner 2009). This suggests, as Burgess argues, a degree of ephiphobia, a fearful perspective on teenagers,

⁴⁶ In addition to *Kill All Enemies*, this concept is explored to great effect in Burgess's earlier novel *Doing It* (2003).

wherein adults see ‘only the bad things, or the things that don’t work’ (2006). He implores his adult readers to re-assess such a mind-set however, stating: ‘growing things are so interesting [...] Changing so much, learning so much. We have a lot to learn from teenagers’ (2006).

Burgess’s writing then, challenges its readers to confront their conventional understandings or prejudices in relation to young people. As Foucault asserts, ‘the Normal is a principle of coercion’ (*Discipline...* 184), and one of the central issues of *Kill All Enemies* is the manner in which teenagers are ‘coerced’ into adult normative frameworks when they have not yet developed the necessary tools to function in the ‘regime of truth’ (*Discipline...* 19) we call adulthood. Foucault’s major works such as *Abnormal, Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilisation*, demonstrate the means by which the powerful routinely abandon and outcast those they fail to understand. Burgess’s novel counteracts this, encouraging adults to embrace and ‘learn from’ teenagers’ ‘splendid qualities’ (Waller 16), rather than excluding, reviling or fearing them.

For Foucault, outcast and abandoned individuals are engaged in ‘limit-experiences’ (*Archaeology...* 248), occupying the periphery or ‘limit’ of systems and institutions. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1964) he demonstrates how transgression of such normative ‘limits’ results in exclusion. Notably however, in tandem with the obvious negative effects of such ‘exclusion’ (for example, the relinquishing of power and ‘status’ [*Madness...* 240]), Foucault suggests how individuals may actually perceive ‘limit-experiences’ positively, asserting: ‘abandonment is salvation; exclusion offers another form of communion’ (5). Ultimately, in *Kill All Enemies* there is evidence that Billie, Rob and Chris’s exclusion to the PRU becomes, to an extent, their ‘salvation’. Unlike in their previous mainstream schools,

the PRU contains staff like the kind and encouraging Hannah, whose awareness of the vulnerability and 'big hearts' (Burgess 109) of her charges shines through in her patient and tolerant attitude towards them. For Hannah, Billie's 'troublesome' (108) Otherness is particularly affecting:

She's one of those kids I can't stop relating to [...] Billie broke my heart the first time I saw her and she's been breaking it ever since [...] In that little girl beats the biggest heart you'll ever find. If only people knew. If only *she* knew. That's what I'm for. To try and show her that inside she's brimming over with love (108-109).

So, whilst teenagers such as Billie may have experienced repeated exclusion and abandonment in the past, Hannah insists that her role ('what I'm for') is to reverse this unhappy trend. Whilst the PRU does not entirely succeed in this reformatory mission, it is nevertheless responsible for bringing these three teenagers together and fostering their unlikely companionship. Indeed, the final part of the novel charts the formation of this new friendship group's rock band called, as referenced in the novel's title, 'Kill All Enemies'.

Michelle Gill discusses the band's legitimisation of arguably 'dysfunctional' relationships:

Rob becomes a member, with Billie adding vocals. Chris suggests himself as the manager and finds to his surprise that he belongs and finally feels comfortable. To the adults around them, these relationships may appear dysfunctional but they are significant [...] Friendships which may appear anti-social to those outside can still have a positive effect on the young people involved (56).

For these perennial outsiders then, the band represents belonging, the music with its 'deathgrowl' (Burgess 293) cadence seemingly a cathartic influence. Music is also shown to be an empowering vehicle for these teenagers. It restores some of the self-confidence and self-belief lost in the processes of exclusion and abandonment they have previously been victims of: 'New mates, new life' Chris reflects; 'I have the band. Things are definitely looking up' (306). The primal Otherness of the band's output (which, in addition to a

'deathgrowl' is also described as a 'screaming gibber'⁴⁷ [244]) is a liberatory sound that, I suggest, may be compared to the 'yawp' in Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1855): 'I too am not a bit tamed...I too am untranslatable, I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world' (85). The speaker's voice with its primal energy and 'untameability' is unleashed upon the 'world'. The 'yawp' in its 'barbaric' inarticulacy, bypasses the limits of conventional language. The music that 'Kill All Enemies' play has a similar function. The 'untranslatable' aspects of the teenagers' 'limit-experiences' are voiced, not through words, but rather 'growls' and 'gibbers'. As Joachim Oberst asserts in his exploration of language and the human condition: 'language does not just consist of the communication of the communicable [...] The non-communicable resides [there] and seeks new forms of expression' (2011). In this novel, such 'new forms of expression' are the means by which agency is restored to these individuals, previously rendered voiceless by virtue of their outcast status. In this way, music becomes Billie, Rob and Chris's sanctuary in the novel. The band encourages them to exalt in their Otherness, results in them finding their voice, and ultimately allows them to transcend the obstacles that abandonment, by school and, in Billie's case, family, has imposed on them. Rob, in particular, believes irreducibly in music's transformative powers, describing early on in the novel his belief that it 'solves problems'. As a result, he asserts: 'You don't have to be angry [...] You don't have to be scared, you don't have to worry' (28).

Rob's role in the band is a source of considerable pride due to his prior outcast status: 'Can you believe it? Yesterday I was nothing and today, look at me! I am in a band! (248). In school he is a figure of ridicule due to his size and penchant for alternative clothes, and has

⁴⁷ These animal-life references representing a shift away from conventional language.

learned to accept that 'a kid like me gets beatings' (75). Rob is rejected by his peers, abandoned for failing to adhere to their brand of cultural normativity: 'It's like the style police, if you're not like them [...] Kids get beaten up for listening to the wrong music or wearing the wrong clothes' (27). Here then, is another Foucauldian example of normativity being 'policed' by individuals who, in the context given, have the power to exclude those who display 'perversions' (Burgess 27) of behavior, such as the wearing of clothes not mandated as 'cool' (29). When Rob boldly decides to wear his new *Metallica* t-shirt to school he is, predictably, 'beat up' [sic]. The school authorities promptly exclude him, assuming that, due to his size and strength, he instigated the fight. Billie comments on the absurdity of this situation, defending Rob to her form teacher: 'Rob doesn't bully – he gets bullied [...] So what really happened is he gets beaten up for wearing the wrong clothes and then he gets excluded by you lot for wearing the wrong clothes. You're no better than the kids' (84). Billie comments tellingly on the divisive nature of this decision. The school, she maintains, in its exclusion of Rob, is simply mirroring the behaviour of its pupils. Schools, Foucault attests in *Discipline and Punish*, are inherently exclusory institutions, surveilling and punishing pupils for inconsequential misdemeanors. In this way, as Billie suggests, they operate in a comparable manner to the 'bullies' that occupy their playgrounds, continually seeking ways to expose differences and disenfranchise those deemed to be Other in some way. Exclusion from school has wider societal significance however, because, as Foucault's work suggests, schools function as microcosms of society (1979). Therefore as Linda Cusworth explains: 'exclusion from school is associated with educational under-attainment and reduced employment opportunities' (118). In this way, Burgess expresses concern regarding the ultimate consequences of the mainstream school system's abandonment of these young people. Indeed, even having attended the PRU and benefited from staff such as

Hannah's encouragement and support, Chris exhibits a strong ambivalence towards education by the novel's conclusion. For example, keen to enact revenge upon his previous school for excluding him, Chris throws a fire extinguisher through one of its windows in the novel's final paragraph: '*Crash!* I love the sound of breaking glass. Then I turned round and walked out of that useless dump forever' (108). The exclusion then, has only resulted in Chris's increased disaffection with this institution, which he now perceives as 'useless', and, by proxy, education generally. Ultimately, Burgess entreats the reader to reflect on how young people, even ones such as Billie, Rob and Chris who clearly present a challenge to staff and resources, deserve access to an education appropriately matched to the nature of their own specific skills and talents. No young person, the novel argues, should be 'bored' (9) by education, fear school or be abandoned by it and branded a 'failure' (106). A system like this, Chris astutely observes, is 'not education' but 'fraud' (9). In this way, I believe that, like much of Burgess's *oeuvre*, *Kill All Enemies* is a truly radical example of YA fiction, that succeeds in intelligently and convincingly questioning the status quo, particularly as it relates to education in the UK.

Comparably, the troubling treatment of young people by the state, and the ramifications of this in terms of outcast and abandoned young people, is also central to Michael Morpurgo's *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea* (2006). Morpurgo explores abandonment with reference to the outcast orphan children who were the 'silent victims' (Humphreys 29) of the British government's child migration policy. The novel opens in 1947 as the narrator, Arthur Hobhouse, prepares to sail from Liverpool to Sydney. We learn that Arthur is an orphan from London who, along with several hundred other children, is in the process of being transported to Australia to begin a new life after the Second World War. Abandoned by his home nation and wholly Other in his new one, Arthur's attempts to survive in this alien

culture are worsened by his struggles with heat, abusive adults and an increasing feeling of disconnectedness from his past.

In some ways, *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea* can be seen as an anomaly when viewed alongside the other primary texts examined in this thesis. Although some of the text is set in the present day, the first half of the novel is exclusively a historical narrative, taking place, as explained previously, in the aftermath of the Second World War. The novel's status as a historical novel is particularly interesting when read in line with Kim Wilson's statement in *Re-visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers* (2011) that: 'modern characters reconcile the otherness of the past by framing it within modern understanding' (22). This is certainly the case with Morpurgo's novel, published a mere four years prior to (then) Prime Minister Gordon Brown's apology for the treatment of the young people subjected to the 'home children' scheme (see footnote 66). Similarly, much of the novel is set in Australia instead of Britain – again, unusual compared to the other primary texts, which are set almost entirely in the UK. Morpurgo's novel merits inclusion I would argue however, because it is a text that nevertheless resonates pertinently with Otherness as it relates to this chapter's main concerns, outcasting and abandonment. Moreover, as is the often allegorical nature of historical fiction, the commentary it provides can be interpreted as relating, not just to post-war Britain, but also to what John Gillespie terms our 'present condition' (2) as a nation, in which issues relating to migration, both *to* and *from* Britain, remain apposite.

Before beginning an examination of Morpurgo's novel, I will briefly introduce its context. 'Child migrants', James Jupp explains, were 'the "Lost Children of Empire", who had been abandoned by their former homeland' (61). In 1869, Annie MacPherson, a Scottish Quaker, founded the 'home children' scheme responsible for supporting the migration of orphan

children to British colonies across the globe. This was a mutually beneficial arrangement because it alleviated the cost of housing and caring for orphans on UK soil, whilst providing countries like Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia with much needed settlers of British stock, white British migrants being the preferred migrants, and much in demand by these countries. The scheme lasted for approximately a century, with changing attitudes regarding the treatment of children in the early 1970s ultimately bringing this practice into disrepute. During the period in which the scheme ran, approximately one-hundred-thousand children were rehoused in countries up to thirteen-thousand miles away from the UK. The scheme had a devastating impact on many of the young lives it affected, with instances of child abuse, mistreatment and exploitation rife. Particularly infamous were the Western Australian 'children's homes' at Bindoon and Castledare run by the 'Christian Brothers', a Catholic lay order. Children who had the misfortune to be abandoned to the bleak auspices of such 'homes' were employed as slave labour, essentially building these institutions from the ground up. This involved them constructing the dormitories, chapel and school by hand, hauling bricks and concrete in forty degree heat, and toiling in the sun in an attempt to farm the arid land and grow enough food to feed this rapidly increasing encampment of boys. The children were routinely denied food and water and also whipped, beaten and sexually abused.

Institutions such as those run by the Christian Brothers were the inspiration for 'Cooper's Station' (Morpurgo 28), the setting of *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea*. With this troubling history in mind then, we can see how notions of abandonment and Otherness will be omnipresent facets of this narrative. Ultimately, instead of the 'new glory' (22) of Australia Arthur had been led to expect, his arrival there only serves to reinforce the reality of his aloneness: 'when our journey finally ended, I felt all the more abandoned, even rejected' (102). The

novel's title is an allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), and is indicative of Morpurgo's association of abandonment with aloneness:

This soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be (22).

Arthur considers the metaphorical resonance of the poem, suggesting that it is: 'not just about a sea voyage, it's about the journey through life, and about the loneliness of that journey' (159). The *Rime* speaks of the terror of being cast out alone to roam the 'wide' sea - appropriate given Arthur's experience in the novel. The mariner describes the sense that even 'God himself' has abandoned those who venture into unknown waters. God's absence is also reflected on by Arthur in the opening chapter: 'I had a father and a mother too, but God only knows who they were, and maybe even he doesn't know for sure. I mean, God can't be looking everywhere all at once, can he?' (11). Arthur's Otherness then, is comparable to April's in *Dustbin Baby*, like April, he is an orphan – wholly alone in the world. Similarly to Wilson, Morpurgo concedes that the Otherness of orphan characters is due, in part, to their lack of a tangible history, because one's past is central to an understanding of identity in the present. 'I have no family stories', Arthur explains, 'no hard facts, no real evidence, no certificates, not a single photograph. It's almost as if I wasn't born at all' (13). In *Philosophy and its Others*, William Desmond argues that 'solitude intimates Otherness' (238). In this way, Arthur's Otherness can be seen to stem from his 'solitude', his aloneness in the world. Unlike Coleridge's mariner however,⁴⁸ who must also face the ocean's 'wideness' (Morpurgo 17) solo, in addition to being alone, Arthur is also a young child, six

⁴⁸ Who, it is worth noting, *opted* to go to sea – something which obviously cannot be said of Arthur.

years old at the start of the novel, when he is forced to make the thirteen-thousand mile voyage alone to a 'brand-new country' (23).

Patricia Sherwood discusses the emotional resonance of abandonment and aloneness in terms of children: 'aloneness, whose grandfather and grandmother is grief and loss, and whose father and mother is emotional abandonment. Aloneness chills the heart of children' (88). For Arthur aloneness is, indeed, a 'chilling' ordeal. His comparatively young age is exploited by the older children on the ship, who bully him mercilessly throughout the voyage: 'They gave me a hard time, a lot of grief. They'd thump me with pillows, hide my clothes, hide my shoes [...] refuse to speak to me, not acknowledge my existence' (Morpurgo 18). Their mental abuse leaves the deepest scars, the enforced silences and 'lack of acknowledgement' haunting Arthur into his adulthood. Indeed, the wish to construct a testament to his 'existence' is ultimately shown to be the driving force in Arthur's narrative: 'The time has come to put my life down on paper. For me this will be the birth certificate I never had [...] I was here, I happened' (13). For outcast and abandoned children then, Otherness is an inevitable facet of identity, the sense of exclusion and alienation associated with these individuals reinforcing their outsidership. As Jacqueline Bhabha, writing in *Child Migration and Human Rights* (2014) asserts: 'this is particularly so for migrant children':

The approach to Otherness in our societies is ambivalent – caught between an identification of the Other as 'human like me' and a hostility or indifference towards the Other as separate or dispensable. This is particularly so for migrant children, where perceptions of vulnerability ('poor and innocent children') and Otherness ('not *really* like *our* children') coalesce (13).

Morpurgo explores this 'ambivalent' coupling of pity and Otherness through Mr Bacon, the 'God-fearin' [sic]' (32) owner of Cooper's Station:

You can count yourselves very lucky that Mrs Bacon and I have taken you in [...] Out of the kindness of our hearts, that's what it was. You are the little ones no one else wanted. You are the little ones thrown out of the nest, rejected and with no home to go to (31).

Mr Bacon rationalises the cruel conditions and treatment the children in his care are subjected to, believing he is carrying out 'the will of God'. He asserts: 'a child is born sinful and must be bent in the will of God. This is now our task' (32). Essentially then, Mr Bacon views his 'task' as correcting the child's inherent Otherness. In the words of Foucault, this 'defines a certain penal style' (*Discipline... 7*), albeit one more in line with the 'corrective' responsibilities of an institution such as a prison, rather than a comparatively more 'feeling' home – a site replete with a supposedly more caring attitude to its occupants. This is reinforced when Arthur discusses feeling like a 'prisoner' (29) and describes Mr Bacon as his 'gaoler' (30). Arthur has been abandoned by his home country to this solitary 'hell on earth' (30). Here, his Otherness as a foreigner renders him a 'slave' (29) to the tyrannical Mr Bacon and his dubious interpretation of what constitutes 'God's work' (33).

The Otherness of 'home children' also stemmed from the cultural differences that differentiated them from native-born Australians. 'For the vast majority of child migrants', one of the contributors to the 1998 report on the 'Welfare of British Child Migrants' stated: 'The most often asked question is 'Who am I?' Most of us were born in the British Isles of British parents. Our culture, heritage and traditions are British. Our nationality, our rights and our privileges were our inheritance' (1998). Comparably to *Dustbin Baby* then, we can interpret the child as being a 'colonised subject' in this context. Colonialism involves the forced abandonment of one's native culture, and inherent to it is the 'systematic negation of the Other person and its determination to deny them all attributes of humanity. It forces the person it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly "Who am I?"' (Doring

149). Arthur's Otherness is shown to stem from a similar such abandonment of cultural identity. Specifically, Otherness is associated with the inherently 'alienating' characteristics of 'language', language being the 'irreducible mediator of the subject's relation with other subjects' (Chiesa 37). Evidence of this can be seen in terms of Arthur's perception of his 'difference' (Morpurgo 24) in the 'new country' (23) characterised by the gulf between the English he speaks, and that of his hosts. Reflecting on the foreignness of a voice he hears upon his arrival in Sydney harbour, Arthur asserts: 'Like everyone else on the dockside, he spoke English, but it didn't sound the same language as it had in England at all. I recognised the words, some of them, but the sounds they made were different and strange' (24).

Jacqueline Rose suggests that children's literature is governed by what she terms an 'ethos of representation' which exists at 'the heart of writing'. This, Rose goes on to argue, is the demand 'for language as a means to identity and self-recognition' (139). Such a view of language is central in reading Otherness in Morpurgo's novel because, for Arthur language (or, more specifically, his *version* of English), is the only remaining tie to the home that has abandoned him. It therefore plays a crucial role in his 'self-recognition' in a manner that is particularly important given his orphan status.

As Margaret Humphreys discusses in *Empty Cradles*, 'language' was an important aspect of the process of 'assimilation' (308) the child migration schemes encouraged. This involved abandoning remnants of a 'home culture' (Humphreys 62) in order to forge a new identity in the host country. However, as *Empty Cradles* demonstrates with reference to case-studies of the *actual* experiences of child migrants, this was rarely a straightforward transition. As Humphreys attests in her summative remarks in the book: 'to take children from their families and their countries was an abuse; to strip them of their identity was an abuse'

(373). Indeed, many victims of the child migrants program struggled with a 'search for identity' (Humphreys 202) for the rest of their lives. In her discussion of the 'Otherness of exile' (2012), Lauren Rusk considers the manner in which such exile functions as both 'banishment and quest' (120), specifically in terms of *bildungsromans*⁴⁹ narratives, of which Arthur's story is a prime example. In this way, stemming from his initial 'banishment' from his native Britain at the start of the text, the text can be interpreted as a 'quest narrative', the latter section centring on Arthur's adulthood efforts to return home.

Problematically however, Arthur's sense of Otherness which is associated with being an orphan, an outsider with a peculiar accent on a 'different planet' ([Morpurgo 25] intrudes into adulthood. For example, following the death of his surrogate mother Aunty Megs, who, comparably to Marion in *Dustbin Baby*, provides Arthur with a stable, and generally happy home, Arthur describes feeling: 'like an orphan all over again, a grown-up one maybe, but an orphan just the same' (161). This contributes to the lingering sense of being lost and 'forgotten' that Morpurgo attributes to Arthur. As the title suggests, he is literally 'alone' throughout the novel and latterly decides to withdraw from the world, abandoning it as it has abandoned him, and retreating for a number of years completely to: 'live like a hermit' (163). The metaphor of 'lostness' is continued during the period Arthur describes, in an apt biblical reference to Moses, lost in the desert and seemingly abandoned by God, as his 'years in the wilderness' (162). Mark Froud cites Rose in his discussion of the motif of the 'lost' child in fiction:

The figure of the lost child is an absent 'plenitude' which produces a traumatic break from our notions of origin and also, following Rose's argument, from the concept of language as embodied within us as humans. This fundamentally troubles our notions of identity and self (5).

⁴⁹ Narratives of growth, formation and / or self-discovery.

Arthur's Otherness may be associated with the 'absences' that surround him then. These are the aspects of his 'identity and self' that have been 'lost' during the various transitions he negotiates in the novel, from sea to land, old world to new, childhood to adulthood. If, as Rose attests, language is one of the defining aspects of the human experience, it is therefore notable that as 'things fall apart' (Morpurgo 162) in Arthur's life, he retreats into a 'fog' of silence, 'switching off' (163) and making verbal contact only with animals: 'I had the animals, and like Dr Doolittle I talked to them' (163).⁵⁰ Such an 'absence' also extends to the adults' abandonment of migrant children's names, referring to them as 'migrant boy number "so and so" or migrant girl number "so and so"' (313). In this way, Morpurgo suggests how, in the absence of names, there is an absence of identity, or as William Desmond puts it, a 'lack of wholeness' (149).

The children in Morpurgo's novel are literal 'outcasts', they have been 'cast out' of their native land and now live as if banished, in a state of exile. Indeed, in his afterword to the novel, Morpurgo alludes to the 'home children' scheme as being 'a form of banishment' (311). For Foucault, 'banishment' is the ultimate performance of power (1979). Moreover, as Jeffrey Nealon asserts, the 'types' of power involved in the various processes of abandonment (of which banishment is one), Foucault's text examines can be further delineated as: 'the banishment of the leper (sovereign power), the quarantine of the diseased (social power) and panoptic surveillance (discipline)' (51). Foucault uses the example of the leper as a symbolic figure in his work to demonstrate society's treatment of the Other. In *Discipline and Punish*, he makes further comparisons to the way in which

⁵⁰ It is perhaps noteworthy that 'Dr Doolittle' (who is, as Torgovnick asserts is a perennial Other; 'a misfit, an outsider' [80]) is the character Morpurgo selects for this comparison.

prisoners are 'banished' to the prison and subjected to 'panoptic surveillance' as a means of control, just as lepers were historically banished to leper colonies. For the British, Australia has traditionally been perceived as a site of Otherness. It has long been viewed as an otherworldly *Alice In Wonderland*-style dreamscape, a topsy-turvy land existing 'down under' and peopled by hardened individuals, capable of living in inhospitable conditions wholly alien to those raised in gentle, climatically temperate Britain. Between 1788 and 1868 'penal transportation' to Australia was a common punishment for even petty criminal offences, and the transported criminal was subject to essentially the same 'power regime' as the lepers Foucault portrays. This included 'banishment' by boat, to Australia, 'quarantine', in Australia - geographically as far from Britain as it is possible to travel, and constant 'surveillance' as a means of maintaining 'disciplinary' control. Arguably, we can observe a similar process at work in *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea*, the children treated comparably to criminals in the days of penal transportation, in terms of their banishment to 'the other side of the world' (Morpurgo 313). Like such criminals, they are escorted to stations in the 'wilderness' (32) far enough away from civilisation to essentially be a 'prison' [29], as if in a state of 'quarantine' like Foucault's lepers, and subject to the constant watchful eye of their 'gaoler' (Morpurgo 30). The characters in Morpurgo's novel however, were not nineteenth-century criminals, but children in as recent a period as the 1970s. Britain, Morpurgo's novel attests, has had a considerable history of abandonment and exclusion of those who do not 'fit' into its society at particular periods in its history. Specifically, in its treatment of child migrants during the 'Home Children' scheme, it was complicit in a process that stripped many individuals of 'personhood, human rights and dignity' (Morpurgo 312).

In this chapter, I have shown the relevance of three contemporary fictional representations of outcast and abandoned children to this thesis's overarching concern, Otherness. In relation to my thesis statement, which associates socio-cultural processes with Otherness as it functions as a contemporary concern, we have also observed how characters' interaction between history and the present serves to further destabilize their relationship with both their own sense(s) of identity and that of the wider group or community. I have sought to demonstrate the way in which notions of exclusion are associated with abandonment, and in so doing, have examined the impact of young peoples' experiences of this in terms of burgeoning selfhood. In my analyses of the chapter's three primary texts, I showed how the experience of abandonment lingers insidiously in the recesses of an individual's consciousness, disrupting their ability to exist within 'normative' frameworks. I also made the case for the various protagonists' experience of abandonment as a 'haunting' narrative, recurring in the present and instilling in them a sense of Otherness which begins, gradually, to define them. As in each of the other chapters, these issues have been underscored by readings of Foucault, specifically his observations on the effect of 'limit-experiences' on the individual as well as the notion of 'self-attachment'. Foucault suggests that school, in its mechanistic approach to learning and inherently exclusory attitude to those who do not (or cannot) comply with this 'regime of truth', is an inherently Othering institution, and this idea was explored through reference to Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*. John Bowlby's writings on 'attachment' helped me shed insight into the effects of maternal abandonment on a young person's social and emotional development – an idea explored with regards to *Dustbin Baby*. The outcome of these discussions is my ultimate belief that Otherness associated with outcast and abandoned young people has a particularly disruptive impact in terms of their developing senses of self that they struggle to transcend.

As in the previous chapter, each of the three authors introduced here have examined these themes further in concurrent works. For example, Jacqueline Wilson's updating of Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872) (entitled *Katy* [2015]) explores a young girl's feelings of Otherness and abandonment following an accident that leaves her severely disabled. In Melvin Burgess's *The Hit* (2013), Adam, the young male protagonist turns to drugs following his abandonment by the various protectors and carers that previously played a crucial role in his life, and through Burgess's typically forensic social realist aesthetic, the bleak consequences of this decision play out. Michael Morpurgo's recent adaptation of Leprince de Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast* (1756) (published in 2013) explores outcasting with regards to physical Otherness and, as in the classic tale, entreats the reader to look beyond superficial elements in their treatment of others. Through our exploration of, for example, *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea*, we began to consider the interplay between foreignness and Otherness in narratives concerning child migration. In the following chapter we will examine such themes in more depth, in particular with regards to what I have termed 'the foreign Other'.

Chapter Four – ‘Having a Stranger to Stay’: The Foreign Other.

The foreign is a term alive and well, as much in the long corridors of history as in the overcrowded neighbourhoods of daily discourse; it is one rarely analysed and with more diverse and consequential nuances than often acknowledged in the shorthand of “Otherness” (Saunders 10).

As Rebecca Saunders argues in *The Concept of the Foreign* (2003), the ‘consequential nuances’ of foreignness, and its relationship to Otherness are ‘rarely analysed’. One of the primary aims of this chapter then, is to remedy this. In the process, I will consider the relevance of notions of foreignness to our comprehension of Otherness in literature for young people, and explore the ‘diverse’ and freighted nature of this concept alongside an analysis of this study’s final three primary texts: Frank Cottrell Boyce’s *The Unforgotten Coat* (2011), Jamila Gavin’s *Grandpa Chatterji’s Third Eye* (2006) and Hilary Freeman’s *The Boy From France* (2012). Notably, this chapter draws on aspects of Postcolonial theory, engaging with Edward Said’s seminal writings in *Orientalism* (1978) which traces the emergence of the figure of the ‘foreign Other’ to western attitudes to the ‘exotic’ Orient. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that the foreign Other is a character trope typically invoked by authors to provide both a commentary on, and critique of the dominant (local) social order.

Foreignness as a form of Otherness appears routinely in the contemporary corpus of British children’s and YA texts exploring difference. It may be examined through the lens of race and racism, as in the Carnegie Medal-winning *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) by Beverley Naidoo. Through culture and ethnicity, as in Trish Cooke’s *So Much!* (1994), or refugee and asylum narratives, of which Benjamin Zephaniah’s *Refugee Boy* (2001) is a prime example. Foreignness may also be introduced through the depiction of an ‘exotic’ foreign Other, such as the *Grandpa Chatterji* character in Jamila Gavin’s eponymous series (1993-2006). Each of these ‘categories’ of foreignness relate to my concerns in this chapter, and out of such

discussions surrounding foreignness there inevitably arise considerations of national identity, assimilation and belonging, and inclusion and exclusion. Accordingly, I will continue to utilise the writings of Michel Foucault to facilitate such discussions, and provide a means by which to 'anchor' them to my broader concern of Otherness.

The manner in which foreignness may be represented on the page in a manner that is not, itself, *inherently* Othering, is an issue I had to contend with when researching and writing this chapter. This is obviously a challenging authorial line⁵¹ to tread and, in the process of character development, certain aspects of characters, including appearance, language and behaviour, are inevitably highlighted in a manner that potentially Other them from the dominant social *milieu* of the text. However, in short-listing the three novels I ultimately decided upon, I felt I had arrived at a selection that did not contain representations of foreign individuals that were inexorably caricatured, incongruous or simply, racist. However, as will become clear in my discussion of *Grandpa Chatterji*, Jamila Gavin could be viewed as being guilty of a certain degree of Orientalist depiction. As such, I believe that whilst this chapter's primary texts examine the figure of the foreign Other in a broadly sensitive and intelligent manner, as will become clear, there are some slight exceptions to this rule. Nevertheless, as I will show, the foreign Other is predominantly viewed in these texts as a liberatory figure, whose presence is ultimately shown to have a positive impact on the lives of the novels' secondary characters.

Prior to beginning this chapter's textual analysis, it is necessary to further define 'foreign' in terms of its use in this context, as well as to introduce certain synonyms for the term that arise in the three novels. Like Otherness, which, as I have explained is the broader category

⁵¹ For both me as the author of this thesis, as well as the writers it focuses on.

in which foreignness resides, the concept of the foreign evades singular definition. The original derivation of the term can be located in the Latin 'foras' meaning 'outside'. This etymology is pertinent given the contemporary interpretation of the foreign as continually existing 'relative to the *inside*, the domestic, the familiar, a boundary' [my italics] (Saunders 3). Such a 'relative' consideration of the foreign draws inevitably on negative definitions. For example, the manner in which foreignness involves *not* being part of an in-group, *not* sharing a common language and *not* adhering to the host country's customs. Foreignness is, as Saunders contends: 'to be *unfamiliar, uncanny, unnatural, unauthorized, incomprehensible, inappropriate, improper*' (3).

Unsurprisingly, notions of power and hierarchy also appear in terms of definitions of foreignness. Owen describes how evocations of the foreign appear in discourse as the 'not-us we say it is' (180). This highlights the presence of an unchallenged voice ('we') evidently in possession of the ability to decide what constitutes foreignness. Who, we might ask, is this 'we'? On what authority does it delineate foreignness, and from where does this power (the right to speak, to make distinctions and to impose 'boundaries') arise? For Foucault, this is the privilege of a ruling-elite, or 'politically dominant class' (*Discipline...* 222), the 'nationally' stable (306) individuals benefiting from 'capital accumulation' and 'legal status of property' (86). In Lacanian terms, Owen's all-powerful 'we' indicates those included in the 'symbolic order' (1966) representative of the language, rules and dictates of a society. Conversely, the foreigner is situated outside of such an order.

Not surprisingly for a term so freighted with meaning, synonyms for foreign abound. Perhaps this, in part, is born out of a collective anxiety relating to the use of appropriate / non-offensive terminology. Those routinely referenced in this chapter's three primary texts

include: 'alien', 'stranger', 'exile' and 'exotic'. However, it is worth noting that *Roget's Thesaurus* (2016) suggests over forty alternate terms. This includes words in common usage such as 'unfamiliar', 'distant' and 'non-resident', but also indicates more archaic derivations, for example: 'extralocal' and 'antipodal'. Also included is the term 'barbarian', its inclusion stemming from negative historical attitudes towards the foreigner that pervaded British imperial ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries.

Partly due to its colonial history, the UK has traditionally been a destination for migrants from all around the world. London can justly claim to be the most multicultural city on earth (Benedictus 2006), but even outside of the capital, the UK has migrant representatives from a vastly wide range of different countries. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, British Literature for young people reflects this and it has a long tradition of focusing on the migrant experience. Some famous examples include Judith Kerr's memoir focusing on her experiences of being a Jewish refugee in World War Two, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), in addition to Ian Serraillier's *The Silver Sword* (1956), Elizabeth Laird's *On The Run* (1991) and Helen Dunmore's *Amina's Blanket* (1996).

The first primary novel explored in this chapter, Boyce's *The Unforgotten Coat*, is a more recent example of such a text. *The Unforgotten Coat* is the story of Chingis and Nergui, two Mongolian brothers who arrive unannounced in a classroom in Bootle, a small Merseyside town, having apparently 'walked' from Mongolia 'along the railway track' (Boyce 31). This claim is never challenged or refuted and the question of whether or not they were accompanied on this unlikely journey by their parents also remains ominously unsolved. Indeed, the various 'weird' (Boyce 25) tales Chingis and Nergui regale their new classmates with contribute to the sense of exotic Otherness that surround the brothers. Chingis and

Nergui explain that they are fugitives from a figure they term, somewhat menacingly, 'the demon' (30). This is ultimately revealed to be a metaphor for the immigration authorities who, throughout the novel are continuously in pursuit of the two boys. As a result, their family is forced to live like 'nomads' (30) in an attempt to evade deportation. As Boyce explains in the afterword, *The Unforgotten Coat* was written to explore what Meek terms the 'outsider's or newcomer's perspective' (9) on a small, 'culturally deprived' (104) English town. The novel is concerned with how the 'presence' (Boyce 103) of the foreign Other has the potential to 'enrich' (103) the lives of its young inhabitants. Indeed, in the afterword, Boyce describes the real-life inspiration for the characters of Chingis and Nergui - a girl called Misheel he met at a primary school during an author visit (103):

She was a refugee from Mongolia and she just lit up the room. The other children were touchingly proud of her and told me about the time Misheel turned up at the school disco in full Mongolian costume with her elaborate headdress and fabulous robes [...] Her presence massively enriched their lives [...] There's a line in the book about Xanadu being hidden in the heart of Bootle, and that's what she seemed to be – a wonder of the world living among them (103-104).

Mongolia, the native home of the real-life Misheel and the fictitious Chingis and Nergui she inspired, acts as a site of Otherness in the text then. It is juxtaposed throughout the novel by Julie, the narrator, with the humdrum surroundings of Bootle. The line Boyce refers to in the passage above is when Julie articulates her belief that, following the arrival of the two brothers with their pervasive sense of the exotic: 'somewhere in Bootle Xanadu was buried like treasure' (27). Xanadu (also known as Shangdu) was the capital of the Kublai Khan's Yuan dynasty in China. In the Western mind, Xanadu (like 'Timbuktu') has become representative of foreign exoticism, and of the stereotypical image of the Eastern / 'Oriental' world. In 1797, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his poem *Kubla Khan* which was inspired by historical accounts of the city. Some of the adjectives Coleridge employs in his

evocation of Xanadu as a site of Otherness include: 'holy', 'enchanted', 'incense-bearing' and 'ancient' (254). Christopher Kaplonski describes how, in the Western mind, Mongolia, the site of the mysterious 'Xanadu' referred to in the novel, has long been 'associated with a degree of Otherness through [its] association with "traditional ethnic" costumes [and] dances' (177). Kaplonski also continues to reference Barth's (1969) interpretation of ethnicity as a 'boundary marker' (177). This relates to our previous discussion of the manner in which the concept of the foreign is inexorably associated with the human need to impose 'boundaries' (Saunders 3) in order to delineate 'in' and 'outgroups'. Indeed, such notions of 'boundaries' and their existence between, for example, east and west, foreign and native, power and powerlessness, are also central components of Edward Said's thesis in *Orientalism*. One of Said's primary arguments in this work is that, throughout history, the West has consistently perceived the Eastern ('Oriental') world as being inherently Other in the manner he describes in the following passage:

The Orient and Orientals [are] stamped with an Otherness – as all that is different, whether it be "subject" or "object" – but of a constitutive Otherness, of an essentialist character. This "object" of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a "historical" subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself (97).

Western (or 'Occidental' [252] to cite the term used throughout *Orientalism*) attitudes to the 'Oriental' Other inevitably involve, Said argues, the denial of agency. Once again, note the use of negative prefixes ('non-') in this regard. He describes how the West has historically maintained and exploited this powerlessness, with particular reference to the colonial policies of Britain during the heyday of its Empire. He continues to argue that the 'Orient' is constructed 'with Britain always in the master's place' (215), through the eyes therefore, of the Western colonist. Citing both Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The Order of Things*, Said associates this dynamic with the Poststructuralist contention that

Otherness is inevitably a construction of the powerful elite. In order to maintain control Said (again, invoking Foucauldian theory) argues, they engage continually in processes of exclusion, disenfranchisement and the withholding of agency from those whose presence threatens to disrupt or curtail the power of the dominant order. Through the example of British rule in India (244), Said demonstrates how colonialism was dependent on such exclusive 'boundary' mentalities, i.e.: the Western need to 'separate an [Occidental] "us" from an Orient destined to bear its foreignness as a mark of its permanent estrangement from the West' (244). He also argues that the Otherness of the Orient from a Western perspective is due, in part, to its status as 'something unknown and distant' (93).

Developing this idea with particular reference to children's literature in *The Hidden Adult*, Perry Nodelman establishes a link between the 'mysterious unknowability of the alien Other' found in 'constructions of the Orient', and 'the constructions of childhood found in children's literature' (165). This is pertinent in relation to *The Unforgotten Coat*, in which Chingis and Nergui's foreignness appears due in part, to their fundamental 'unknowability'. Indeed, from the moment they arrive in their new school, the brothers become objects of 'exotic' intrigue to their classmates. In the following passage, Nergui impersonates a Mongolian eagle, fascinating his peers:

'Where do you get eagles from? Eagles R Us?'

'Everyone has eagles when I come from'.

'Where's that then?'

'Mongolia'.

They kept telling him to make eagle noises. His sleeves were flapping loose and he did fully look like a bird (Boyce 15).

For Said, the Otherness of the Orient stems from its 'parading' of the 'exotic and strange' (188-9). Foreignness and 'theatricality' (188), he argues, go hand-in-hand, and this is certainly the case in terms of Boyce's representation of Chingis and Nergui. The brothers,

from their initial spectacular entrance at the beginning of the novel, clad in the 'mad coats' Julie describes as: 'long, like dressing-gowns, with fur inside' (9), 'perform' (Said 256) their foreignness on the 'theatrical stage' (63) of the classroom. In their discussion of *Performing National Identity* (2008), Manfred Pfister and Ralf Hertel consider the 'transactional' nature of 'performing intercultural identit[ies]' (329) in which the performance of Otherness can be interpreted as a gift to the host(s), who in turn duly 'perform their own national identity' (24) in an act of reciprocity.

The 'transactional' nature of foreignness is explored in the novel with Chingis employing Julie as a 'guide' to his 'new country': 'When we come to new country, we need to find a good guide. You will be our good guide in this place' (Boyce 16). The brothers reciprocate by 'enriching the lives' (53) of their classmates, who become increasingly enchanted by Chingis and Nergui's stories, personalities, as well as what they learn of their home culture as the novel progresses. Such a 'transactional' relationship is also explored in terms of the power dynamic that exists between foreign guest and host in the novel. Chingis and Nergui's foreignness and therefore inherent lack of understanding of the various codes of conduct inherent to the institution in which they have found themselves (i.e.: a primary school in the suburban north of England), means they fail to comply with the fundamental 'discourse of truth' (Foucault 1979) around which this institution is organised. This is in contrast to their peers who, having already attended school for many years, have been conditioned by this environment into functioning within its governing 'discourse' - the regulatory rules, bells and timetables that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. The power of the Other, Foucault suggests, is one in part, of social resistance. Moreover however, the Other's subjectivity presents a perspective from which certain actions contained within certain power relations, may be interpreted as transformative and / or emancipatory. For example,

discussing a situation in which the oppression of the Other appears inevitable, Foucault asserts: 'we are not trapped [because] we are always in this kind of situation. It means we always have possibilities of changing the situation' (*Sex / Power...* 167).⁵² With this in mind, Chingis and Nergui's Otherness is, at times in the text, presented as liberatory⁵³ because of the power they have to 'change their situation', a power their classmates do not share. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Chingis engages in a 'struggle for power' (Boyce 11) with the class teacher Mrs Spendlove. He challenges her authority by insisting Nergui is allowed to be enrolled in the same year-group, despite the obvious age-gap between the two boys:

'[He] needs to go to a different class'

Chingis looked up and said 'No'.

It was the second time he'd said no to her. Once might be a mistake. Twice was game on.

We were witnessing a struggle for power (Boyce 11).

By uttering the word 'no' (11), Chingis asserts his decision not to comply with the 'discourse of truth' Mrs Spendlove has constructed, and therefore becomes the 'powerful' party in this exchange. Following this, and subsequent other acts of passive resistance from Chingis, the long-suffering Mrs Spendlove relents and, with 'normal' (25) protocols long-since abandoned, Chingis 'end[s] up with everything he wanted' (12).

The privileges that Chingis and Nergui's foreignness secure for them in the school setting are counteracted however, by the novel's darker subtext. The omnipresent 'demon' (30), as discussed previously, is a metaphor for the immigration bureau that pursues Chingis and

⁵² Conversely however, much of Foucault's corpus suggests that such resistance is in fact, limited, being easily 'absorbed' by dominant discourse. More on the limitations of Foucault as a methodological voice is discussed in the introduction.

⁵³ In this way, a parallel can be drawn to Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*, introduced in the previous chapter.

Nergui's family because of their lack of 'the right papers' (91) to entitle them to legal residence in the UK. The novel concludes with the police arriving one night to 'take them away and send them back to their own country' (90). This is a process Boyce describes with a bluntness evidently representative of his own feelings of anger surrounding this issue. Indeed, he comments on this poignantly in the novel's 'afterword', asserting his belief that: 'a country that authorizes its functionaries to snatch children from their beds in the middle of the night can't really be called civilized' (104). In this way, the novel challenges what Gregor Starc terms the 'theory of the illegal immigrant as "threatening Other"' (141), a definitive figure in the twenty-first century Britain with which this thesis is concerned. Indeed, the hysterical, often overtly racist reporting from certain tabloid newspapers certainly does not support or assist the migrants' plight (see appendix 13).

Developing this, and discussing it in terms of the representation of illegal immigrants in certain sectors of the media, Starc discusses how 'audiences got an impression that borders were being besieged by foreigners who certainly did not bring any gifts' (141). Contrarily, in *The Unforgotten Coat* however, the 'magical' (62) Otherness Chingis and Nergui bring to this otherwise unremarkable location is inexorably associated with the boys' status as what Starc terms 'alien bodies' (141). Their foreignness *is* shown to be an 'enriching' (Boyce 104) 'gift' in this otherwise 'culturally deprived' (104) area - particularly because, as Julie questions, 'what other wonders of the world were in Bootle?' (62).

This is not to say, however, that the boys' classmates, including their 'good guide' (17), Julie are not engaged in the process of 'absorbing' them into the dominant culture of school. In relation to *The Concept of the Foreign*, Saunders argues (36) that there is a credible link to be made between Foucault's discussion of madness (1964) and contemporary societal attitudes to the foreign Other. There is, for example, the initial 'inability to integrate into the

group' (Foucault 64), for which the only 'cure', Foucault asserts, is for the individual to be 'wrested from his pure subjectivity in order to be initiated into the world'⁵⁴ (175-76). Indeed, such 'initiation' can be observed playing out in *The Unforgotten Coat* in, for example, the passage in which Julie describes how, as the brothers' 'guide' she 'told them to lose their weird-looking coats and wear something normal' (Boyce 25). David Palumbo-Liu considers this part of a process of regulating Otherness, of ascertaining 'how much Otherness is necessary to gain the benefits of being "exposed" to the lives of others without creating too much distance from our selves' (35). Similarly, in her essay exploring the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1983), Gayatri Spivak argues that gaining agency in 'mainstream' discourse is reliant on the 'submission' of the Other, at least in part, to a 'ruling ideology' (68). As Julie realises part-way through the novel: 'The boys were [...] burying themselves in footie and insults, swearing and buzzwords. They were *learning* themselves ordinary [...] Soon they didn't need a Good Guide anymore (45)'. In reference to Lacan, this could be interpreted as part of a gradual process of absorption into the 'symbolic order' (1966). However, Chingis and Nergui's foreignness remains a pervasive factor in their relationship with their classmates. Indeed, as the enigmatic brothers become more established in the school, their new friends become increasingly intrigued by them. In particular, their curiosity focuses on their home life, details of which the brothers have hitherto taken great pains to avoid revealing. It becomes an object of considerable speculation as the children imagine the gloriously exotic contents this 'Xanadu' (52) inevitably contains.

⁵⁴ For 'world' here, read 'dominant culture',

Ultimately, Julie decides to sate her own curiosity by paying Chingis and Nergui a visit. However, far from the 'silks, samovars and horse-head fiddles' (53) she is expecting to encounter at their flat, it is a rather more mundane experience. The brothers live, not in the traditional Mongolian Yurt Julie imagines, but instead 'on the tenth floor of Roberts Tower – the tower block nearest the flyover' (52). The interior of Chingis and Nergui's apartment disappoints Julie further, the exotic trappings she expected replaced by: 'a long-empty corridor, bare light bulb and a line of bags and suitcases, bulging and fastened, as if the family were about to leave' (55). Julie is faced then, with the reality of what this family's foreignness *actually* represents. It may be less associated, she realises, with the spectacular and theatrical facets of cultural exoticism the brothers initially appeared to symbolise, and more with the transitory nature of living in fear of pursuit and persecution that their status as 'illegal aliens' has evidently imposed on them.

The Otherness of the foreigner, and particularly of the refugee, Glenn Burger argues, is inexorably associated with their status as 'nomads' (15), a term Chingis and Nergui use to refer to themselves on various occasions in the text (16, 30, 58). 'Nomads', he explains, are characterised by their 'intrinsic mobility, secrecy and hiddenness' (15), traits that are obviously shared by Chingis and Nergui. Even Nergui's name, he explains, means 'no one' (31) in Mongolian, and his omnipresent hat is evidently a disguise designed to dupe the 'demon' (30). In addition to Nergui's hat, Chingis's eponymous coat plays a pivotal role in the narrative. In the second chapter, Julie describes visiting the school as an adult, to have a last look, as 'I'd heard they were going to knock the school down' (19). Fatefully, while searching through a box of lost-property, she comes across: 'The unforgettable coat of Chingis Tuul. [...] I wish I could say it looked like a bird, but it was more like a big hairy bat,

just hanging there. I went through the pockets. And that's how I found these pictures [appendix 14] (19).

The symbolism of the coat itself, described by Julie as being like a 'bird' and subsequently a 'bat', cannot be overlooked, these creatures re-iterating the theme of 'flight' that is clearly so pertinent to this text. However, in contrast to a 'bird', and comparably to the coat's owner, a 'bat' is a dark, mysterious creature indicative of hiddenness and unknowability. The coat's contents, however, shed a particularly interesting light on how foreignness functions in this novel.

The pictures Julie finds are revealed to be Polaroid photographs, initially appearing to feature scenes from Mongolia (for example, a cornfield, an oil lantern, a bird of prey, and a samovar),⁵⁵ but actually, as she eventually realises, 'cobbled together from bits of Bootle' (92). An interplay therefore exists between the notion of the foreign and the 'local'. What constitutes 'exotic' foreignness is purely, Boyce suggests, a matter of perspective. Therefore even an unremittingly 'ordinary' (Boyce 44) environment such as suburban England, can be perceived as exotic and beautiful when viewed through what Michael Zimmerman terms 'an alien gaze, or the "look of the Other"' (164), such as that represented by Chingis and Nergui in the novel. Zimmerman posits that the question the native should consistently ask themselves in respect to the foreign Other is: 'what can we learn [from them]; personally, culturally, experientially and spiritually? [My inclusion] (173-174). Similarly, for Foucault, an 'encounter with the Orient' (*Order of Things...* 592) may encourage the 'dissolution of constraining subjectivity' (592). Arguably, such 'dissolution' of singular, limiting perspectives could be interpreted as Boyce's overriding project in *The Unforgotten Coat*, and also

⁵⁵ A Eurasian tea-kettle.

remains a concern in the second novel in this chapter, Jamila Gavin's *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye* (2006).

Jamila Gavin is an author with a longstanding interest in the concept of foreignness. Born in Mussoorie in the foothills of the Himalayas to an Indian father and English mother, Gavin settled in England at the age of eleven. She has written extensively about her experience of foreignness during this period of her life, and particularly her treatment as an Anglo-Indian woman in mid-twentieth-century England in her two volumes of memoir: *Out of India: An Anglo-Indian Childhood* (1997) and *Walking On My Hands* (2007), to which I will refer presently. Many of her books for young adults also directly confront the theme of foreignness including: *The Wheel of Surya* (1992), *The Robber Baron's Daughter* (2008) and the Whitbread Award-winning, *Coram Boy* (2000). However, she is perhaps best known for her trilogy of books for middle-readers focusing on the eponymous *Grandpa Chatterji*. The trilogy is comprised of: *Grandpa Chatterji* (1993), *Grandpa's Indian Summer* (1995) and, the focus for this section of the chapter, *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye* (2006). In this novel, Grandpa Chatterji, an elderly gentleman from Calcutta with a penchant for yoga, meditation, cookery and storytelling, travels to England to visit his family. He is, as John Townsend puts it: 'at sea in an English context' (296), a fact that allows Gavin myriad opportunities for cross-cultural humour in her 'gentle contrasting of English and Indian ways' (296), but also provides her with opportunities to explore what Saunders terms the 'intangibility of foreignness' (60), as well as the process the foreign Other inevitably undergoes, of adjustment and transition to a new culture.

The book can be treated as a novel or, read, in a manner suggestive of what James Nagel terms a 'short-story cycle' (2004), as a 'series of interrelated stories' (57). It is comprised of

a series of adventures Grandpa Chatterji has with his grandchildren. These include for example, flying a special Indian kite (43), learning to meditate using their 'third eye' (131), and attempting to locate an esoteric brand of Indian chilli pickle (102). What follows are various astute comments on the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, as well as the experience and perception of the foreign Other in twenty-first century Britain. More specifically, as we will see, Gavin constructs Grandpa Chatterji's 'Indianness' (164), to cite the term coined by Bijay Das in *Studies in Postcolonial Literature* (2007), in a manner broadly aligned with the image of 'Oriental' Otherness that Said explores in *Orientalism*. We first meet Grandpa Chatterji mid-air during his flight from India to England. Attempting to distract himself from the tedium of long-haul flying, Chatterji seeks solace in his meditation:

Settling back, he closed his eyes. Anyone passing by could have thought he was sleeping, but they may not have noticed that he had tucked his bare feet up into a cross-legged position, with his arms resting on his knees. Though he looked so still and quiet, Grandpa Chatterji was seeing with his third eye, his inner eye, his eye of thought and contemplation (14-15).

Chatterji adopts the Lotus position to meditate at various points throughout the novel (14, 57, 131) and his routine immersion in spiritual practice is central to the aura of foreignness that surrounds him. In his writings on *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought* (1982), Francisco Bazan argues that 'Otherness is the character of spiritual matter' (184), and this is particularly observable in terms of western attitudes to eastern 'spirituality' explored in the novel. In this way, Gavin juxtaposes Chatterji with his English family who, although of Indian heritage, have evidently embraced the consumer trappings of a western lifestyle, complete with 'Playstations' (56), 'Cornflakes and Frosties' (100) and 'supermarkets' (106) since their arrival in the UK. Chatterji in contrast, lives a lifestyle of Gandhi-esque simplicity, praying and meditating regularly (14), owning few possessions (33), preferring to sleep 'on the floor'

(32), and declining showers in favour of washing with a ‘bucket’ so as not to ‘waste water’ (58). Chatterji’s primary reason for coming to England appears to be to encourage his now westernised family to appreciate the spiritual heritage of their native culture or, to cite Said, ‘to get from the Orient what [they] had lost in spirituality, traditional values, and the like [my addition]’ (271), in the process of emigration. In this way, Gavin introduces an Other (notably, in the wider context of this thesis, an adult Other this time), to unsettle, disrupt and critique what Foucault terms ‘the order of things’ (1966). In this way, Chatterji may be interpreted as the ‘foreign element capable of rebutting’ (*Order of Things...* 56) western attitudes, modes of behaviour and thought-processes.

Zimmerman’s association of the Other with what he terms an ‘alien gaze’ (164) is pertinent to an analysis of this text. The novel, as the reference to Grandpa Chatterji’s ‘third eye’ suggests, is concerned with the way the foreign Other may facilitate alternate modes of perception, or what Danaher referencing Foucault suggests, are different ‘ways of seeing and being’ (158). Initially, this is a literal process, for example, when we observe Chatterji teaching his grandchildren to balance ‘upside-down’ (27) (see cover image [appendix 15]) to gain a more ‘serene’ (27) perspective on the world. Subsequently however, this is explored through Chatterji’s practicing of, and attempts to impart, Hindu theological principles – and, particularly that of the ‘third eye’. For Hindus, belief in the presence of a ‘third’ or ‘inner’-eye is an integral component of the faith’s Dharmic⁵⁶ spiritual tradition. Ordinary sight, they believe, is limited, the two human eyes denying access to more complex planes of spiritual experience and consciousness. The ‘third eye’ however, traditionally accessed through practices such as meditation, fasting and chakra cleansing, enables the individual to

⁵⁶ The moral and spiritual law governing the conduct of individuals in the Hindu religion.

transcend the everyday world and reach beyond the level of perception ordinary sight allows. Chatterji explains the concept to his grandchildren:

When you think then your third eye opens – and the whole universe comes into your mind, and distance is nothing. Some people can be together all day and every day, but they never see with their third eye, and they can be as far apart from each other as India is from England. But we know better don't we? (133-4)

The Otherness of this meditative practice to a western child is humorously suggested: 'I can't see anything with my eyes shut. I haven't got three eyes [...] this is stupid' (55) Sanjay, Chatterji's grandson, proclaims in annoyance. Chatterji however perseveres, encouraging the children to practice the art of meditation for periods of increasing duration throughout the novel. This culminates with Sanjay's eventual success in the final chapter: "'I sat on the back of the eagle and flew all the way to India, and landed on the roof of your house. Did I see all that with my third eye?" "Yes you did" smiled Grandpa' (133). On the surface there may, Gavin suggests, be an integral foreignness between east and west, Orient and Occident, India and England, but the 'third eye' removes such 'boundaries' (Said 40). Therefore for Chatterji, divisions and 'distance' ultimately become 'nothing' (133). This is suggestive of what Saunders asserts is the 'semantic fluidity' (9) of Otherness. It may, she argues: 'refer to an experience, a state or a metaphysical status' (9). Linking this to the 'character of the foreign', Saunders argues that, inadvertently or not, the presence of a foreign Other prompts 'transformations of people, boundaries and values' (9). Indeed, I would argue Gavin's representation of Chatterji as foreign Other functions along similar lines. His visit is certainly shown to have been 'transformative': 'I've brought you something to do with life and living, flying and touching the sky' (Gavin 39) Chatterji proudly proclaims. Ultimately, I would argue that we may interpret his comments in this regard as being representative of the foreign Other's role in children's literature more generally.

There exists throughout the novel, what Barbara Eckstein terms an ‘atmosphere of Otherness’ (78) attributed to Chatterji on his visit to England. His grandchildren, Neetu and Sanjay, initially realise he is ‘back’ (23) when they detect the tell-tale scent of his signature ‘Lotus flower’ (23) incense upon arriving home from school. Incense is an ‘exotic’ (Said 188) substance strongly associated with the Orient. Its presence therefore introduces a foreign mood to this otherwise ordinary suburban English home. The mysterious fragrance that ‘wafts through the house’ (23) sets the scene for the house’s new, equally mysterious guest. This ‘atmosphere of Otherness’ is also conjured from various other sensory descriptions Gavin associates with Chatterji. These include the ‘sloshing, splashing, gargling and snorting’ (66) of his morning ablutions. Chatterji is depicted undertaking traditional Indian *Ayurvedic*⁵⁷ health and cleansing rituals (66), from ‘breathing exercises’ to sinus-rinsing (66), themselves largely foreign from a western perspective. It also includes the ‘magical’ smell of his pakoras baking (67), and the ever-present ‘*Om*’ (66) mantra necessitated by his meditations. Similarly, in a comparable manner to the ‘presents’ in Moniza Alvi’s poem *Presents From My Aunts In Pakistan*, the gifts Chatterji brings his grandchildren provide them with a mode of accessing what was previously foreign, acting as a bridge between cultures. For the speaker in Alvi’s poem, receiving them at home in England, her aunts’ gifts are initially objects of foreignness, wholly ‘alien’ (Alvi 30) in their ‘colour’ and ‘radiance’ (30). On handling the items that include, for example, a ‘salwar kameez’, ‘satin silk’ and ‘embossed slippers’ (30) further however, she is able to visualise the site of their provenance:

I saw Lahore [...]
There were beggars, sweeper-girls and I was there
Of no fixed nationality

⁵⁷ *Ayurveda* is an ancient, naturally-based system of medicine with its roots in the Indian subcontinent.

Staring through fretwork at the Shalimar Gardens (31).

The presents Chatterji brings for Neetu and Sanjay have, I would argue, a similar function in the novel, that of, in the words of Said: 'bringing the Orient closer to Europe' (87). Sanjay's gift is a traditional Indian kite in the shape of an 'eagle' (44) fashioned from 'paper and sticks of bamboo' (37). It acts as a stimulus for one of Chatterji's stories (84), 'Garuda, the Eagle' (91) (see illustration in appendix 16) in his narration of the *Mahabharata*⁵⁸ creation story in chapter four. Foreign 'cultures', Jean Webb explains, have the power to disrupt or 'force through the dominant culture' by 'constructing and reconstructing myth' (72). Indeed, through objects such as the kite and the storytelling it prompts, Chatterji initiates his grandchildren into the 'narrative' of their familial culture which, due to their western upbringing, they have so far had limited exposure. Emily Brady et al argue that 'the Otherness of objects consist in the fact that our experience of them can never be total [...] Objects always outstrip our powers to perceive them, and they may defeat the expectations we have of them, or surprise us' (72). Comparably, the ability of the exotic objects Chatterji introduces to 'outstrip' the children's 'powers of perception' is explored initially in terms of the mysterious 'baggage roll' (32) he travels with instead of a traditional suitcase. In a similar manner to Mary Poppins' commodious handbag in the P.L. Travers stories, the roll unfurls, revealing, to the children's disbelief, an Indian sleeping mat (32), Chatterji's entire wardrobe and washing accessories (33) and 'thinking rug' (34).

Similarly, when the gifts themselves are finally prised from the roll's depths, Sanjay expresses concern his kite will be 'boring' (37), only to be 'surprised' by the beauty of its

⁵⁸ The *Mahabharata* is an Ancient Indian epic poem. Originally written in Sanskrit, It is considered one of Hinduism's sacred religious texts.

‘spiralling’ (46) flight and transcendental capacity to alter his own ‘powers of perception’: ‘his eyes fixed on the kite, he felt he was up there too; he imagined he was an eagle, flying over the world’ (46). Tellingly, when the kite breaks loose of its tether and ‘drifts away’ (51), Sanjay ‘mournfully’ (52) rebuts Chatterji’s offer to buy him another (51): ‘But that one was from India. Another won’t be as good’ (52). This suggests that for Sanjay, the kite’s inherent foreignness or status as an exotic object, is its primary appeal. If for Foucault, ‘objects’ are ‘presented to perception’ in a process that ‘re-defines and challenges’ belief in ‘appearances’ (*Discipline...* 41), it could be said that the Otherness of the foreign objects Chatterji introduces to the children stems from the inherent sense of intangibility surrounding them, from the expanding luggage, to the extraordinary kite with its ‘mind of an eagle’ (53).

The primary aim of the Postcolonial project is to evaluate, critique and disrupt the foundations on which colonialism rests. In particular, the imbalance of power between coloniser and colonised and the ‘subaltern’ view of the Orient, (inhabited by ‘lesser peoples’ [Said 350]), by western colonial powers is challenged in Postcolonial cinema, drama, poetry and prose. In particular, Postcolonial literature written in the past two decades has returned repeatedly to depictions of the ex-colonial Other as, in Said’s words, a ‘spiritual hero, a knight-errant bringing back to Europe a sense of the holy mission it has now lost’ (115).⁵⁹ Oriental ‘culture and religion’ Said continues to argue, ‘could defeat the materialism of Occidental culture’ (115). With this in mind, Gavin does not suggest ‘defeat’, such stridence would be anathema to Chatterji’s ‘gentle’ (Townsend 296) sensibilities, but instead a form

⁵⁹ See also the works of authors such as John Agard, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta and Kath Walker, who have considered this theme in books for both children and adults.

of spiritual counterpoint to the 'materialist' culture to which his family now belong. Like the Earl of Kent in Shakespeare's *King Lear* who wills the bewildered king to 'see better' (24: 158), Chatterji encourages his family to pursue a world 'beyond' the west's 'coercive limitations' (Said 337). This is illustrated in *Grandpa Chatterji*, the first book of the trilogy, when, during a family reunion, Grandpa Leicester - the most avowedly western member of the Chatterji family who delights in wearing 'pinstriped suits' with 'Italian leather shoes' and drives a 'Jaguar' (67), is persuaded by Grandpa Chatterji to remove these trappings of western excess, don a *dhoti* (81)⁶⁰ and join him 'cross-legged' (82) in meditation. Gavin's Indian father was, she explains in her memoir *Walking On My Hands*, her 'model for Grandpa Chatterji' (100). Discussing a family reunion similar to the various ones depicted in the *Grandpa Chatterji* stories, the thoroughly westernised Gavin,⁶¹ recalls her perception of her father when he 'appears on the scene' (97) after he had accepted a new posting working for the British Civil Service in London. In a similar manner to Chatterji's effect on Grandpa Leicester, Neetu and Sanjay, Gavin recalls how her father's 'presence tipped us upside down [...] suddenly a whole new dimension entered our lives' (97). His foreignness in England was immediately apparent, and Gavin describes him as: 'so different, so dark, so Indian' (97). Like Chatterji, the Otherness of Gavin's father counters the staid ordinariness of 'dreary and grey' (15) England. His presence infuses the family home with 'dynamism' and 'fizzing energy' (97) and, again, comparably to Chatterji, his 'ingenuity in the kitchen was legendary [...] he could turn anything into a curry' (100). If, as Michelle Superle contends, food is a signifier of 'Indianness' (2011), the foreignness of both Gavin's father and Grandpa Chatterji

⁶⁰ A traditional Indian garment, a *dhoti* is a thin cotton-spun tunic that symbolises humility.

⁶¹ Who although born in India, had, by this stage in the memoir, moved to London with her mother, leaving her father behind to run a school in Pune.

stems in part, from the exotic nature of their culinary preparations. This is in evident contrast to Gavin's description of the blandness of post-war British cuisine, the 'boiled eggs' and 'dank, wet cabbages' (36) that made her long for the 'steaming tureens of delectable mutton curry and spicy potatoes and plates of newly made chapattis' (38) she had been used to as a child in India.

Gavin utilises food effectively as a cultural signifier in the novel, describing Chatterji as a 'dhoti-wearing magician' as he presides over his 'steaming' pot, ladling in ever more 'mouth-watering ingredients' (66-67). Beck argues that authors' depiction of 'special foods and old-time stories' to expose children to new cultures 'treats tradition as a superficial phenomenon' (121) in a way that can, itself, be viewed as Othering. I however, suggest that such a view negates food's ability to provide a pertinent and tangible introduction to a culture. Indeed, this is particularly the case for a child audience for whom sensory descriptions, used so effectively by Gavin throughout the novel and particularly with regards to food, are crucial in terms of supporting their overall engagement with texts, but specifically in the process of developing what Nicholas Bielby terms the 'reading skill of empathy' (60). Furthermore, in *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye*, food, like Chatterji's storytelling, has a significant thematic role in the novel with regards to foreignness. In particular, it provides Sanjay and Neetu with an access point to their family's home culture. This idea is explored further in the chapter focusing on Chatterji and the children's epic search for a jar of 'Mrs Fernandez' Pickles' (112), a brand of spicy pickle chutney Chatterji used to flavour his omelettes in India, but which appears to be sadly lacking in England: 'We used to get Mrs Fernandez' Pickles in Pune, but not here. You won't find it here in the UK, but what a favourite it was though. We never ate an omelette without Mrs Fernandez' Pickles back in India' (113).

Assisted by his grandchildren, Chatterji eventually locates a 'darkened, dusty jar' (122) of the pickle in a corner shop⁶² and takes great pride in introducing it to his family, who consume it gratefully and with evident 'interest' (128). This notion of a 'cultural access point' also extends to Gavin's intended child readership, for whom, in an innovative and engaging endnote to the novel, she includes a simple 'recipe for Mrs Fernandez' Green Chilli Pickle' (144). If, as Margaret Chatterjee contends: 'the Otherness of the Other is sought to be removed by empathy' (193), such a directly experiential opportunity serves again, to deepen a young reader's empathetic engagement with the text. This suggests another strategy through which Gavin's novel attempts to dissolve 'boundaries' (Said 40) between for example, east and west, local and foreigner, self and Other.

In *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye* then, the foreign Other acts in part, as a bridge between what Said terms 'binary oppositions' (46). Chatterji is a vessel freighted with 'a complex array of Oriental ideas, philosophies and wisdoms' (Said 4) adapted, or 'domesticated for local European use' (4). His presence disrupts the 'order of things' in the family home, willing his relations to maintain their sense of cultural identity ('Indianness') among the west's myriad distractions. Sanjay, sorry that Chatterji must return to India in the novel's conclusion, delivers an impromptu poem:

Grandpa Chatterji
Please come backerji
Go upside down

⁶² The community convenience store or 'corner shop' in Britain, particularly in the post-war years, were often run by recent immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia. The reasonably low running costs of such a business attracted first generation immigrants, with such shops also able to provide employment for extended family members. In addition to supplying western goods and day-to-day grocery items, in their pre-supermarket heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, such corner shops also stocked a small selection of imported items from the Indian subcontinent. These were intended to appeal to immigrants who realised the difficulty of tracking down such items in the highstreets of mid-twentieth century England. This is likely the story behind the single dusty jar of Mrs Fernandez' pickle that Chatterji finds; in many ways like him, being a remnant of a different place and time.

Like a sleeping batterji (140)

This prompts Chatterji to consider one final session of ‘upside down’ meditation. Notably however, this time he abandons it for fear that ‘people might think he was mad’ (141).

Although this study does not place overt emphasis on the role of the author in interpreting and responding to the primary texts, Gavin is noteworthy as being the only writer this thesis examines with non-white British origins. A narrator in Samuel Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing* (1967) asks the question ‘what matter who’s speaking?’ (109). If, for the purposes of this example, we consider the ‘speaker’ to be the author⁶³, I believe their context does indeed ‘matter’, because we may suppose a writer’s own sense of cultural Otherness may impact upon their fictional representation of such Otherness. This is particularly the case in terms of how Gavin’s ethnicity might position her with respect to, for example, the publishing industry. Gavin has long argued in favour of the need for the notoriously homogenous children’s publishing industry in the UK to commission more work by ethnically diverse writers writing about ethnically diverse characters. Indeed, speaking at the 2017 *International Board on Books for Young People* (IBBY) conference in London, she discussed how, even having achieved a considerable level of eminence in this field, as a female British-Asian author, publishing opportunities for her work remain elusive. Comparably, other writers such as Sita Brahmachari, the author of *Artichoke Hearts* (2011), explain their experience that when works by such writers *are* commissioned, this is often with the expectation that a certain level of cultural exoticism will be appropriated into such narratives: ‘Because of their own diverse backgrounds as writers they become expected to

⁶³ Although I am aware that this position is freighted with theoretical / ideological ambiguities and complexities.

tick certain boxes' (Brahmachari 2014). There is therefore a sense that children's publishers are attracted to work by such authors because of the way they *emphasise* rather than attempt to negate, Otherness.

Perhaps due to this external expectation, *Grandpa Chatterji* is the most problematic of the texts explored in this thesis, Gavin being the author who treads least cautiously into the territory of Orientalism in her portrayal of Chatterji. Gavin's representation of Chatterji serves an ideological purpose in that he essentially serves as a foil to the homogenising trappings of western life that are absorbing his family. However, Gavin's depiction strays into little more than caricature routinely enough that his Otherness in a western context is consistently reemphasised. Into Gavin's portrayal of Chatterji is crammed every stereotypical component of Indianness. These range from yoga, curry cooking, incense, meditation and flying carpets. This ultimately results in creating a further sense of Othering distance from the implied reader, who, because of the nature of Gavin's description and explanation of Indian traditions and customs, is imagined to be a non-participant in this culture. Therefore, if part of the author's role in exploring diversity with a homogenous audience involves a process of what John Chasteen terms 'making the foreign familiar' (223), the extent to which Gavin succeeds in this mission is somewhat negligible.

Gavin's occasionally problematic representation aside, the text does, I wish to make clear, also achieve some valuable cultural work in terms of this thesis and its primary objectives. For example, just as Chatterji has encouraged his family to challenge and question aspects of western life they now take for granted (including, for example, secularism and consumerism), this suggests the opposite process has also taken place, with Chatterji now adopting a degree of western perspective in modification of his own behaviour. This is also

integral to the process of what Syed Manzooral-Islam terms 'becoming Other' (7) - again, note the reference to the disruption of the 'boundary' mentality between self and Other the traveller necessarily experiences: 'Travel is to do with encounters with Otherness that fracture both a boundary and an apparatus of representation: it is a performative enactment of becoming Other' (7). Similarly, as I will now consider, the transactional component of 'travel', be it literal or metaphorical, and its ability to both 'fracture boundaries' of Otherness and facilitate cultural exchange, is also one of Hilary Freeman's chief concerns in *The Boy From France*.

Freeman's *The Boy From France* (2013) is set during a school foreign exchange programme. At the beginning of the novel, fourteen-year-old Vix (the narrator-protagonist), is notified that she will be hosting Xavier, the eponymous 'boy from France', at her parents' London home. Vix's mother suffers from a mysterious illness (7), as a result of which she has been 'medically retired' (92) and her father has therefore had to 'increase his hours' (7) at work, resulting in Vix becoming her mother's primary carer. As such, she worries about the logistics of the French exchange because, as she explains: 'I have to do a lot more around the house than any of my friends [...] How am I going to add in entertaining a French person too?' (7). As the novel progresses however, such fears are allayed as Vix and Xavier develop a romantic attachment based in part, on the 'exotic' (Freeman 136) allure of their mutual foreignness. Xavier's arrival also prompts Vix to gain perspective and reflect on the long-term feasibility of her carer role, whilst engaging more fully in what her father terms 'proper teenage' (126) pursuits. Through Vix's narrativization of her burgeoning relationship with Xavier, Freeman playfully explores the inherent Otherness of national stereotypes, the 'stranger' (76) as a simultaneously disruptive and liberatory presence, the association of

foreignness with exoticism, as well as the impact of association with a foreign Other on what Hart terms 'identity formation' (274) in young-adulthood.

Much of the humour deriving from Freeman's treatment of foreignness in the novel centres on Vix's preoccupation with national stereotypes, pertaining, in particular, to French culture. As Julia Krause contends: 'stereotypes assign inert and thus immutable reasons for Otherness' (7), and this is particularly the case prior to Vix's initial meeting with Xavier. Indeed, at this stage, Vix struggles to imagine Xavier except through the obviously Othering perspective of the 'immutable' French stereotype. Although she is aware of how reductive a gaze (two-dimension, as in a 'stupid cartoon' [9]), the stereotype she cannot help but draw on is, Vix nevertheless worries that, 'knowing my luck, I'll get the only French boy who really does wear a beret and a stripy top and ride a bicycle' (9). Throughout the novel, as the reality of Xavier as a fully-formed character takes over, Vix dispenses with such 'cartoon-like' stereotypes, but admits her attraction to Xavier is likely due, in part, to the 'novelty factor' (136) of his French exoticism: 'perhaps I only like Xavier because he's French [...] I'm probably the world's least exotic person' (136). These thoughts mirror Foucault's association of stereotyping with the desire for an 'imaginary element' (*Discipline...* 156). For Foucault, this dynamic was one of the 'most essential internal operating principles' (156) of ideology. He asserted that, when an ideology creates, as the focus of its attention, an 'imaginary element' (156), it also generates a powerful desire for such an element. The crucial 'imaginary element' of Xavier then, is his foreignness - he is imbued with an 'exotic' (136) Otherness that Vix desires. Pertinently, she also imagines how Xavier may share this perspective:

The opposite question has started to bug me: does he only like me because I'm English? Maybe there's something I do that French girls don't? Something I'm not

aware of. Or maybe it's just the novelty factor – my accent, or the fact I seem 'exotic' to him (136).

Vix's thoughts here conform to Joseph Libertson's idea of the 'inspired reception of the Other in desire, that invests in the novelty and foreignness of the concept of difference' (310). Similarly, in *Children's Literature and National Identity* (2001), Margaret Meek discusses how the 'Otherness of children from foreign countries' (64) is a recurring theme throughout children's literature. To illustrate this, she cites various examples, one of which, part of a stanza from Robert Louis Stevenson's poem *Foreign Children* (1885) suggests parallels with Vix's initial attitudes to Xavier: 'You have curious things to eat / I am fed on proper meat' (qtd. in Meek 64). Comparably with the speaker in the above stanza, Vix also focuses on the unfamiliarity of Xavier's presumed diet: 'they eat weird things like frogs' legs and snails and too much garlic, and *frites* instead of chips [...] He'll probably bring a string of onions as a welcome gift' (Freeman 9). The irony of this statement is revealed in chapter four in which Vix insists Xavier sample 'British cuisine' (35) which, given the peas are 'luminous green and very runny', prompts her to admit her native diet is as much 'an acquired taste' (36) as Xavier's. For David Freidenreich, food helps 'define or relativize the Otherness of foreigners' as discussed earlier in the chapter. Indeed, differences in cultural diets, he argues are involved in the formation of 'nuanced distinctions between Us and Them' (8). Such is the case in Freeman's novel, with the comparably 'exotic' nature of the food Xavier introduces to his hosts ('croissants' [41], 'olive oil' [107] and 'crème caramels' [108]), being representative, for Vix at least, of his foreignness. 'What did he make, something really romantic and French?' (107) Vix's friend Sky enquires of the meal Xavier prepares in chapter twelve. Pertinently here, it is not so much foreignness being singled out as 'romance', but specifically *Frenchness* that is exoticised. This is also the case in terms of

what Vix perceives as Xavier's continental charm. For example, when he 'holds the door open' (35) for Vix, she remarks 'none of the English boys I know would ever do that' (35). This is even evident in terms of Vix's perception of France itself, imagined as a romantic idyll: 'it seems so exotic, with its beaches and outdoor cafes' (17). This setting, Vix implies, is wholly foreign from the familiar environment of 'grey-skied, noisy, hectic Camden (17).⁶⁴ Foreignness is also explored in the novel through Vix and Xavier's fascination with their mutual native languages. Hart contends that 'words influence ones subjectivity' and that 'identity formation' is informed by 'language, within which identity and connectedness get lost in translation' (274). The following extract from the novel sheds light on the quote from Hart, in which we observe Vix struggling to decrypt Xavier's speech:

Bof?
 Oui bof! Eez difficult to translate, like erm, nevair mind. But not. Just bof!
 Ah, you mean like meh?
 Meh?
 Yes, meh. I laugh. This is a ridiculous conversation [...] I think we're lost in translation (49).

For Vix, the Otherness of Xavier's language and its foreignness compared to her own 'North London vowels' (63) is integral to what Foucault terms '[language's] special quality' (*Archaeology...* 55). For Foucault, the power of the speaker is, from language, to 'derive [...] his own special quality, [a] prestige' (*Archaeology...* 55). In the novel, Freeman makes the case however, for a kind of cultural reciprocity in relation to Vix and Xavier's experience of language. Concerned about her limited French compared to Xavier's more substantial grasp of English, Vix explains: 'I speak a tiny bit of French but your English is tons better. And my accent is awful', to which Xavier encouragingly replies 'No! Eez cute axont. I love zee axont Anglais' (63). This is one of various examples in the text of what Meek argues is a recent

⁶⁴ The London borough where Freeman lives and routinely adopts as a setting for her novels. *See also Freeman's *Camden Town Tales* (2010 – present) series.

trend in British fiction for children and young-adults of viewing 'Britishness through the lens of Otherness' (45). Commenting on how Xavier's presence as a foreigner encourages her to consider alternate perspectives on aspects of 'Britishness' normally taken for granted, including the English language itself, Vix comments: 'it's really making me think about the words I use every day and never question' (40). Here again, this demonstrates how the foreign Other acts as a critical reflection on the dominant culture, this secondary perspective exposing the strangeness of the quotidian aspects of Vix's life (such as 'language') she would otherwise 'never question'.

The teenagers' respective lifestyles are also critiqued, both positively and negatively, through the perspective that Otherness offers. For example, whilst chaperoning Xavier on their excursion to Camden Market, Vix explains: 'I love seeing it through a stranger's eyes, as they take it all in [...] The music, bright colours and general mayhem' (47). In contrast however, Vix compares the 'cold' (36) insularity of life in 'grey-skied' (17) Northern Europe ('mostly lived indoors; lounging around' [38]) to Xavier's day-to-day life in Nice which she imagines 'jealously' (38) as brimming with adventure: 'filled with cycling and skateboarding, playing football, camping in the woods [...]' (38). Sensing a need to impress the worldly Xavier, Vix attempts to 'make my life seem more exciting' (38) through her tenuous associations with local celebrities (38) which, she imagines, will enliven her otherwise humdrum existence: 'I make out that my life is one big, celebrity-filled party when, in reality, I go to school, see my mates and help my mum' (38). This is proved to be unnecessary however, as Xavier is as enchanted by Vix's life in London, somewhere, he claims, he had always 'dreamed to veesit' (39), as Vix is by her imagined version of Xavier's French home. It

is the inherent foreignness of these two locations in comparison to one another that results in their respective attraction for Vix and Xavier.

Both home 'spaces' may be interpreted as 'heterotopias', in terms of Vix and Xavier's perception of them. It is evident from the text that, for Xavier, London, and, for Vix, Nice represents what Foucault terms in *Of Other Spaces* (1984): 'the space of our dreams' (47). The 'spaces' in the text, in this case, London and Nice, exist both as a reality for one of the children, whilst existing as a 'dream' for the other. Therefore, for Xavier, London is not the site of 'normal' (76) experiences, such as 'homework', 'family' and 'school' (160) as Vix describes and experiences them, but instead takes on the fantasy significance of 'tourist' (47) brochures. In this way, it becomes 'a place of wonder – a sort of alternative theme park' (47). Comparably, for Vix, Nice becomes an 'Othered space' (Foucault 1984). Rather than viewing Nice's reality as a workaday 'port' (37) town where Xavier lives with his 'mum, dad and two sisters' in a single 'apartment, not a house' (37), Vix perceives it as a colourful and exotic holiday resort consisting of 'beaches, parties and swimming' (37). The perception of an alien culture is inevitably one of Otherness then, but, particularly in young-adulthood, as Vix and Xavier demonstrate, there may also exist a romantic attraction to the dream-like ideal of such a culture, regardless of whether it is based wholly in reality.

Due to the way in which Xavier distorts Vix's perception of 'reality', he can be viewed as a simultaneously disruptive and liberating presence in her home. Ultimately, Vix recognises that, because of the expectations placed on her as carer for her mother, her life has become somewhat 'mundane' (Freeman 150): 'it's up to me to do the food shopping and a lot of the cleaning and cooking' (7) she explains. Xavier's assistance however, helps make such workaday chores 'bearable' (93) - 'cleaning with Xavier is (almost) fun' (93) Vix proclaims at

one point. Moreover, Xavier introduces Vix to life's pleasures, including music (93), food and cooking (61) and 'romance' (6), that he believes she has been denied due to her 'Cinderella'-like (90) status at home. For Vix then, the foreign Other ultimately becomes an emancipatory figure, freeing her from what she perceives as the 'greyness' (17) of ordinary life. Witnessing the change in Vix's behaviour as a result of Xavier's visit, her father realises the necessity of removing the burden of her mother's care from Vix: 'You're fourteen – you should be out there having fun. Not worrying about your mother. Xavier coming...it's...well, having a stranger to stay makes everything a little more normal' (76). Here Vix's father highlights what Foucault describes as the potential 'normalising power' (*Discipline...* 21) of the Other.

Xavier's primary purpose in the novel is to draw Vix back into the 'dominant order' (Foucault 1977) of life as, what her Father terms, a 'proper teenager' (Freeman 126). In this way, Xavier assists Vix's re-entry into what Shelley Park argues is the typical *style* of 'identity and symbolic order experienced during adolescence' (206). In *The Boy From France*, the foreign Other functions to critique and destabilize an existing dynamic, their Otherness in the host's setting a 'window' through which 'foreign experiences' (Badran 93), or, what Foucault terms new 'attitudes' or 'modes of relating to reality' (*Power: The Essential...* 309), may be accessed.

The foreign Other is employed by the authors in myriad ways in the three novels discussed. However, as I have shown, they share an ability to both question and potentially disrupt what Foucault terms 'the order of things' (1966). This can be through the subversion of traditional power dynamics, such as between pupil and teacher, as evident in the classroom chapter in *The Unforgotten Coat*, or, in respect to *Grandpa Chatterji*, through the imposition

of eastern 'modes of practice' (*Order of Things...* 44) to critique western hegemony. The foreign Other, as portrayed in *The Boy From France*, may also be depicted as an exotically romantic figure, one whose presence serves to carry out what Roberta Seelinger-Trites argues is the essential function of adolescent literature, that of 'disturbing the universe' (1998). However, simultaneously in this case, Xavier also attempts to draw Vix back into the dominant order of teenage life.

Given much of this chapter's theoretical foundation was provided by Edward Said, I wish to turn once again to *Orientalism* to conclude. The following quotation also corresponds to my own reflections regarding the representation of the foreign Other in the three texts we have explored. For Said, 'the foreign Other' [...] 'involves a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality' (19). Ultimately, it is this 'humanistic spirit' and wish to encourage those around them to celebrate, in the words of Grandpa Chatterji, 'life and living' (Gavin 39) that makes 'having a stranger to stay' (Freeman 76) such a worldview-altering experience for those whose lives they touch.

Notably, each of the three authors introduced in this chapter have published concurrent works in which they continue to explore comparable themes and issues. Frank Cottrell Boyce's *The Astounding Broccoli Boy* (2015), about a boy who inexplicably turns green, explores Otherness with regards to what Lisa Isherwood and David Harris describe as 'highly visible differences' such as 'skin colour' (53). Foreignness has continued to be a perennial theme in Jamila Gavin's work. In *Oddboy* (2014)⁶⁵ for example, the eponymously-named character who, the reader is told, speaks in a 'foreign tongue' (188) struggles to develop a

⁶⁵ One of the six short stories that comprise Gavin's 2014 collection *Blackberry Blue*.

sense of 'belonging' (188) in a place that is 'not his home' (180). In Hilary Freeman's *When I Was Me* (2015), Ella, the central character, suffers severe amnesia. Through her depiction of Ella's negotiation of this situation, Freeman explores the ramifications of estrangement or, feelings of foreignness from one's past.⁶⁶ In doing so, she considers how a sense of Otherness inevitably underscores the process of what Jopi Nyman terms 'reconstructing identity' (26).

The following chapter represents a departure from the previous four chapters, each of which have been devoted entirely to the contextual and literary analysis of this study's primary texts. In this way, the proceeding section privileges the voices of young people themselves – the primary demographic for these texts. Their direct and lively responses, the aspects of the novels they find challenging, inspiring, pertinent and poignant, will now shed new and different lights on how Otherness can be seen to function within their pages.

⁶⁶ The past being, as L.P. Hartley astutely observed in *The Go Between* (1953); 'a foreign country', in which 'things' are 'done differently' (2).

Chapter Five - 'He's from another planet': Reading Otherness with young readers.

Introduction and contexts.

In Lucy Pearson's *The Making of Modern Children's Literature in Britain* (2013) the author considers how: 'The shift towards more realism in children's books reflects an attempt to engage with "real" childhoods' (67). With this in mind, given the social realist nature of the primary texts examined in this thesis, in addition to the underpinning focus on the 'real life' context of modern-day Britain, it is perhaps not surprising that I would wish to explore 'real' children's thoughts and feelings about Otherness, in terms of how literature can help us to comprehend this. However, this is not an arbitrary decision. Rather it stems from the critical position I established in the introductory chapter, and my stance on the invaluable role of the child in adding a crucial additional lens to our interpretive toolkit.

In the introduction, we examined Rose's view that the body of writing we know as 'children's literature' is inherently problematic due to the involvement of adults in most aspects of its production and consumption. This was associated with Nodelman's thesis in *The Hidden Adult*, that children's literature is a form through which adults dominate or 'colonise' (2008) children, and that the adult 'agenda' (rather than the child's) therefore becomes the ruling ideology in this fiction. I argued that one strategy through which to counter this central issue in the field, is through the privileging of the child's voice, something that has habitually been lacking in academic studies of children's literature. This is therefore the guiding rationale for this chapter focusing on reader's responses to the primary literature, which comprises a key part of the 'original contribution to knowledge' posited by this thesis.

In David Rudd's study *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature* (2000), he provides a 're-examination' of Blyton's substantial corpus in line with young readers' critical engagement with her work. Enid Blyton is a writer who, even though her work is somewhat dated, continues to attract a substantial child readership. This is despite the attitudes of adults, who are, Rudd suggests, often rather disparaging about the quality and literary credibility of her work. This was the first study to draw extensively on the views of Blyton's readership, past and present, and to use a reader-response approach to demonstrate how adult criticism has consistently missed the secret, or 'mystery' of this author's appeal. Rudd believed that children's thoughts on one of the most divisive popular writers for young people could be revealing of broader attitudes and feelings children may have in regard to fiction. This idea of adult critics potentially 'missing' pertinent details in texts that children's readings *could* reveal, also underscored my wish to engage in discussion with child readers in this study. Ultimately, as will be shown, engaging with and absorbing children's 'book talk' (Chambers 1993), did indeed reveal fresh and unique insights on the primary texts, some of which I would certainly otherwise have 'missed'.

As reader-response research remains, even in children's literature scholarship, a rare approach, this chapter provides a kind of 'test case' for this methodology. It aims to show why I believe consultation with readers should take a more prominent role, and make the case for why, as researchers in this particular field, we must consistently ensure we are traversing the 'bridge' between literary criticism and qualitative research. If nothing else, I hope that this aspect of my thesis demonstrates the potential rewards inherent to this approach, and influences other researchers to explore children's books *with* children, in an effort to approach the discipline from a different tack and gain fruitful new perspectives on

material. This, I passionately believe, has the ability to result in a more revealing lens on primary material, and almost certainly a more equitable one.

Given that, prior to beginning doctoral research I taught in primary schools for five years, I knew I possessed the necessary expertise to make carrying out research in this setting a successful endeavour. Specifically however, due to the relatively challenging and abstract nature of some of the discussions the books were likely to prompt, I felt an older Key Stage Two age group (such as Year Six), with reasonably strong existing reading capabilities would comprise the most successful participants. Although a number of the texts examined in this thesis are designated young-adult fiction, and therefore would not have been out of place in a secondary setting, certain novels featured in my thesis were pitched more at a 'middle-grade' audience and therefore, I selected four of these to form the basis of this reader-response section. From Chapter One, I opted for Anne Fine's *Up On Cloud Nine*, from Chapter Two – Catherine MacPhail's *Tribes*, from Chapter Three – Jacqueline Wilson's *Dustbin Baby*, and from Chapter Four – Frank Cottrell Boyce's *The Unforgotten Coat*. I believed that these novels would be the most accessible and engaging for Year Six readers, and would act as an effective 'way in' to discussions of Otherness and its associated subthemes. In addition to the school setting of these books which established an immediate point of identification for the participants, these texts could also be viewed as transitional. In this way, middle-grade novels existing as a stepping stone between children's and young-adult literature, could be said to mirror the transition these particular pupils were about to negotiate, between primary and secondary school. Notably, as Barbara Kiefer explains:

As students begin the transitional period that corresponds roughly to the middle-school years, they begin to develop abstract theoretical thought; they are no longer dependent on concrete evidence but can reason from hypotheses to logical

conclusion [...] they can now deal with the layers of meaning found in complex stories (39).

For a study such as this, the readers' ability to negotiate 'abstract' ideas such as Otherness, and, through the dual processes of inference and deduction, 'deal with layers of meaning' in texts was obviously key. Similarly, as Lee Galda states, reader responses inevitably evolve 'as children mature' (7). Specifically however, the shift from 'childhood to adolescence' (7) (broadly, as I have interpreted it, coinciding with the end of primary and start of secondary school), is a particularly fertile period for the development of new readerly practices, skills, attitudes and ideas. As Galda argues, for the emerging adolescent, 'powerful' (11) books have the ability to:

[...] Shake us out of complacency, hold our assumptions and values up to those of others and allow us to consider and reconsider our own. Reading allows us the opportunity for transformation, for a shaping and reshaping of how we view ourselves and the world around us. Discussing books with others in a collegial environment only increases the power (11).

My own memories of reading J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) at approximately the same age⁶⁷ as the readers selected for this study, is personal evidence for this, suggesting how 'transformative' certain texts read at instructive times in our lives can be. Similarly, I, like Galda, also realised that the 'power' of literary themes and ideas had the potential to be intensified through the process of discussion with other readers. This however, was only made evident to me when I entered the 'collegial environment' of the university literature seminar, where, in contrast to school, books and the ideas they spawned were discussed in an open, non-judgemental manner, without continual reference to assessment objectives and *all* responses were valued.

⁶⁷ See section on 'autobiographical contexts' in the introduction.

Logistical considerations.

My supervisor in the Education department at UWE provided me with the contact details of the literacy coordinator at a local university 'link' primary school. The school was a large, urban primary serving an affluent, politically liberal / left-leaning district with a predominantly white-British demographic. It had a long-standing positive reputation among local educators in terms of its culture of innovative teaching and learning strategies, its commitment to teacher training as well as its willingness to participate in outreach activities, including university research projects. There were however, certain criteria the school would be required to comply with if they agreed to support me in this endeavour. These included: Allowing a small selection of participating readers in Year 6 (and ideally of mixed gender), to attend a weekly thirty-minute reading focus group in order to read and discuss the four selected texts, giving me permission to record discussions using a hand-held (MP3) audio recorder, and allowing me to carry out my research across two consecutive academic years for a period of approximately ten months and involving two separate Year Six cohorts. Crucially, the host school must also comply with ethical protocols stipulated by both the UWE ethics committee and the British Educational Research Association (BERA), with particular regards to informed consent and participants' rights to withdraw. Following a discussion with the literacy coordinator, during which I outlined the aims and objectives of my research, discussed the above criteria and highlighted the positive outcomes of attendance at a weekly reading group in terms of potential reading skills development for participants, it was agreed that, pending ethical approval and my successful application for a Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check, I could carry out the reading groups each Friday starting from January 2015.

Given participation in the reading-groups was optional and, in the first six months of the project, ran at lunchtime, it was fairly self-selecting, attracting pupils who were already keen readers, used to reading and discussing books in and out of school on a daily basis. The groups were comprised of the following eleven participants whose names have been changed, as per ethical requirements, to protect anonymity:

Group One – January to June 2015:

- Lucy, Bree, Jasmin, Neil, Ellie, Austin.

Group Two – September to December 2015:

- Robyn, Alice, Jill, Henry, Taylor.

Each reading group would meet for thirty minutes per week, except in cases where this was not possible due to participants' other commitments.⁶⁸ The sessions were recorded using an audio (MP3) recorder and, in most cases, transcribed the same day, the responses introduced in this chapter being transferred directly from these transcriptions.

This thesis, as a result of its interdisciplinarity, carried with it an additional layer of complexity. This concerned how best to amalgamate what could be perceived as two 'standalone' studies, one comprised of literary analysis, and one involving qualitative research with readers. Various strategies were mooted in order to accomplish this, including embedding the reader-responses into the main body of chapters focusing primarily on literary analysis. This would have been comparable to the method employed by David Rudd in *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature* (2000). Experimenting with this

⁶⁸ See 'problems and challenges...' section in the appendix for more information regarding this.

however, the responses appeared somewhat 'scattered', disparate and out of context. They did not relate to every primary text and so were only relevant to certain sections of the chapters. In this way, their full potential as a crucial component of this thesis was not being realised. It was at this stage that I realised the necessity of the reader-response research comprising its own chapter. In addition, I subsequently intended to begin the thesis with this chapter, thereby privileging the voices of young people from the outset in a manner intended to reinforce the argument that they have a crucial role to play in the interpretation and analysis of fiction for which they are the intended audience. The issue here was that such a chapter was not possible without the primary texts having initially been introduced and discussed in some depth prior to their discussion by the readers, in order for the responses to carry any interpretive weight. Ultimately, this necessitated the 'main body' of literary analysis chapters having to precede the reader-response chapter. Initially, I was concerned that this could have a marginalising effect, essentially relegating the readers' contributions to the end of the thesis, where they were in danger of appearing almost as an afterthought. Ultimately however, I realised that the current structure more successfully made the case for young people's responses to the texts being paramount, their thoughts and opinions essentially forming the 'final word' on the representation of Otherness contained in these texts.

Choosing to conduct the reader-response research in a primary provision with a comparatively young group of participants also highlighted certain limitations. From a purely logistical standpoint, I encountered a variety of challenges that were, on reflection, a predictable aspect of any school-based qualitative research. These are detailed in the appendix rather than being included here because, although they are of importance in terms of evaluating my research methods and the procedural considerations involved in

undertaking this aspect of the project, they did not have any direct bearing upon the ultimate evolution of this thesis. Of greater relevance however, were the textual considerations relating to the context of the focus group I had selected. I had chosen to conduct this research with an upper-primary (Year 6) aged-group primarily because, as a former primary school teacher, I felt confident in my own abilities to organise and work within this context. However, due to the diversity of the age-range of the primary texts introduced in this thesis (compare, for example a 'middle-grade' text such as *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye* to a YA novel like *Kill All Enemies*, obviously aimed at much older teenagers), there were clear limits in terms of which of the primary texts could be appropriately introduced to this cohort of readers. Similarly, because the reader-response project necessitated one novel from each sub-themed chapter being explored in the groups, there were certain representations of Otherness that I had originally intended to devote an entire chapter to (in relation, for example, to sexuality explored through novels such as Lisa Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal* [2015] and Hayley Long's *What's Up With Jody Barton?* [2012]) that would have been more appropriately suited to examination by a reader-response group comprised of older, potentially secondary school-aged participants. This also links however, to the multi-faceted nature of a concept such as Otherness generally, and the challenge facing me as I attempted to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible of it. As such, in addition to gender and sexuality, I am aware that this thesis has not examined what could be interpreted as being the defining form of Otherness in contemporary Britain, race and, by proxy, racism as a derivative Othering process. This was partly because representations of race and racism in children's literature could easily comprise an additional thesis-length study, and as such it would have been challenging to do such a topic 'justice' in only one chapter. In addition however, I wanted to investigate

Otherness in relation to wider concerns regarding foreignness and 'the foreigner' as a human category generally, rather than becoming enmeshed in discussions specifically relating to race as a subtheme of foreignness, already well-trodden by critics such as Beverley Naidoo (1992) and Julia Hope (2015).

Ethical considerations.

In addition to anonymising the names of participants, working within the remit established by the British Educational Research Association (BERA)'s 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2011), the primary ethical consideration involved ensuring informed consent was obtained from participants' parents. This was because the participants were below the age whereby they could submit their own informed consent, and therefore a prerequisite for any research underpinned by BERA guidelines which assert: 'researchers must seek the collaboration and approval of those who act in guardianship (e.g. parents)' (6-7). This was achieved by supplying a UWE ethics committee-approved 'information sheet' letter to parents (see appendix 17). Similarly, the manner in which participants could withdraw from the project, should they wish to, was also a key ethical consideration. This was straightforward for group one, who were attending lunchtime sessions in their own time anyway, which meant they could simply stop attending at any time, without speaking to me or a member of staff, or stipulating a reason. For group two, who were attending the book group in class time, it was made clear to participants that, should they wish to withdraw, they did need to briefly speak to me or their class teacher, but that no justification for withdrawal would be required. Ethical considerations also governed my selection of primary texts for inclusion in this aspect of the project. The four that were chosen were arguably the

most age-appropriate of the twelve novels explored in this thesis, in that their subject matter was challenging without being unduly upsetting or anxiety-provoking. Certain choices of text, such as Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies* or Anne Cassidy's *Looking For JJ* would, due to their graphic depictions of violence, likely have been considered inappropriate for use in a primary school setting. For a broader explanation of the ethical implications of this component of my thesis, please refer to the ethics form (appendix 34) approved by the UWE ethics committee on 19th December 2014.

Methods: Researching in a group setting.

As mentioned previously, I wanted to conduct this research in a group setting that would replicate the 'collegial' (Galda 11) atmosphere of a 'book group' or literature seminar. This was intended to be in contrast to the didactic nature of the type of guided reading-style sessions the children would likely have encountered previously in school. This collective method of data gathering is known in qualitative research as a 'focus group'. As Sharon Vaughn et al suggests, such groups are 'best used when conducting exploratory research', and, crucially in terms of my study, are useful in terms of 'find[ing] out each person's point of view and to encourage people to express different points of view' (6). Similarly, I wanted to avoid initiating a typical teacher / pupil dynamic that could compromise the participants' belief in the validity of their own thoughts and ideas. From the outset, I tried to emphasise the group's egalitarian objective, explaining that I was not there to 'teach' these texts, guide their interpretations or impose my own personal readings on the participants, but rather to listen to (and, where appropriate share in), their discussions.⁶⁹ Essentially then, although

mine was necessarily an 'active' role in terms of prompting and facilitating discussions around the texts, I was aware throughout of wanting to take a 'back seat' as much as possible, with the participants' responses being of primary importance, and my intervention only taking the role of what Aidan Chambers terms an 'enabling adult' (12). In this context, the 'enabling adult' was intended to function primarily as a 'mediator' of text, particularly in terms of the most challenging novel we encountered as a group, *The Unforgotten Coat*. This adult's primary purpose is to support children in extending their thinking by, for example, considering carefully how their questions are framed. As such, I was careful to provide open questions which were likely to result in more fruitful, personal and astute responses from the participants, that would be most likely to contribute effectively to my thesis objectives.

With this in mind, I adopted the 'tell me' approach Aidan Chambers advocates in his study of *Children, Reading and Talk* (1993). Chambers' 'tell me' questions are designed to 'enable the children to say what they want to say' (Chambers 38) about books, and to guide the process of 'learning to behave as critics' (37). As a result, his 1993 volume is, in part, a 'how to' guide to framing questions designed to stimulate high quality 'book talk' (22). Such questions are often prefaced by the eponymous phrase 'tell me' (9), selected due to its indication of the researcher's *genuine* interest and wish to listen to the thoughts and responses of the readers. In addition to Chambers, the methodological foundation of this chapter draws on the work of myriad theorists who collectively have established the field of 'reader-response criticism'. Although reader-response remains a prevalent field of critical enquiry in literary studies generally, for the reasons suggested in this chapter's opening section, it has a particularly unique place in the interpretive toolkit of children's literature critics. A reader-response approach is particularly crucial in terms of this genre, where, as

we have seen, readers' voices have habitually been marginalised, if not silenced entirely. As such, I will proceed to introduce the origins, evolution and main contributors to this methodology.

Reader-Response.

Reader-response theory became an increasingly prevalent form of literary criticism in the late 1970s, culminating in the publication of the first collection of essays on the theme in 1980, Jane Tompkins' seminal *Reader-Response Criticism*. In this volume Tompkins collated several essays by the most prominent advocates of reader-response theory, including Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser – now synonymous with the approach. Reader-response in this period developed primarily as a reaction to the New Criticism that had dominated literary thinking and textual interpretation in the middle years of the twentieth century. For New Critics, the text itself was the arbiter of all meaning. This mode of criticism encouraged the reader to detach themselves from the text's wider cultural, socio-political and historical influences and significance, in favour of a focus on scrupulous 'close reading' wherein meaning must be sought *entirely* from the words on the page and not influenced by any extraneous factors. Combatting the New Criticism in the 1970s and 1980s came a renewed emphasis focusing on the readers' ability to construct their own meaning(s) from texts. In the more reader-centric environment of literary studies characteristic of the later years of the twentieth century, determinations of textual meaning began to make more explicit reference to readers' experiences of other texts, be they narrative or contextual sources. These positions, that suggest meaning is a product of the manner in which author and subsequently reader draw on textual, contextual, as well as other personal literary experiences, are at the basis of reader-response and its evolution into a discrete field of

literary criticism. Moreover, as initially discussed in the 'methodology' section in the introduction to this thesis, reader-response criticism can be grouped within the overarching category of Poststructuralist critical theory, in terms of its commitment to destabilizing singular notions of 'truth'.

Reader-response theorists.

Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive communities' is one of the cornerstones of reader-response criticism.

An author hazards his projection, not because of something 'in' the marks, but because of something he assumes to be in his reader. The very existence of the 'marks' is a function of an interpretive community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members (Fish 485).

In the above extract from his seminal essay 'Interpreting the Variorum' (1976), Fish argues that physical text ('marks' [485] on a page) is meaningless in the absence of the various (social, cultural, historical) contexts that readers are a product of. He develops this, arguing that communally generated literary 'meanings' are apt to differ from solo interpretations of texts, due to the different degrees of cultural and emotional 'baggage' contributed by each member of an 'interpretive community', as well as opportunities within such a 'community' for sharing and refining ideas. 'Meaning' therefore becomes a product of social interaction. The implications of such shared processes of textual interpretation will become evident when we examine the children's responses presently.

For Louise Rosenblatt, another central 'voice' in terms of reader-response criticism, the relationship between text and reader is inherently personal and highly subjective.

The individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs

and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response (Rosenblatt 30-31).

The reader's interpretation of a literary work, she contends, is one of a 'transactional' nature. Here, the reader 'brings' their current personal condition 'to the work', the reading of the text they receive in return being a specific ('never-to-be-duplicated') reflection of that individual's present state or 'mood of the moment'. In a reading group, this is necessarily a shared process, the myriad 'readerly selves' (Sell 153) entering into the transaction, ultimately resulting in a unique 'combination' of 'response[s]'. In addition, Rosenblatt utilises the metaphor of a 'live circuit' (25) to describe the manner in which text and reader are connected. Extending this metaphor to encompass a reading *group*, each reader could be said to represent a different component in this 'circuit', each having a different impact on the communal process of literary interpretation, just as the inclusion of an electronic component such as a resistor, capacitor or diode will vary the output of an electrical circuit. Comparably to Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser considers reading a similarly 'transactional' experience between text and reader, in which the reader's proactivity in 'setting the work in motion' unlocks or 'awakens' personal interpretations:

As the reader uses the various perspectives offered by the texts in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematised views' to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. Thus reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character (Iser 280).

Iser was interested in exploring what he viewed as a gulf that existed between the 'implied reader' of the author's imagination, and the 'actual reader' as they exist in the here and now (1974). For Iser, reader-response was a means of establishing a connection between these two 'types' of reader, and in the process allowing for text's 'inherently dynamic

character' to stabilize, ultimately forming a tangible 'meaning' in the mind of the reader. As Hope explains, in Iserian reader-response theory, there exist particular 'blanks' or 'gaps' between the authorial text of the 'implied reader' and the text as it is experienced by the 'actual reader' (85). It is ultimately the task of the reader to 'select and organise' such 'gaps', 'excluding some and "concretising" others – giving shape or meaning in the act of reading' (85). As a result, reader-response, particularly when conducted in a communal setting, is necessarily an organic process, with readers re-evaluating and reframing responses with reference not only to their own evolving understanding of the text, but also to the thoughts and feelings of other readers. With this in mind, a parallel can be drawn to Fish's discussion of how readers function in 'interpretive communities'.

The theorist Lawrence Sipe can be viewed as the 'bridge' between children's literature and reader-response criticism. For Sipe, pertinent aspects of children's experience have the potential to be revealed through reader-response: 'Researchers and practitioners who focus on literary response are in a position to trace children's sense of identity, purpose and common humanity' (Sipe 127). This is evidence for the argument posited in this chapter's opening paragraph - that children should be the primary interpreters of *their* fiction. With this in mind, Sipe suggests that adults ('researchers and practitioners') should 'focus' on children's responses in order to understand both children's literature as a literary genre, as well as what it reveals about the nature of childhood itself. Crucially, Sipe also argues that: 'Text is produced actively by readers who must put it together for themselves [...] All meaning making is active' (122). This discussion of the 'act' of reading is broadly comparable to the previous three theorists' thoughts. Again, the notion of 'meaning' is not, as per New Criticism, rigidly bound to what can be deduced solely from the text, but 'active' in that it is

constructed by readers whose contribution is underscored by ‘individual experience *and* cultural backgrounds’ (123). These theoretical approaches did, as the following section demonstrates, have an impact on my reflections and observations of the transcribed recordings because I was able to draw parallels between the manner in which the discussions unfolded (and the children’s individual styles of engagement in them), and the ideas of theorists such as Fish, Rosenblatt, Sipe and Iser.

Reader-responses.

Early on in our discussions on the four texts, I encouraged the readers to focus directly on the authors’ construction of their protagonists as Other. This was in order to explore Otherness in the texts ‘head on’, before continuing to discuss its nuances and subthemes. As mentioned previously, my discussion prompts were prefaced with a phrase such as ‘tell me...’ or ‘let’s explore...’ to indicate the open-endedness of what we were pursuing, whilst re-iterating the idea that we were not searching for singular truths or ‘answers’, but for ‘ideas’. In the section below, the participants attempt to unpack the primary contributing factors in regards to Stol’s Otherness in *Up On Cloud Nine*. It is intriguing to observe how the readers function in the ‘interpretive community’ comprised by the reader-response group. The first three children to respond describe Stol – characterising him articulately, but nevertheless simply describing his character traits:

Lucy: Stol is imaginative, creative...

Bree: He’s also a good liar.

Jasmin: He’s an over-the-top storyteller who changes every time. He’s really disastrous, and comes up with these really over-the-top stories (appendix 18).

One of the primary reasons for ‘doing’ reader-response, for reading texts in ‘interpretive communities’ is because, as Fish describes, shared reading experiences prompt domino-like thought processes, in which one participant’s contribution may ‘trigger’ (326) a link or unique interpretation in the mind of another. In particular, Fish suggests ‘interpretive communities’ may foster more ‘abstract’ (373) perspectives on literature that are not overtly concerned with the immediately superficial and ‘stylistic’ (69) aspects of text, but instead in the manner in which it deals with the broader scope of human experience. In ‘interpretive communities’ then, ‘the focus of attention is shifted from the page and its observable regularities to the temporal context of a mind and its experience’ (Fish 69). Indeed, such a ‘shift’ is now observable from Jasmin’s observations above, garnered entirely ‘from the words on the page’ (Fish 151) relating to Stol’s ‘storyteller’ status, to the manner in which the other readers continue to develop this, albeit this time considering what they can *intuit* and *infer* (from a personal and emotional perspective), about Stol’s ‘mind and its experience’ (Fish 69):

Neil: He’s got a talent for telling stories. He’s unusual. He’s not like anyone else.

Lucy: He tells stories because it helps him feel better.

Austin: He can’t control himself, which links in to his stories - they are over-the-top.

For Neil, Lucy and Austin, Stol’s Otherness is inexorably associated with his status as a ‘storyteller’ - a fantasist. This, Neil suggests, is beyond the bounds of the ‘usual’. The discussion proceeds to consider the extent to which aspects of identity synonymous with Otherness are ‘controllable’. Austin suggests that his ‘over-the-top’ stories are evidence of a lack of control, that Stol displays an inability to ‘reign in’ such narrative(s), which Lucy argues have a primarily cathartic purpose. Bree extends this, adamant that Stol’s status as a fantasist situates him wholly outside the social order:

Bree: He's from like, another planet. He's *so* different. He's *on* another planet.

Note here Bree's modification of '*from*' to '*on*', emphasising her point. Her observation here is suggestive of Zimmerman's classification of an 'alien Other' (163) introduced in chapter four. Bree suggests Stol's 'plane of reality' (Zimmerman 155) is 'different' enough to re-enforce his Otherness, the metaphor of being 'on another planet' indicative of the kind of 'liminal' space that Homi Bhabha describes 'provid[ing] a place from which to speak of the exilic and the marginal' (300). Stol's Otherness then, the readers contend, is primarily associated with the marginalising effect of his 'imaginative' narratives. Such a 'fantasising' subjectivity, they argue, ultimately sets him apart from the normative spheres of school and family life that provide the context and setting to Fine's novel.

Discussing Catherine MacPhail's *Tribes*, the readers begin by considering the collective sense of Otherness associated with the eponymous 'tribe', the gang of pre-adolescent boys on which the novel centres:

Ellie: They act a bit like animals; it's like she makes them seem less than human.

Neil: (*laughing*) I'd think what weirdos, because the tribe keep 'howling'!

Bree: They're different in the community (appendix 19).

Ellie and Neil focus on the Otherness of the tribe's 'animal-like' characteristics then. Neil introduces evidence from the text in support of this, considering the Othering implications of language, and citing Macphail's repeated use of the descriptive verb 'howling' to suggest what he views as the 'weirdness' of the tribe's behaviour. Bree considers the text's 'bigger picture' with regards to Macphail's positioning of the boys in the 'community' in which the novel is set, and considers how evident their 'difference' is, when presented against this setting. This re-enforces the idea that literary representations of Otherness are reliant on the sustained depiction of a perceived 'norm' (in this case, the small-town 'community')

setting amidst which the tribe wreaks its havoc), that the Other is either in contrast to, or deviates from. Perhaps inevitably, from 'community', the discussion shifts to 'belonging', and from a consideration of the tribe generally, starts to focus primarily on Kevin, the novel's protagonist:

Neil: He only has one friend, so maybe he wants to find another way to fit in with everyone else.

Lucy: He's definitely trying to find a way to fit in.

Austin: Also it's a way for him to feel safe.

Ellie: But Kevin's an outsider, and what they do to try and make him fit in [*the initiation test] kind of makes it worse I think. **My addition* (appendix 20).

The readers invoke a way of thinking about the 'insider' / 'outsider' dynamic explored by Macphail in the novel⁷⁰ that broadly correlates with Henri Tajfel's conceptualisation of 'in' and 'outgroups' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Joining an 'ingroup', as explored in chapter two, is ostensibly a form of social mobility, or as Martha Cottam et al suggest: 'the enhancement of positive social identity by advancement to a group of high status' (60). The 'high status' group, in this case, is, of course, the tribe - the 'ingroup' that Kevin tries fervently to 'fit in' to, because it has the potential to remove the stigma of Otherness (of being the 'outsider'), whilst also providing him with a ready-made friendship group. Austin also indicates the manner in which joining the tribe may provide a 'way for [Kevin] to feel safe'. This is reminiscent of Anthony Borrow and Jennifer Walker's assertion⁷¹ that in addition to the sense of collective 'identity' (67) its members benefit from, belonging to an 'ingroup' also provides 'safety in numbers' (67). Ellie however, challenges the previous responses, focusing on the negative ramifications that ultimately unfold due to Kevin's decision to join the tribe.

⁷⁰ Also discussed presently as a subtheme in relation to 'normativity'.

⁷¹ Introduced in chapter two.

For her, Kevin's 'outsider' status is difficult to lose sight of, because it results in him being vulnerable and open to exploitation by the tribe. Kevin's decision to undergo the 'initiation test' ultimately 'makes things worse' Ellie argues. Indeed, this is certainly the situation suggested by Macphail in the novel, because passing the 'test' places Kevin firmly within the control of the tribe (and by proxy, its Machiavellian leader, Salom), whilst also making 'escape' (Macphail 3) untenable.

April, the protagonist of Jacqueline Wilson's *Dustbin Baby* is clearly presented as Other from the opening lines of the novel: 'I always hate my birthdays. I don't tell anyone that. Cathy and Hannah would think me seriously weird' (Wilson 3). With this in mind, I began by drawing the readers' attention to this opening, and encouraging them to consider how Wilson constructs April's Otherness in the introductory paragraph in a way that both anticipates and foregrounds the ensuing text:

Jill: Well, normally children love birthdays and can't wait for them - she hides hers.
Robyn: Yeah, she's quite secretive; and she obviously keeps lots of stuff from her friends at school. She doesn't want them knowing about her past because she would be embarrassed, and she worries they wouldn't want to be her friends any more (appendix 21).

For Jill, April's Otherness is evidently as a result of her decision to 'hide' her 'birthday' – an event children 'normally love'. In line with Sipe, here meaning is constructed 'actively' with Jill's 'individual experience' (123) (in which birthdays are 'normally' joyful occasions), underscoring her interpretation of the text. Jill's use of the term 'normally' also implies April's non-compliance with childhood's normative 'acts of cultural participation' (Zylinska 3), in which birthdays are events to be longed for and revered, rather than shunned. Robyn highlights one of the aspects explored in depth in chapter three, the manner in which the past is liable to intrude in the present, hence April's 'secretiveness' around her friends.

Robyn utilises the term ‘worries’ to suggest that April’s concern that revealing anything about her background would inevitably alienate her from her friendship group is an unfounded anxiety. In this way, it presumably indicates the insecurities that April routinely falls prey to (and, by proxy, the manner in which these are instrumental in constructing her Otherness), rather than suggesting the reality of how the situation would likely play out. The discussion proceeds to consider the way in which Wilson’s style of ‘teenage confessional book’ (Gamble 99) (*Dustbin Baby* being a particularly good example of this, with its emotionally charged episodes – ‘crying’ and ‘melodrama’ [Gamble 77]), leaves some of the readers feeling somewhat voyeuristic:

Henry: She’s always crying – that’s why she’s nicknamed ‘April showers’.

Henry: I think since she feels so different, she’s a lot more emotional.

Jill: I felt like I should put the book down and give April some privacy. Some of the story felt kind of personal.

Alice: Yeah, so many details! (appendix 22).

Henry’s association of Otherness with April’s ‘emotional’ state is pertinent here. This mirrors Giovanni Stanghellini and Rene Rosfort’s pairing of ‘emotional fragility’ with what they term the ‘ambivalent dialectic of selfhood and Otherness’ (296), and the inevitable sense of ‘human vulnerability’ (296) that stems from this. Witnessing April’s vulnerability, and the manner in which the novel’s secondary characters routinely misinterpret or exploit this is certainly not a comfortable experience for the reader. There is indeed, as Jill asserts, a feeling that the reader’s ‘duty’ must surely be to ‘put the book down and give April some privacy’. Note the voice of conscience in Jill’s response: ‘I *felt* like I *should*...’ she explains in an almost guilty-sounding tone. The participants are becoming aware then, of certain dilemmas readers of fiction must face. These range from how to reconcile oneself with the often ‘personal’ or ‘confessional’ nature of first-person narratives, to how to negotiate

territory replete with uncomfortable ‘details’, and ultimately how to respond to the ‘moral and ethical responsibilities’ (Palumbo-Liu 81) necessarily contained within the ‘act of reading’ (195). Comparably to *Dustbin Baby*, the manner in which Frank Cottrell Boyce depicts his protagonists’ Otherness with regards to their vulnerability in a school setting is also identified by the readers as a theme in our initial discussion of *The Unforgotten Coat*:

Jill: They’re both overly protective of each other.

Robyn: Nergui is timid, scared and nervous. He doesn’t really seem to speak up for himself much – instead he lets Chingis speak for him (appendix 23).

Taylor: I think he doesn’t speak though because he’s afraid... it’s about their fear of the demon they think is following them.

Alice: He doesn’t talk much until he’s been taught football, and then he’s got a Liverpool accent! He only seems to talk when he knows he doesn’t sound like himself (appendix 24).

Unlike April in *Dustbin Baby*, brothers Chingis and Nergui have ‘each other’ to ‘protect’ them in this setting. However, as Taylor reminds us, in addition to school, their vulnerability in terms of the ominous ‘demon’ who the brothers believe is pursuing them (see chapter four for an interpretation of what exactly this ‘demon’ represents in the text), is considerable, and ‘fear’, Taylor suggests, plays a role in Boyce’s characterisation of Chingis and Nergui as Other. In terms of how such ‘fear’ manifests itself, particularly with regards to Nergui, (Chingis’s younger brother), Robyn, Taylor and Alice refer to the manner in which he is rendered ‘voiceless’ for much of the narrative. With this in mind, Alice’s observation that Nergui ‘only seems to talk when he knows he doesn’t sound like himself’ is particularly astute. In particular, it would appear that his eventual joining of the social order, (being ‘taught football’) is a liberatory act. Through football, Nergui’s Otherness is lessened and ‘speech’ restored – the ‘Liverpool accent’ implying participation in an ‘ingroup’ (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The aura of exoticism and ‘mysteriousness’ surrounding the brothers also, as Taylor, Jill and Henry explain, contributes to Boyce’s depiction of their Otherness:

Taylor: Although we don't find out much about them at the start, they're quite mysterious boys. They're from a very different country and they seem really exotic.

Jill: I think the fact that they are so different from the others in their class really captivates the reader. They are the odd ones out in their group of friends.

Henry: They wear different clothes and they're always going on about the fact that they're from Mongolia. I don't think the others really believe them (appendix 25).

The readers express the Orientalist contention⁷² that Otherness in this context relates to preconceived notions of eastern ('Oriental') cultures as being inherently 'exotic'. 'They seem really exotic in Liverpool' Taylor says of Chingis and Nergui, Liverpool being representative of the west's 'mundane reality' (Said 68) in contrast with Mongolia's 'exotic' sense of 'difference'. Following on from this, the brothers' Otherness is consistently made reference to, the readers' repetition of the term 'different' and Jill's use of the phrase 'odd ones out' reiterating this. Although Chingis and Nergui 'perform' their Otherness (Rogers 2014) tangibly however, 'wearing different clothes' and 'going on about the fact that they're from Mongolia', Henry accurately infers that, throughout the novel, there remains a degree of doubt among the brothers' classmates in regards to their provenance. There is certainly evidence for this in the novel: 'as if they're from Mongolia anyway [...] they're probably from Speke'⁷³ (Boyce 15) one pupil in Chingis and Nergui's class argues, a place of such evident foreignness and exoticism being wholly Other to the homogenous, 'culturally deprived' (Boyce 104) Liverpool suburb where the novel is set.

A pertinent and recurring subtheme of Otherness that dominated our discussions, was the concept of power, and by proxy, powerlessness. The group began by considering this in relation to Anne Fine's depiction of Stol in *Up On Cloud Nine*:

Lucy: She shows that it depends how people interpret him. In the book he's interpreted as being different, but funny. Being funny is a good thing, so he has a bit

⁷² See previous chapter.

⁷³ A suburb of Liverpool.

more power. With each good thing people can find about you, you have a bit more power.

Ben: So you're saying power is the result of how other people choose to look at you?

Bree: Yes because everybody sees him differently. In different places and at different times and with different people he has more or less power. For example, in his speech when Ian says that [*Stol] has spoken up for all of them. **My inclusion*. (Appendix 26).

As is consistently made evident throughout Foucault's body of work, it is impossible to understand the nature of Otherness without reference to the functioning of 'power relations' (*Discipline...* 24) within social groups. Two of the group's most perceptive readers, Lucy and Bree's analyses are in line with Foucault's reasoning that the manner in which 'power is exercised' is inexorably associated with 'subjectivity' (29-30). One's power in any given situation, Foucault (invoking Marxist theory) argues, 'corresponds to the function of each individual and to his value' (146), this 'value' being bestowed on the individual by others and therefore, as Lucy explains, 'it depends how people interpret [Stol]'. He is, she continues, 'different' and therefore Other in the 'social group' (*Discipline...* 81) the novel depicts. However, crucially this Otherness is offset, Lucy argues, by the 'value' of the fact he is 'funny', which results in him acquiring 'a bit more power'. Bree highlights how, in addition to subjectivity ('everybody sees him differently'), the novel demonstrates the importance of context in determining an individual's power or powerlessness. Although he is powerless 'physically' ('no one could slope off round a corner swifter than Stol if any biffing started' [102] the narrator maintains), Stol's most powerful moments, Bree argues, are his 'fearless' (Fine 102) classroom speeches. In particular, Bree alludes to the one in chapter twenty-four in which Stol, warming to his theme with 'arms flapping' (102) publicly expresses his 'contempt' (99) for school, 'speaking up' (102) for his classmates while the class teacher, the now powerless Mrs Garabour, can only 'stare' (100).

Unlike Stol, April in *Dustbin Baby* has few 'fearless' moments, remaining disenfranchised for the majority of the novel. Her powerlessness in the various situations she is presented with in the text is routinely depicted overshadowing opportunities she is given to demonstrate power, or to control the way in which events unfold in the novel. Whilst the discussion opens with an example in which April is depicted as 'powerful', the dialogue swiftly shifts to focus primarily on her powerlessness and its contributing factors:

Robyn: Sometimes April is powerful, like when she's telling Marion she's got to have a phone and stuff. But she's also powerless, like when she can't find her mum and she doesn't know what to do.

Jill: Yeah, and then she needs to go and find someone she can relate to.

Taylor: I think April is powerless because she hasn't got a mum and doesn't know what to do with herself; she copies her friends to try and fit in.

Alice: She feels like she doesn't belong anywhere and this makes her feel powerless. It's like she's just this random girl who doesn't have a mum.

Taylor: And she's always scared of getting things wrong. Your mum and dad have a big impact on the way you act around people, so by not having these she has to work it out herself (appendix 27).

Not surprisingly, April's powerlessness is attributed to the sense of Otherness and lack of 'belonging' she must contend with as a result of her status as a looked-after child: 'she hasn't got a mum and doesn't know what to do with herself' Taylor argues. 'Fitting in' is a struggle because April exists outside the defining social order of the family, instead, in Alice's words, she is 'just this random girl who doesn't have a mum'. Alice's term 'random' is indicative of the arbitrary, unstable nature of April's situation and identity, characterised by its lack of roots / family ties. Taylor's final comments here ('your mum and dad have a big impact on the way you act...') mirror my interpretation of April, explored in chapter three with reference to Bowlby's 'attachment theory' (1969). Indeed, similar thoughts and considerations are also raised by the readers, as we will see presently, in their discussion of *Dustbin Baby* and the theme of 'abandonment'. In contrast, in *The Unforgotten Coat*, power is explored through much less of a personal gaze. Instead it is attributed to the mechanisms

of control inherent to an institution such as a school, and the threat of Otherness in this context:

Taylor: At first they're kind of ignored, as if they're just minor disruptions, but then Nergui refuses to take off his hat.

Henry: I think the teacher and their classmates think they're from a totally different world. Particularly here when Nergui won't take off his special hat. The class seem quite surprised that someone isn't afraid to stand up to the teacher. They wonder who they are and where they come from. The others in the class find Chingis and Nergui very mysterious.

Alice: The teacher is the top; the head of the class, and she's meant to be the one in power there, but Chingis tries to get power over Miss Spendlove. He's trying to win power so his brother can stay with him and not take his hat off.

Robyn: Yeah, the teacher and Chingis struggle with each other for power in this chapter. I don't think the teacher is used to having a child try to question her!

Jill: The other people in the class are like; 'what are you doing!?' (Appendix 28).

In this exchange, the readers' thoughts on the incident in which, as Taylor describes, 'Nergui refuses to take off his hat'⁷⁴ echo the manner in which the Other, for Foucault, has the potential to challenge the hierarchical 'power relations' (*Discipline...* 24) around which institutions⁷⁵ function. In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the school teacher is, like Alice suggests, 'the top'; an all-powerful 'master of discipline' (166). The natural order of the classroom therefore relies on the 'disciplined individual' (166) complying unquestioningly with their 'orders' (166): 'The activity of the disciplined individual must be punctuated and sustained by injunctions whose efficacy rests on brevity and clarity; the order does not need to be explained or formulated; it must trigger off the required behaviour and that is enough' (166). In the chapter the readers are commenting on, it is clear that both Miss Spendlove and Chingis and Nergui's classmates are so familiar with such typical 'power relations' (24) imposed in a school setting, that the idea of an 'order having to be explained or formulated'

⁷⁴ Discussed at length in chapter four.

⁷⁵ Those specifically mentioned in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) include schools, prisons, barracks and factories.

is anathema to both parties. Chingis and Nergui's Otherness results in them being unable to function in this 'regime of disciplinary power' (182), or in Lacanian terms, their existence outside of this 'symbolic order' (1966) means they are incapable of acting within it, because they lack an inherent understanding of school's governing rules or 'codes' (255). As Henry suggests, in not being 'afraid to stand up to the teacher', Chingis and Nergui's Otherness, the aura of 'mystery' that surrounds them, is reinforced.

The following exchange, dealing with a reasonably abstract concept, demonstrates how adept the readers had become in terms of 'awakening responses' (Iser 280) to the text - interpreting its 'gaps' through the dual processes of inference and deduction. The readers offered various perspectives on the extent to which Stol's Otherness in *Up On Cloud Nine* has a liberating or 'freeing' effect:

Ellie: It's freeing because he can be who he wants.

Austin: He doesn't really care because everyone thinks he's weird anyway.

Bree: Yeah, it's not like he's ruining his reputation!

Ellie: He wouldn't really care. He keeps showing he doesn't care. There is more freedom, and that's good.

For Foucault, individuals whom power relations have rendered Other, are conversely themselves placed in a position of power: 'The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle' (*Power / Knowledge...* 98). This can be interpreted as being somewhat liberatory, giving the individual license to 'perform' (to cite the verb Judith Butler [1990] employs), a version of self unfettered by the constraints of the social order. This plays out to notable effect in *Up On Cloud Nine* where Stol's Otherness appears to situate him 'outside the rules' (97) in the institutions depicted in the novel, notably school and the family. Ian, the novel's narrator,

suggests that Stol subverts the ‘order of things’ (Foucault, 1970) in a comparable manner to ‘one of those Jesters in Shakespeare who are allowed to mock the king’ (97), and describes the apparently liberating effect of this on Stol as ‘brazening’ (97). It means ‘he can be who he wants’, Ellie argues. Indeed, the fact that Stol keeps, as Austin and Ellie assert, ‘showing he doesn’t care’ *does* appear to provide him, they suggest, with ‘more freedom’ than his peers.

As this study has routinely acknowledged, Otherness as a concept is inseparable from discussions of what does, or does not, constitute normativity in any given context.

Throughout the reader-response project, the readers interrogated notions of normativity or ‘normality’ with regards to the various contexts and settings presented in the novels. In particular, as the transcriptions below demonstrate, social ‘categorisation’ and the authors’ representation(s) of ‘in’ and ‘outgroups’ in the novels, is a recurrent concern for the readers:

Ellie: It’s about standing out from the crowd. But I guess when people say ‘you’re not normal’ it makes you think well, ‘what is “normal”’ anyway?

Jasmin: Average people are normal.

Neil: Yeah, everyone knows some things are normal and some things aren’t.

Austin: Normal means you and other people have got more similarities.

Bree: (**moving to a specific focus on Stol in Up On Cloud Nine*): His class may be in the same categories for quite a lot of stuff, if you put them in categories, but Stol’s just, kind of, different.

Ben: So, does ‘normal’ tend to involve putting people or things into categories then?

Ellie: Well, it doesn’t actually *mean* that, but that’s what people make it into.

Ellie, an individual who consistently demonstrated an ability to identify the shortcomings and ambiguities associated with simplistic labels and definitions, responds by posing the pertinent question: ‘What is “normal” anyway?’ to the group. The other readers initially fail to grasp what Ellie suggests is the inherently problematic nature of the term, instead relying

on somewhat vague and superficial phrasing ('average people', 'everybody knows...') in their attempts to define it. In the process of this however, the readers inadvertently indicate the manner in which notions of normativity are reliant on 'in' and 'outgroup' mentalities or, a process of 'categorisation' ('some things are normal, some things aren't', 'you and other people have got more similarities...') which prompts Bree's interpretation of my discussion prompt in relation to *Up On Cloud Nine*. Picking up on her use of the term 'categories', I decided to question the group further on this, to determine whether they believed that such 'categorisation' was integral to the distinction between 'normal' and Other. Ellie responded to this insightfully, indicating her belief that normativity is a social construction ('that's what *people* make it into' [my emphasis]). This would certainly correspond to Poststructuralist interpretations of the concept. For example, as it is illustrated in Foucault's discussion of 'normalization' (*Discipline... 21*), and what, in *Limited Inc* (1988) Jacques Derrida terms 'the Standard' (157).

The freighted nature of terminology is similarly a concern in the readers' analysis of *Tribes*. Here the discussion shifts from general discussions of 'in' and 'outgroups' as they are represented in Macphail's novel, to the *labelling* of 'ingroups' as either a 'gang' or 'club' (the terms Macphail employs), and the associated effects of this on notions of normativity and by proxy, Otherness.

Bree: Gangs are more rough, and more secretive. With a club, you wouldn't really have to pass an initiation test. A gang is more close, they all know each other and I think people feel more like they belong in a gang.

Austin: Also, you're expected to be in places that the gang is. You have to be there.

Ellie: People feel like they belong with friends though, but you can't really ever properly belong there. There are always going to be people who are different and people who stand out (appendix 29).

Bree acknowledges the role of the tribe's 'initiation test' in the process of what Bath terms 'polic[ing] the borders of belonging' (19). Such a 'test', Bree asserts, results in a greater degree of 'closeness' and 'belonging' prevalent in an 'ingroup' such as a 'gang', that arguably, would not be matched in a comparatively milder collective such as a 'club'. Problematically however, Austin suggests, is the overwhelming nature of one's expected allegiance to a 'gang', 'you *have* to be there' he explains – 'have' indicating an intensity and greater degree of loyalty than one might be expected to invest in the more casual membership of a 'club'. Ellie's response takes a different tack, exploring how, no matter what categorisation of 'ingroup' is being discussed (it could even be a typical friendship group, she argues), individuals' differing abilities to comply with the internal social dynamics of such collectives, will inevitably *still* result in those who exist outside the contextual boundaries of normativity: 'people who are different and people who stand out'. This is certainly the case in terms of Kevin in *Tribes*, who, throughout the novel, even following his successful negotiation of the 'initiation test' and acceptance into the primary 'ingroup' described in the text (the eponymous 'tribe'), continually struggles to fulfil the gang's increasingly demanding requirements. As readers, we observe Kevin's progress throughout the novel, from feeling a strong sense of 'belonging' upon his initial entry into the gang, to sensing eventually, as Ellie phrases it, that he 'can't really ever properly belong there'. Becoming increasingly detached from the tribe as the novel progresses, and finding their insistence that he spend the entirety of his free time in their presence ('you have to be there'), an affront to his individuality, Kevin becomes a disruptive presence in the group, ultimately challenging Salom's leadership⁷⁶ which contributes to the tribe's eventual

⁷⁶ Refer back to chapter two for specific details of how this occurs.

downfall. Kevin's behaviour and actions in this regard correlate with Davis's identification of an 'ever-present tension' (57) between 'group' and Other, explaining that it is possible to:

[...] Identify the creative and disruptive presence of 'the other' – the outsider, the stranger, the alien, the subversive, the radically different – in systems of power [...] in behaviours and groups, and in the ever-present tensions at the heart of social life (57).

Indeed, in addition to being central to Macphail's project in *Tribes*, a similar tension is also pertinent in *Dustbin Baby*. This is evident in the following exchange focusing on Jacqueline Wilson's recurring interest in characters who are depicted as outsiders in their social group:

Jill: Orphans seem slightly mysterious, and someone who reads about them really wants to find out what happens in their life.

Robyn: Yeah, as a reader, you want to find out if they find their parents, how the rest of their life is, and what's going to happen to them next. You're interested in how they grow up, and whether they'll live a normal life (appendix 30).

April's narrative demonstrates how she struggles to maintain effective participation in an 'ingroup', as well as her attempts to emulate what she terms the 'normal' (Wilson 10) behaviour of her friends. Wilson begins the novel by describing how this challenge plays out in April's daily life, with regards to her school-based friendship-group:

I try so hard to fit in with them so they'll stay friends with me. Sometimes I try too hard and I find myself copying them [...] They *are* my friends and I badly want them to stay my friends. They're the first nice normal friends I've ever had. They think I'm nice and normal too (10).

Wilson's repetition of the term 'normal' does, as Jill suggests, result in April 'seem[ing] slightly mysterious'. Indeed, this is a compelling opening paragraph due to the various questions Wilson raises concerning her 'mysterious' protagonist. For what reason does April resort to 'copying' these individuals? If they are described as 'normal', does this mean she is inherently, 'abnormal', and if so, what is the cause and effect of this? As both Jill and Robyn

explain, it is the inherent Otherness of Wilson's protagonists and their uneasy relationship with the 'normal' social dynamics of early adolescence that holds the reader's 'interest'. In retrospect, I would have liked to have questioned Robyn further on her use of the phrase 'a normal life' in this context. Contrarily, I believe that this is *not* shown to be April's primary aspiration in her passage through the novel. Arguably *Dustbin Baby*, like much of Wilson's *oeuvre* is concerned with exposing the subjectivity of what constitutes 'normality' (10), the final chapter of the novel promoting the idea that 'happiness' (156) is of substantially greater value anyway.

Given that Otherness as a result of abandonment is a major theme in *Dustbin Baby*, I encouraged the group to explore their thoughts on how they thought April may feel growing up whilst attempting to come to terms with this situation.

Robyn: It's almost like she doesn't belong to anyone.

Alice: Exactly, it's like she doesn't really know who she is and she seems to feel like she isn't owned by anyone.

Jill: That's probably why she tries extra hard to fit in, and to avoid being teased – she would like some friends.

Henry: If she hadn't been abandoned in the dustbin as a baby, she wouldn't be trying so hard to fit in though, and wouldn't be so agitated about people thinking she's strange.

Alice: She's always searching. She keeps going back over her life, back and back, until she comes to the first day.

Jill: Yeah, and I think she's always thinking... 'what would happen if my mum hadn't dumped me in the first place?'

Taylor: That's because when you're a baby, what happens to you stays with you. Your parents talking to you and things help you develop as a child, so when you grow up you can speak and stuff.

Henry: Yeah, and because this hasn't happened to April, it's had a big effect on the next fourteen years of her life

Taylor: And she's always so scared of getting things wrong. Your mum and dad have a big impact on the way you act around people, so by not having these she has to work it out herself.

Not for the first time in these sessions, the readers allude to the relationship between Otherness and belonging. Developing Robyn's initial argument, Alice articulates the disruptive impact of April's lack of a secure sense of belonging in terms of identity: 'she doesn't really know who she is'. For Jill, this insecurity is at the root of April's need to 'fit in', to participate in an 'ingroup'. Henry is the first reader to refer specifically to the term 'abandonment', and establish the link between this event ('abandoned in the dustbin as a baby'), and how this plays out in April's present, in terms of her continual struggle to 'fit in' socially, her 'agitation' and perceived 'strangeness'.

Alice's use of the verb 'searching' to characterise April's project in the novel is effective in its description of the way in which she is continually depicted looking 'back over her life'. 'Searching' in this context implies both a physical and a mental act. April's attempt to reconcile herself in the present with the events of the 'first day' of her life is primarily a mental journey. However, it is notable that April's narrative only reaches its resolution when she ventures 'back' to the *physical site* of the abandonment in the novel's conclusion. Next, although (presumably) unintentionally, Taylor offers a reading of the text in line with both Piagetian child development and 'attachment'⁷⁷ theories. Henry builds on this, arguing that April's abandonment at an early age has had a detrimental 'effect' on the years that have followed. Taylor then brings the discussion full-circle by echoing Alice and Robyn's earlier points relating to April's apparent lack of self-confidence ('she's always so scared of getting things wrong') and the Otherness inherent to the way she 'acts around people', linking this

⁷⁷ Introduced in chapter three.

explicitly to lack of parental ‘impact’ in terms of development. Life, Taylor argues, is something that April has been forced by virtue of circumstance, to ‘work out for herself’.

Ultimately, as David Bleich explains, in addition to structural, stylistic and broadly thematic avenues of enquiry, the reader-response project should never venture far from text’s linguistic building-blocks, its ‘manifestation[s] of language’ (150). ‘The openness of linguistic categories’ Bleich argues, ‘places the authority for their definition in subjective initiative’ (150). With this in mind, I was keen to document two instances where the readers performed close-readings of sections in *Up On Cloud Nine*, demonstrating their own ‘subjective initiative’, in their interpretations of the wider textual implications of a specific word or phrase:

Austin: [Stol] takes everything literally. For example, with the box of ‘odds and ends’; I mean, it’s just a saying!

Ellie: Some people think he’s trying to be clever and take it the wrong way. Other people just think he’s a bit crazy though.

Neil: He’s not really trying to be clever though Ellie. He’s asking lots of questions, but it’s just they’re not normal, usual questions, like when he asks about the ‘odds and ends’. He just, kind of, thinks about everything a lot more (appendix 31).

This part of the discussion refers to the section in *Up On Cloud Nine* where Fine explores how social competency involves negotiating different language ‘types,’ including figurative phrases which Stol habitually struggles to comprehend. As Austin explains ‘he takes everything literally’, and this is illustrated when, ‘rooting through the box of odds and ends’ Stol asks ‘which ones are odds and which are ends?’ (144).⁷⁸ In line with my own argument in chapter one (that considered ‘these three authors’ depictions of autistic signifiers’), Michael Spivey et al explains how ‘figurative language impairments’ commonly occur in

⁷⁸ There is a similar passage introduced in chapter one, in *Curious Incident* in which Christopher is challenged by similarly ‘coded’ language. “About 20 quid.” And I said, “Is that pounds?” (Haddon 187)

children with autistic spectrum conditions: ‘autistic children tend to interpret language literally with a clear difficulty in going beyond a word-by-word interpretation of the meaning’ (514). Kirsten Campbell, in her discussion of the Lacanian ‘symbolic order’ argues: ‘the subject is always a speaking subject that comes into being in the social link of language [...] for Lacan, the symbolic order of language founds the ‘social link’ of discourse, that is, the relationship between subjects’ (112). The Otherness of autistic children is therefore due, in part, to their existence outside the symbolic order represented by shared linguistic understanding – their inability to participate fully in the ‘social link of language’. Ellie and Neil’s responses demonstrate the difficulties the reader faces in interpreting this character. In an example of Rosenblatt’s ‘live circuit’ (25) metaphor in action, in which alternate perspectives result in an active reframing of communal interpretive ‘output’, Neil partially rebuts Ellie’s argument that ‘he’s trying to be clever’. Instead, he asserts that it is simply in Stol’s nature to ‘think about everything a lot more’, but agrees with Ellie that his enquiries are clearly outside the bounds of normativity, ‘they’re not normal, usual questions’. From the nature of a character’s relationship with language more broadly in *Up On Cloud Nine*, our discussions of *Dustbin Baby* focused on the narrator’s employment of one specific word. In a moment of anger, April explains how she feels like ‘rubbish’ (Wilson 122). I encouraged the readers to reflect on the wider implications of this term:

Jill: She’s been thrown away, abandoned, like rubbish.

Henry: Yeah, literally chucked in a bin. It’s what you do to something you don’t want – her mum didn’t want her.

Alice: And what makes it worse is that she can’t go back in time and change it. The bin will always be with her, affecting her life because she doesn’t know how to deal with these feelings of getting chucked away. It keeps coming back to her, especially when she’s busy trying to make friends and fit in (appendix 33).

While Jill and Henry refer to the metaphor's literal meaning and its personification of April, Alice's interpretation is more nuanced, indicating April's emotional imprisonment in her life history ('she doesn't know how to deal with these feelings of getting chucked away'), as well as the Derridean notion of the past as 'trace' recurring in the present⁷⁹ ('it keeps coming back to her'). Notably, Alice's reading of April's description of herself as 'rubbish' also mirrors Nick Sharratt's visual interpretation of this. In his cover illustration for the novel, (see appendix 12), Sharratt places the teenage, rather than baby April in the bin. This is suggestive, as I asserted in chapter three, of how this historical event continues to define and undermine April's developing sense of identity, as well as what Alice describes as her attempts to 'make friends and fit in' in the present.

Conclusions.

This chapter has introduced and explored a selection of wholly original interpretations of texts from young people, which, as we have seen, greatly contributed towards my reading and understanding of how Otherness functions in these texts. The responses have also demonstrated the readers' high degree of conceptual understanding, the texts selected prompting their interpretations in line with, for example, Foucauldian theory. For me, the responses are surprising in terms of their depth, articulacy and complexity. They reveal far more than I initially thought possible, given both the readers' age and previous lack of familiarity with this 'type' of project. These mature, considered and pertinent responses wholly demonstrate how much can be learned in consultation with the genre's readership.

⁷⁹ Introduced in chapter three.

Some of the participants' readings are clearly comparable to my own interpretations of these texts presented in the previous four chapters of this thesis. However, as the responses above demonstrate, the readers also offered a variety of unique interpretations on the representation and functioning of Otherness in these novels, in a way that is invaluable to my overall thesis. Crucially, these were the result of their own personal 'transactions' with the texts. As children, the readers in the reader-response group can inherently be regarded as the 'implied reader' of these texts, all of which, by virtue of their inclusion in this thesis, were written and marketed for a young audience. However, it is also necessary to note the relationship between the Othered character(s) in these novels, and the implied reader.

Generally speaking, these texts suggest their implied reader is what Alexa Wright terms in her 2013 work on *Monstrosity*, the "'normal" onlooker' (90) - a reader who exists outside of the experience of Otherness depicted in the novel. Therefore, the protagonists' Otherness is established in relation to the presumed normativity of the child reader(s). Generally speaking, we observe an alignment with the implied reader from the children's responses in the transcripts. For example, where Jill discusses how 'I felt like I should put the book down and give April some privacy. Some of the story felt kind of personal', she is describing the 'narrative intimacy' (Day 2013) Wilson establishes between her typical style of first-person narrator and the reader (this has its roots in the diary register Wilson initially adopted in *The Story of Tracy Beaker* [1991]). This is clearly an effective device in terms of facilitating what Janice Bland terms 'encounters with Otherness' (98).

There is also a tendency for the readers to comment on the powerlessness of the Othered protagonists. Specifically, this relates to the fact that they are often seeking, as Neil and Lucy suggest, ways to 'fit in' and achieve 'belonging' in order to negate their Otherness. As we have seen, this is certainly the case in terms of characters such as April in *Dustbin Baby*

and Kevin in *Tribes*. However, this is not the case in the readers' interpretations of Stol. This is a character who the implied reader of this text may be inclined to view as powerless in the various unfortunate situations in which he finds himself in this novel. However, as we have seen, by giving examples of times in which Stol can be 'funny', see things from different perspectives or 'speak up' for others, the readers posit pertinent reasons why Stol might, in fact, be regarded as *powerful*.

Hamida Bosmajan argues that in children's literature, 'the authorial self is in a sense liberated, in that the textual strategies and gaps that constitute the subtext of the work escape the implied reader, the child' (103). This represents a perspective all too often held in relation to child readers. Essentially, because they are not reading through, what Robert Bator terms 'adult eyes' (244), they do not possess the readerly skills necessary to fill the Iserian 'gaps' in narrative. Ironically, this is a particularly prevalent perspective in children's literature studies, a discipline in which one could be forgiven for assuming the child reader would be held in higher regard. I suggest however, that the reader-responses presented in this chapter rebut Bosmajan's claim. Rather, they show just how sophisticated this cohort of readers' skills of inference were, in their ability to comprehend the various authors' 'textual strategies and gaps'. Admittedly, this could also be seen as stemming from their existing status as avid and able readers who had already cultivated these skills, this, as previously discussed, being one of the reasons I selected this particular group of participants.

The establishment of the reading groups as 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1980) was particularly crucial in the elicitation of what are, given the age of the participants, veritably sophisticated and astute responses. As the readers' dialogue suggests, 'meaning' is routinely

arrived at through shared discussion in which one reader's thoughts and feelings on a text inform another's. As such, the readers' 'individual experience *and* cultural backgrounds' (Sipe 123) contributes to an interpretive melting pot in which the 'transactional' outcomes are richer than those likely to be arrived at by individual reading questionnaires or interviews.⁸⁰ As for the readers themselves and the 'connections' (Naidoo 150) that they have developed with these texts, I align myself with the sentiments expressed by Beverley Naidoo, in relation to the participants in her own reader-response project: 'What they will do with their newly aroused feelings and knowledge is uncertain, but at least they will have been opened to new voices. That, at an individual level, is a beginning' (150).

Contextual factors, additional comments and points for further research.

As discussed, the partner school in which I carried out the qualitative research for this aspect of the project had a reasonably narrow demographic of predominantly white British (Ofsted 2011) pupils, from clearly affluent and aspirational backgrounds. The students involved in the study were achieving above age-related expectations in English and none had any special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). There is arguably then, an irony surrounding the fact that I opted to research literary representations of difference in such a homogenous setting, with participants who were clearly part of a mainstream *milieu*. This was partly a logistical choice, because I was led by my supervisory team who felt I needed to select a school that had an existing partnership with my university. More importantly

⁸⁰ Research methods other critics have used in undertaking comparable projects.

however, I also needed to find a school that actually *wanted* to participate in my project, and would feel comfortable giving the required consent.

In addition, for the success of this aspect of my work, I also wanted to involve high ability readers because of their potential in offering high quality, articulate critiques of the material. I felt that children who were regular and experienced readers (and, in this case, with a substantial amount of existing 'cultural capital'), would approach the focus group with a strong array of critical, inferential and decoding tools. However, this meant that the reader-responses would not necessarily be coming from the perspective of young people who had *overt* experience of marginalisation. Nevertheless, one of the key arguments made in this thesis, is that feelings of Otherness are an inherent aspect of the human condition that we all encounter at different times in our lives, not least during our formative years and school days. Therefore, because these high achieving, middle-class young people did not necessarily have experience of the disability-related prejudice, youth criminality, or the challenges associated with immigration in the manner described in the texts we were exploring, this did not necessarily mean that they would not have experienced broader feelings of Otherness, for example, alienation, exclusion from social groups, or feeling, at times, like an outsider. These after all, are side effects of being human, rather than purely stemming from a specific experience / context of marginalisation.

With this in mind, I had faith in the readers' skills of, what Suzanne Keen terms 'reading empathetically' (2007), because, as we have seen, readers are capable of translating their own life experiences to the page, allowing them to relate to and interpret fictional situations. This is one of the key tenets of reader-response criticism and is loosely

comparable to the manner in which a 'method' actor channels their own emotional experiences in representing those of the character they are playing on stage.

If my thesis only examined one facet of Otherness, for example, literature about the refugee experience, there would perhaps be an argument for carrying it out in a school with a large proportion of children from refugee backgrounds. Theoretically, such participants could identify more clearly with characters and bring their own personal experiences to bear in the discussion. Problematically however, in this case, the selection of participants based on my perception of their Otherness would raise clear ethical issues. In addition, my thesis examines various 'forms' of Otherness, and I felt that it would be challenging to select participants to comprise a focus group who more closely mirrored the 'types' of Otherness present in the texts, without this feeling contrived.

I am also aware that the readers' responses, when presented in a 'written up' format such as this, appear very much as a standalone 'end product'. This is an illusion however, and it is important to recognise that a reader-response project such as this is a *process* not an *event*, the responses presented in this chapter being the most erudite, fully developed contributions and sections of dialogue available to me from the 'raw' data. In our reader-response journey, the participants explored ideas, 'parked them' for a week or more, and then returned to them, although often articulated in a slightly different way, gradually developing their understandings and thoughts in relation to the texts over a period of weeks and months. The records of this process, obviously necessary for a full contextualisation of the project, constitute over twenty hours of audio recording. As a result, much of this material could not feature in this chapter due to obvious space / word-count considerations.

Comparably to other researchers who have previously attempted reader-response work in school (for example, Naidoo 1992 and Hope 2015), I am aware of how challenging negotiating the supposedly 'equal footing' between researcher and participants can be. Children, as Foucault (1979) suggests, are a product of the power hierarchies around which institutions such as schools function. They are used to adults possessing an authoritarian or 'disciplinary' power over them, and can find it confusing when this dynamic is disrupted. Particularly problematic for the researcher attempting to establish their non-dominance in a group setting when working with children, is the need to maintain order, to ensure that children behave sensibly, take turns speaking and are respectful of each other.⁸¹ This obviously implies that, however much they may refute this, the adult cannot help but remain in an authoritative position. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is interesting to note how much power the children actually had over me, and by proxy, the degree of responsibility they possessed regarding the success or failure of this project. It was obvious that I needed their focus and insight, I needed them to be fully invested in, and enthusiastic about the project to generate insightful discussions. They in turn, had the power to withhold this, to attempt to disrupt, or simply not participate wholeheartedly in the project. Whilst this was luckily not the case, and in fact, the children's investment in the project was considerable, it is interesting to note how such ideas mirror the themes at the heart of this thesis. I was clearly the Other in the group setting. I arrived with a different language frame, a lack of specific understanding of their context,⁸² and different expectations from them regarding what I wanted to 'get out' of the book group. Ultimately, I was left wondering what the impact of my Otherness in such a setting would be, in terms of a different cohort

⁸¹ Other 'problems and challenges' involved in the reader-response project are detailed in appendix 35.

⁸² Unlike their teachers, I did not work in the school and was therefore not part of this particular 'ingroup'.

of participants, perhaps ones who were less focused and engaged in the project, or less confident readers.

Conclusion.

This thesis has shown how contemporary British fiction for young people handles, engages with and responds to the theme of Otherness. This discussion was underscored by a context of fracture and disruption characterising Britain in the years 2001 – 2012. This, I would contend, remains the case to the present day, indicated most recently by Brexit and its tangled aftermath. The primary texts have posited a variety of responses to the national *mise en scène* as it exists in relation to young people, and I have shown how these books have routinely drawn upon and gestured to the Othering socio-political changes representative of the period.

For example, where Frank Cottrell Boyce's *The Unforgotten Coat* alludes to the oppressive immigration legislation that occurred during this period as a reaction to 9/11 in the United States and 7/7 in Britain, Melvin Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*, with its examination of a growing culture of fear and distrust in relation to teenagers, allows parallels to be drawn between the 2011 London riots and the subsequent sense of unease in terms of the public perception of young people. Given these novels' status as social realist texts, issues such as, for example, crime, immigration, disability and homelessness have inevitably been discussed in relation to social exclusion. With this in mind, I made the case for the importance of such realist fiction in helping to challenge and critique negative and inaccurate, but nevertheless widely held perspectives in relation to young people, which as I demonstrated, often stem from sources such as the media.

Crucially, I have also shown how comparably problematic perspectives on children and young people function within the structural and ideological parameters of the discipline, with critics such as Rose suggesting that attempts adults make to connect and communicate

with a young readership are potentially flawed because 'children's responses are more or less impossible to gauge' (9). Along with critics such as Merah Gubar, I have argued for the need to engage in a greater sense of 'kinship' with young people. This has had the ultimate effect of demonstrating that far from being 'impossible to gauge', children's responses routinely demonstrate specificity, sophistication, insight and originality.

However, such responses are only revealed when, as critics, we learn to listen to and privilege children's responses on their own terms, with genuine openness and curiosity and, as much as possible, without feeling the need to intervene, impose an agenda or, in any other way, exert a sense of adult-oriented control. As chapter five shows, this is not always straightforward to achieve, and there are clearly factors stemming from the adult-child dynamic that affect the nature of the response(s) children posit. However, working within the *spirit* of a child-centred interpretive reading process (whilst acknowledging the inevitable shortcomings of the approach), can, in my opinion, only be a positive step forward in children's literature studies.

In addition however, this thesis advocated strongly for the inclusion of the child's 'voice', not only because, as discussed, their perspectives can afford us tangible insights into 'their' fiction; but also because of my belief that it is only through granting children greater agency in the discipline that we can provide a more balanced and nuanced response to the question of what Rose views as the inherent 'impossibility' of children's literature. We can see then, how my use of reader-response 'ties in' not only to the primary texts' mission of challenging and responding to the Othering of young people, but also directly confronts the question of their perennial Othering *within the field itself*.

Eleven years is a short chronology for a doctoral study. As a result, I have chosen to adopt as broad a lens as possible in terms of my understanding and interpretation of the functioning of Otherness in these texts. I have therefore explored both positive and negative representations of Otherness. In certain instances, for example, Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*, these co-exist within the same text. Such examples, I believe, help us to understand how dynamic and multifaceted a notion like Otherness truly is. I have introduced novels that portray Otherness in terms of the vilification of central characters, whilst also encountering examples in which a character's Otherness is ultimately portrayed as redemptive. Indeed, redemption as a human virtue and its association with Otherness has been an issue I have confronted on a number of occasions throughout this thesis, particularly in chapters two and three. Characters such as April in *Dustbin Baby* despair of their Otherness, and those like Troy in *Seriously Weird* revel in it. The tricks, flaws and occasionally illusory aspects of narrative itself have been inseparable from the kinds of discussions this thesis has engaged in. I have viewed Othered characters through different narrative lenses, including instances in which the narrator constructs a character as Other, whilst remaining themselves anchored firmly within mainstream discourses. My study has also shown how one of the key strategies contemporary writers use to represent Othered protagonists is through first person narrative. This obviously allows that character to give voice to their *own* experiences of Otherness through the direct address prevalent in texts such as, for example, *Curious Incident*. In an original manner, compared to other similar studies introduced in the literature review, I have, at times, shifted away from the direct representation of the young person as the predominant Othered character in these texts. In so doing, I have considered the effect and influence of an older Othered character, for example, Grandpa Chatterji, on his young charges during his home-stay with his Anglo-Indian family.

This research has demonstrated the inherent fluidity of Otherness as a concept as it exists in fiction for young people. It has been conceived of as an identity or state of mind, a physical or emotional 'site' in which both history and the present coexist, a construction or narrative projection upon a group or individual, a 'heterotopia' in which traditional power structures are disrupted and sanctuary sought and, on occasion, achieved. Richard Kearney's introduction to his study of Otherness, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2002) highlights certain recurring concerns in this thesis and is therefore, I believe, an apt place to start bringing its myriad components together, whilst demonstrating their interrelationship:

Figures of Otherness occupy the frontier zone where reason falters. They subvert our established categories and challenge us to think again. And because they threaten the known with the unknown, they are often set apart in fear [...] ostracized from the human community into a land of aliens (Kearney 3).

From the outset, evidence of 'figures of Otherness' who 'occupy the frontier zone' was introduced when I considered how the Other acts as a 'boundary dweller', inhabiting what Foucault termed 'heterotopias' (1966). Troy's retreat to the attic in Kemp's *Seriously Weird* was evidence for this, in addition to Christopher's concealment of himself in the train luggage rack in Haddon's *Curious Incident*. Stol's occupation of the ledge from which he subsequently 'falls' in Fine's *Up On Cloud Nine* is a third example of a 'heterotopia' - here hegemony has broken down and a character is shown to occupy a liminal space. These three characters defy 'reason' (Kearney 3) through their actions, which lie outside the bounds of normative behaviour. In the case of chapter one, I would argue that this is due, in part, to the communication impairments that are a facet of these boys' autistic spectrum conditions. As we begin to understand the characters in these initial three novels and their motivations further, notions of 'reason' and the inherent subjectivity associated with it, becomes increasingly important. In this way, Troy, Christopher and Stol 'challenge us to think again'

(Kearney 3). They insist the reader consider alternate perspectives on the events of the narratives and, in the case of Christopher, demonstrate the clarity of these in contrast to the 'blindness' routinely displayed by the secondary characters in the text. Indeed, as he attests: 'I was just noticing how things were, and that wasn't clever. That was just being observant' (Haddon 32). This is at the heart of why representations of Otherness play such a crucial role in fiction. They facilitate what Zimmerman terms an 'alien gaze' (163), a way of seeing, if not, as Shakespeare's Earl of Kent demands of King Lear⁸³ 'better' (24: 158), then, at least *differently*.

I have also shown how 'threaten[ing]' (Kearney 3) a concept such as Otherness can be however. Indeed, for YA author Kevin Brooks, the genre is 'almost tailor-made for stories about prejudice, fear and hate' (qtd. in Screech 2014) and, in novels such as Brooks' *Lucas*, Cassidy's *Looking for JJ* and Burgess's *Kill All Enemies*, the negative aspects of Otherness are omnipresent. In texts such as these, Otherness relates directly to exclusion from societal and community structures and for certain Othered protagonists such as Billie in *Kill All Enemies*, efforts to secure a sense of belonging are continually thwarted. What Kearney terms 'ostracism' (3) is born out in certain of this thesis's subthemes such as 'abandonment' - a key form of social exclusion in this study. Feelings of Otherness stemming from abandonment impact upon young characters' developing senses of, for example, cultural identity in *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea* or familial attachment in *Dustbin Baby*. Finally, what Kearney terms 'alien' Otherness (3), foreign characters whose presence in narrative serve to 'hold up the mirror' to contemporary British society, offer a disparate critique of this particular social order. Indeed, the functioning of foreignness as a form of Otherness was

⁸³ See previous reference to *King Lear* on p.191.

referenced with regards to Postcolonial theory, Said's *Orientalism* highlighting both the potential power possessed by the 'exotic' (Said 188) Other, but also their marginality and vulnerability to oppression.

I would argue that the youth gangs that feature in, for example, *Tribes* demonstrate an important link that exists between youth culture and notions of both categorisation and the existence of a dominant 'mainstream'. This is at the heart of the concept of normativity – in adolescence 'fitting in' is everything, and those who veer away from such a mentality, as I have repeatedly shown, pay a high price. Normativity exists in opposition to Otherness, as the benchmark against which the Other is necessarily defined. Such a binary is problematized however, when we consider the inadequate, arbitrary nature of this construct. Indeed, as one of the participants commented in the reader-response chapter, 'what is "normal" anyway?' This question is raised routinely by the authors of the primary texts. In novels such as *Curious Incident* and *Lucas* for example, normative attitudes are exposed as contradictory, dubious and irrational, the Othered protagonists themselves ultimately being depicted as the primary arbiters of 'reason'. In this way, Otherness can also be viewed as liberating, as a vehicle through which alternate modes of experiencing and relating to the world may be accessed. Such a notion is explored in novels such as *The Unforgotten Coat*, *Grandpa Chatterji's Third Eye* and *The Boy From France*, all of which depict the Other as an emancipatory figure capable of transcending the quotidian world, as well as having a transformative impact on the lives of the secondary characters in these texts.

Ultimately however, running like an artery through the myriad ways in which Otherness plays out in these texts, is the concept of power. This is because, as Stephen Ross argues,

‘within the regime of power, Otherness materializes as oppositional’ (80). Otherness therefore becomes a way of resisting dominant discourses; the Other, in certain contexts, becoming capable themselves of empowerment. With this in mind, Foucauldian theory has been a necessary and invaluable tool to help develop my discussion and interpretation of the relationship between power and Otherness. Through reference to Foucault’s work, I have considered the alliance between societal power structures and processes of Othering. Specifically, I have observed how the workings of ‘disciplinary’ mechanisms can be interpreted as forming both a cause and effect of Otherness, as well as how dominant forces routinely conspire to ‘correct’ the ‘abnormal’ transgressor. The primary Foucauldian ‘institution’ examined in relation to the primary texts has undoubtedly been the school, understandably a common setting for novels in a study such as this. However, a criticism of Foucault has consistently been that his work fails to feature individual resistant voices.⁸⁴ I, in contrast, would argue that this study has demonstrated various instances of Othered characters resisting the disciplinary power inherent to the institutions in which they find themselves. For example, both Troy and Stol have an attitude of general non-compliance in their respective primary schools in *Seriously Weird* and *Up On Cloud Nine*, Chingis and Nergui vie for power (successfully) against their teacher Mrs Spendlove in *The Unforgotten Coat*, and no educational institution appears successfully able to mould Billie, Rob and Chris, the protagonists of *Kill All Enemies* into what Foucault terms ‘docile bodies’ (*Discipline...* 135).

In addition to Foucault, carrying out research with ‘real life’ readers meant I could deepen my understanding of how Otherness is represented and functions in the texts. Whilst the

⁸⁴ See introduction for more on Foucault’s shortcomings as a methodological voice.

responses often complement and re-enforce the literary analysis undertaken in the preceding chapters, they also offer numerous uniquely personal perspectives on the texts influenced by the readers' own lives and previous reading experiences, which independently, I could not possibly hope to emulate. Put simply, the texts 'came to life' through the transactional process of group reader-response in a way I had not expected. I had assumed the readers would comment enthusiastically and articulately on the novels and make the occasional pertinent point, but I had not anticipated the range and complexity of the responses. Neither was I prepared to be confronted by a level of insight that allowed for abstract discussions on, for example, the functioning of power in social groups, their understanding in this regard mirroring, as discussed in the chapter, Foucault's observations. To reiterate the argument made on numerous occasions throughout this thesis, this is why consultation with readers is such an important facet in academic research in children's literature, (although arguably there is also a case for this in terms of literary research generally). In children's literature there is a nuanced dialogue between the author and what Wolfgang Iser terms its 'implied reader' (1974), which can be challenging for adult readers to comprehend in its entirety. On some level, the purest understanding of children's literature relies on *being* a child then, and so consulting them seems fundamental. In addition, in a thesis consistently concerned with disenfranchisement, the democratisation inherent to 'doing' reader-response is clearly crucial if we are to avoid Othering young readers, and work towards a greater sense of 'possibility' (Rose 1984) that the power relations characteristic of this field can become more evenly balanced.

It is worth considering the specific nature of the engagement demonstrated by the young readers in the reader response groups. In relation, for example, to a novel such as *Dustbin*

Baby, in which April's narrative is relayed in a 'confessional' (Gamble 99) register, the readers' ability to palpably experience or 'feel' April's struggle was notable. This is because, as Suzanne Keen contends in her study of *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) 'we humans can "feel with" fictional characters and faraway strangers' (6). The readers' personal sense of empathy then, is central to the manner in which Otherness is experienced in literature. This is due to the way in which readers read with their own life experiences in mind, the emotional resonances of these being brought to bear in their ability to 'feel with' (Keen 6) fictional characters as they progress through novels. In addition, as Amy Recob suggests in her 2008 volume entitled *Bibliotherapy*⁸⁵: *When Kids Need Books*, novels such as these even have the potential for use in a 'therapeutic' context, as a way to support and 'open doors of communication' (13) with young people experiencing similar issues and challenges as the books' protagonists. As she asserts, 'the therapeutic value of a book is often overlooked' and fiction can be a valuable vehicle for helping certain readers 'come to terms with an issue' (13). Indeed, it could even be argued that one of the responsibilities inherent to being a contemporary author for young people is one of bibliotherapy. Could it be perhaps, such authors have a duty to use their talents as storytellers to assist young people who have turned to their work (for reasons as myriad as there are books themselves), in order to learn about who *they* are, to come to terms with their own lives, communities (and roles within them), and general states of being?

To think more broadly about this however, texts representing Otherness engage us, I believe, because feelings of Otherness are an inevitable aspect of the human condition. As individuals, our understanding of and attitude towards ourselves is influenced by our peers.

⁸⁵ The term 'bibliotherapy' refers to the use of fiction in a counselling or psychotherapeutic environment.

We live our lives attempting to demonstrate the manner in which we ‘fit into’ various, ever-shifting parameters of normativity, (a process that is arguably exacerbated in contemporary times, by the presence of social media). As such, there is an element in most individuals that is concerned about being, or appearing to be Other from those who surround us, and the consequences of this. If we consider Camacho’s assertion that ‘we read to know we are not going through this life without others who have also experienced some of what we are going through’ (3), it is perhaps re-assuring to know that others, albeit to greater, lesser, or varied degrees, have stood where we have stood and felt the things we have felt. This is the same for children, adult and young-adult readers, and is one of the main insights fiction can offer. Fiction for young people plays a particularly crucial role in facilitating and supporting this audience’s initial reflections on the nature of selfhood and identity. This is because childhood and adolescence are the period in which we become increasingly aware of our place in, and interaction with the world. Indeed, as YA author John Green articulates in *The Fault In Our Stars* (2012),⁸⁶ our teenage years are the time in which many of us feel for the first time, that we are ‘irreconcilably Other, and never [is] it more obvious’ (144) [*My addition*].

My decision to examine chiefly social realist texts for young people prompted me to further consider the relationship between this genre of fiction and its audience. Waller asserts that social realist texts for young people ‘represent contemporary teenage life, narrating events that could conceivably occur in reality’ (18). This, therefore is the genre that anchors its readers most firmly to the nature of this specific cultural and historical epoch. Social realism is inevitably confrontational, it challenges the reader’s need for narrative moral certainty

⁸⁶ Another key novel in an early twenty-first century corpus of texts exploring Otherness which, due to its American (rather than British) author and setting, is regrettably outside the immediate remit of this thesis.

and exposes them to alternate ways of conceiving the self. My personal belief in the value and importance of introducing social realist texts to young people has certainly been re-affirmed as a result of carrying out this study. With this in mind, my thesis has provided evidence of the manner in which social realism can be seen as a way for young readers to confront real-life issues that genuinely matter, that are not simplistic, 'clear cut' or included by authors purely as a plot device or catalyst for character development. Such fiction necessarily grapples with the 'messiness' of life, whilst also highlighting, and even sometimes celebrating, the manner in which the human experience is fraught with complexity and contradiction.

Social realist fiction also demonstrates the inherent humanity of even troubling, morally ambiguous characters such as, for example, the convicted murderer Jennifer Jones in *Looking For JJ*. It is a genre concerned with exposing the various 'sides' that each individual possesses, because, as Walt Whitman expresses it, we are 'large' and each of us inevitably 'contains multitudes' (91). Through the process of engaging with reader-response research, I have observed first-hand the power of social realism to encourage young readers to shift perspectives and re-evaluate characters' behaviour and motivations, to interrogate nuances and pay close attention to the 'unsaid', to invoke empathy whilst avoiding judgement, and ultimately to facilitate a process of being a more critical, humane and reflective reader. Although arguably, other genres of literature could be said to result in similarly fruitful readerly engagement, I would argue that social realism, due to its commitment to 'truthful' representation, supports young readers' emerging social, cultural and political attitudes and understanding in a manner that would not be wholly shared if this thesis focused on, for example, fantasy fiction.

Nevertheless, if I was to extend this study, I would embark upon more divergent avenues of enquiry. I would likely, for example, consider the use of an alternate theoretical lens. Certain schools of critical theory are particularly concerned with the nature of Otherness, and could have the potential to result in additional insightful perspectives on this thesis's primary literature. For example, Queer Theory, as Annemarie Jagose describes it 'locates and exploits incoherencies in terms [...] demonstrating the impossibility of any "natural" sexuality. It calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as "man" and "woman"' (3). This is comparable to Poststructuralism's destabilization of apparently straightforward terms or labels, such as, for example, 'normativity' - analysed on numerous occasions throughout this thesis. This implies that these terms are socially constructed by those in dominant social positions, and Queer Theory's primary project is to challenge this dynamic whilst amplifying the voices of those who have been Othered by simplistic (binary) interpretations of, for example, gender and sexuality. With this in mind, a future iteration of this project could incorporate key titles in the contemporary corpus of British LGBTQ texts for young people, for example, Julie Burchill's *Sugar Rush* (2004), Malorie Blackman's *Boys Don't Cry* (2010) or Hayley Long's *What's Up With Jody Barton* (2012). These would be a highly relevant component to an extended version of this thesis, because young people who are Othered as a result of gender or sexuality is clearly a theme of increasing importance not only in contemporary British writing for young people, but also contemporary Britain more generally. Increasingly however, Queer Theory is expanding its boundaries to encompass broader contexts such as race / ethnicity, and disability, and therefore could be illuminatingly applied to certain of this thesis's existing texts. Indeed, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder contend, Queer Theory can be seen as having a particular relevance to a novel such as *Curious Incident* (or, arguably, any of the novels introduced in chapter one),

with its focus on the 'nonnormative body' and its relationship with what they term 'queer interchanges of environments' (553). Notably, there have been a variety of studies of children's literature that utilise a Queer Theory methodology (such as Rebecca Rabinowitz's *Messy New Freedoms: Queer Theory and Children's Literature* [2004] and Michael Cobb's *Childlike: Queer Theory and its Children* [2012]), providing further evidence of the potential suitability of this theory to the field.

Consistently, this thesis has returned to the notion of childhood as a contested discourse in these texts, as an inherent site, itself, of Otherness. We have seen examples of what Clementine Beauvais suggests is the 'temporal Otherness of childhood relative to adulthood', this 'temporal "shard" in consciousness' resulting in 'existential wait' (43). This, we discussed is, in part, suggestive of a shift in perspectives on childhood in the contemporary period, in which there is a tendency for young people to be viewed as what Jenks terms 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings' (167). Margaret O'Brien articulates this similarly, arguing that, young people are frequently judged as 'adults in the making'; their current 'state of being' (70) viewed as being, in some way, incomplete. Therefore, the inherent value of childhood and adolescence, as a state to be cherished and celebrated *in itself*, becomes instead an unfortunate phase which must simply be 'passed through' en-route to adulthood. Indeed, certain of these texts' representations of Otherness relate to characters' inability to negotiate this transition at a rapid enough pace, resisting immersion into an adult-oriented social order. In *Kill All Enemies* for example, Hannah (Billie's social-worker) explains the result of this in terms of the young people she mentors who, for the various reasons the novel explores, are unable to comply with such societal expectations. As she puts it: 'the whole system comes down on them like a ton of bricks' (Burgess 199). Again, in Foucauldian terms, we observe evidence here of the dominant

order ‘punishing’ (*Discipline...* 10) those who do not (or cannot) comply with its governing codes of behaviour. This also stems from what Jenks terms a ‘disappearance’ (117) of childhood associated with young peoples’ representation in the ‘contemporary media of late-modernity’ which he argues ‘serve[s] to dissemble existing taxonomies’ (117). As we have seen in our discussion of both the real-life media depiction of young people following the London riots in 2011 (examined in the introduction), as well as the fictional newspaper reporting following the release of Jennifer Jones in Cassidy’s *Looking for JJ*, arguably the primary ‘taxonomy’ that has been ‘dissembled’ here is that which suggests childhood possesses an inherent innocence. Writers from William Blake onwards have struggled with how to represent the problematic coexistence of ‘innocence’ and ‘experience’ in relation to the child. This has been a recurrent theme in children’s literature, arguably since the genre’s inception, and is certainly the case when we consider the representations of Othered young people encountered in this thesis. Indeed, if we consider a character such as Stol in *Up On Cloud Nine* for example, the uneasy coexistence between what Jenks terms a child’s ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ (77) propensities becomes particularly apparent.

In its contribution to an emerging preoccupation with Otherness in children’s literature studies, this thesis has notable implications for the field. It develops and extends the research of previous literary critics specialising in this area including, for example, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, Roderick McGillis and Julia Hope. In particular, comparably to McGillis, as this project developed, I too found myself wishing not only to ‘write about the voices of the Other – especially children as Other’ (McGillis 12), but also about the ‘importance of hearing these voices’ (12) as they exist both ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the book. Ultimately, this thesis is testament to my belief regarding why such ‘voices’ must not only be ‘heard’, but genuinely listened to with curiosity, respect and an appreciation for what they may ultimately teach

us. In addition, the comparatively recent publication dates of this thesis's primary texts support my assertion that this study proffers original research. This is, in part, because few of the twelve novels featured have been in existence for long enough for much critical material to have been published on them already.⁸⁷ As explained in the introduction, there is little research specifically examining Otherness in relation to social realist children's literature. Crucially however, there are at this stage, *no* studies on Otherness in fiction for young people in existence that draw on both literary and qualitative-based research. Therefore, much of the originality of this thesis lies in its merging of these divergent methodologies.

Literature thrives on what Harold Percival terms 'a desire for the knowledge of the self' (819), but such 'selfness' (Percival 819) as this thesis has shown, can only be comprehended in relation to Otherness. Otherness therefore becomes as recurrent a concern as love, hate, good, evil, sex, madness, death, or indeed any other aspect of the human experience, in English Literature. The novel is a highly effective vehicle for the exploration of such universal themes, because of its ability to examine interior narratives of characters in a level of depth impossible in, for example, a poem or short-story. Historically however, there has been a marked lack of confidence in the ability of fiction for young people to wholly 'do justice' to such themes.⁸⁸ Increasingly though, contemporary writers whose work has been aimed at a young audience have subscribed to Phillip Pullman's maxim that childhood should not be 'ringfenced' (qtd. in Daniels 161) by adult gatekeepers. The primary texts examined in this

⁸⁷ With the exception of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* which was widely marketed and critically acclaimed (winning several major literary awards including the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize) upon publication, and latterly, has been adapted for both the West End and Broadway stage.

⁸⁸ The extent to which children's literature is routinely viewed as Other to literary fiction for adults (even in environments as supposedly enlightened as English departments), is also worthy of note here, but could, itself, comprise another PhD-length discussion.

study suggest *not only* that young people are entitled to a literature that is every bit as disruptive, challenging, innovative and above all, truthful, as any work of 'adult fiction', but, as demonstrated from the process of 'doing' reader-response research, are just as capable (arguably, perhaps, *more* capable), of interpreting it meaningfully.

Such a belief has spawned a new generation of social realist writers for young people. In addition to those I have examined directly in this thesis (such as the comparatively well-known Melvin Burgess, Jacqueline Wilson and Frank Cottrell Boyce), authors such as Alan Gibbons, Brian Conaghan and Lisa Heathfield to name but a few, are also worthy of mention, and could just as easily have featured in this study. Perhaps inevitably given its centrality as what Marcia Holly terms a 'human theme' (44) in literature, their gaze continuously falls upon Otherness, on what it means and how it feels to occupy a marginal position in the social order of contemporary British society. Routinely this involves allusions to crime, violence, prejudice and other facets of life that would not, certainly before the social realist 'boom' in the 1960s, have played any part in literature for young people. 'Ringfencing' childhood only succeeds in shielding young people however, from the realities of the society to which they belong. Hence my belief in the necessity of their access to novels by the high quality and challenging authors examined in this thesis. Such writers consistently depict troubled and troubling young people whilst both avoiding judgement and emphasising their humanity. They make it easy for readers to empathise with, rather than condemn their protagonists, demonstrating how they are often victims of unfortunate life circumstances, such as, for example, poverty, abuse, homelessness, addiction and mental illness, of which each of us are only a 'roll of the dice' away anyway. Writers such as these utilise the YA genre and its recurrent theme of Otherness to advocate tolerance and

respect for difference. These they suggest, are virtues it is crucial their young audience learn, if their generation is to make any sort of positive change to the endemic and highly ingrained social disparity inherent to contemporary Britain. Literature therefore has a humanising influence - it encourages the reader to reflect upon the complexities and ambiguities that underscore human behaviour. Fiction at its most absorbing allows the reader to 'climb into someone's skin and walk around in it' (Lee 36) to cite Atticus Finch's wise metaphor in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). In a genre as formative as children's and YA literature, the importance of such a process cannot be underestimated.

As we move into another period of rupture in Britain, an era some pundits are already terming 'Post-Brexit'⁸⁹ (Walker 2017), it is perhaps inevitable that, comparably to the period proceeding both 9/11 and 7/7, renewed 'them' and 'us' mentalities and prejudices are being forged. The UK's imminent departure from the European Union has brought discussions regarding national identity, foreignness, migration and community back to the fore. Once again, the age-old question of 'who does' and 'who does not' *belong* in British society is being re-evaluated. To cite Andrew Lane writing in *The New Yorker* shortly after the EU referendum result, British society is once again moving to the 'soundtrack of Otherness' (2016). Inevitably this 'soundtrack' will have an impact on Britain's young people, although in what guise it may be too early to determine with much clarity. As such however, it remains crucial that children's and YA literature continues to engage with Otherness by providing a space to investigate and comment upon this consistently fascinating and relevant human theme.

⁸⁹ In reference to the United Kingdom's controversial exit from the European Union, confirmed by a referendum vote on 23rd June 2016.

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Appendix

1 - Article redacted for copyright reasons.

An Interview with Hayley Long – February 2015.

Ben: You began your career writing for adults. What was the initial stimulus for deciding to give writing for children / teenagers a go, and did you face any challenges in terms of managing the transition between these two modes of authorship?

Hayley: You're quite right. My first novels were for a general readership and published by Parthian, an independent press in Wales. It didn't initially occur to me to write for teenagers – although, I was always writing *about* teenagers; *Fire and Water* is about university students and *Kilburn Hoodoo* was very much a school drama in a London comprehensive. It was actually Gwen Davies (now the Editor of New Welsh Review but back then my editor at Parthian) who suggested I write something actually for teens. And I was fast coming to that conclusion myself. I'd been teaching for a while in Cardiff and there just didn't seem to be enough YA novels with Welsh kids in. This was about ten years ago; there are a few more now. But anyway, that was my inspiration - Gwen's suggestion and also the goal of writing something which I thought the younger kids at Whitchurch High in Cardiff – where I was teaching - would enjoy. That's why Lottie Biggs lives in Whitchurch, a northern suburb of Cardiff.

In terms of challenges, I don't really see any huge difference between writing adult novels and YA ones. It's still difficult! At least, it is for me anyway. And I still agonise over every word. I think the only definite change is that I feel a greater sense of responsibility when I write for a younger audience. If I use bad language or say something shocking, I have to be satisfied that the novel absolutely needs it. And I think I worry more about the messages I send out. Take *Lottie Biggs* for example; I was writing a book about depression. That could have had a very downbeat ending. But as brilliant – and as real – as it is, I never wanted to rewrite *The Bell Jar*. I was thinking about those kids who I've known and who have fallen off the class-register with long-term absences because they have depression. I didn't want to say, 'Yes, you have depression; your whole life is going to be a struggle and your depression will be the dominant feature of your life.' I wanted to send out a message of hope. In no way does depression have to define everything.

As somebody who also divides their time between teaching and writing, I can empathise with the occasionally challenging nature of this combination. How do you find balancing the two, and to what extent do you find that teaching complements or influences your writing work (and vice-versa)?

Ha! Now there's a question. I can answer that quite easily. After seventeen years, I gave up teaching last summer. Yes, for a writer of YA fiction, the classroom is an invaluable resource – but the truth is that teaching is one of those jobs that just stretches and stretches and fills up every gap of time. Even after I reduced my hours to part-time, I was still doing much more than that in real terms. In the end, I felt something had to give – and it was never going to be the writing. It sounds such a glib thing to say – but I don't know who I am if I'm not that person who writes.

The discovery of music, and its influence on teenagers plays a considerable role in your fiction. What is it about the influence of music that continues to interest and excite you as a writer, and what impact did music have on you as a teenager?

I LOVE music. LOVE it LOVE it LOVE it. Can't play a single instrument. Can't sing. But I can listen. And I can hear a tune on the radio and often date it correctly because it takes me back to a specific flat-share or city or wherever I was at that time. Music is a really powerful thing. Some songs even remind me of smells! In my house, we have shelves full of records and when I lived in Cardiff, I used to DJ in bars with a friend. It was the most fun ever.

I think this record-hoarding love-affair has something to do with my own adolescence. I wasn't actually very good at being a teenager. I was small (still am), had a crippling lack of confidence, and compensated for both these state of affairs by either being silent or a bit obnoxious. As a result, I wasn't massively popular and spent hours in my bedroom taping the Top 40 off the radio or listening to pirate radio stations. Music gave me confidence. As a teenager, I discovered The Doors and – for a while anyway - that defined who I was. Just like it does for Jody Barton. Then I saw people like Tanya Donnelly (Throwing Muses/Belly/The Breeders) playing guitar on TV and I thought, 'THAT'S who I want to be,' - even though I had no skills any band could ever use. But I suppose it was just about finding my own identity. Or finding someone to identify *with* anyway. I still have a very strong emotional connection to a lot of indie/pop/soul/rock/funk music and I hope I always do have that. And that's why I write about it.

Otherness, and feelings of 'difference' (in terms of for example; alienation, mental illness and sexuality), is a recurrent theme in your novels. To what extent do you feel that writing for adolescents inevitably involves engagement with such concerns, and do you feel that writers for young audiences have any sort of duty of reassurance?

I don't think these themes are necessarily inevitable in YA fiction – but, yes, I accept that they do crop up in *my* fiction. The truth is this: I don't have the sort of mind which can conjure up future worlds or wild adventure stories. I can, however, imagine what it's like to be someone else. And that's every bit as useful I think. It's Atticus from *To Kill a Mockingbird* who says (something along the lines of) 'You never really get to know a person until you climb into their shoes and walk around in them.' That's what I try to do when I write and to some extent, any sense of otherness that's created mirrors how I feel. We live in a very consumerist and media-driven world and we're all receiving a million messages a day on how we're supposed *to be*. If you don't share the same likes and dislikes and tick all the usual boxes, it's easy to feel a bit like a baffled onlooker at somebody else's party. Fiction is a way to explore those less ordinary and less commonplace perspectives and the more these alternative views are explored, the less marginal they will seem. But what's really needed is more writers being published who reflect our diverse world. Malorie Blackman caused a bit of a Twitter storm last year when

she suggested that there needs to be more diversity in (children's) fiction but she is, of course, absolutely right. People come in all sorts of variations – whether that's ethnicity or religion or sexuality or whatever - and it's not helpful to pretend that they don't. So yes, I do feel I have a duty to reassure my readers that it's OK to be different.

Much has been made of the 'twist' ending in *What's Up With Jody Barton*. Reading this book, and considering its ending reminded me of the (late) Gene Kemp's novel *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler*, where gender is manipulated in a similar way. With this allusion in mind, I was wondering which children's / YA novels inspire you and provide the background to your writing (if any), and who you are reading these days?

I don't actually read a huge amount of children's or YA fiction. I read a healthy amount, of course. But I also read adult literary fiction and commercial fiction and history books and... well, just anything at all that I fancy. I've always been like that. By the time I was about twelve or so, I'd read every book my parents owned – it wasn't a bookish house so there wasn't really too many to work my way through. But amongst this selection were *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Wooden House* (a story about an escape from a Prisoner of War camp in WW2) and *Everest, the Hard Way* by Chris Bonington. I just read anything and that way, I think I developed the capacity to read more or less anything. And even now, I'd never want to limit myself to just one or two areas of the bookshop or library – for me, that would be like only ever eating chocolate biscuits. Nice for a while but then I'd go off them forever. I think my own eclectic reading tastes are especially helpful to me when I write. I can get motivational inspiration from a book like Louis Sachar's *Holes* which is a fantastic example of how wonderfully clever children's fiction can be and one of my favourite books of all time – but then my creative inspiration usually comes from other sources. I find myself thinking about how John Irving creates a shock impact in *The Hotel New Hampshire* or marvelling at what Anthony Burgess has done with language in *A Clockwork Orange*. Or thinking about how Salinger has created a convincing and unique voice in *The Catcher in the Rye*. I'm not, of course, saying that the end result is that I've written books which are anywhere close to being as effective as these classics but you asked me where my technical ideas come from and this is the answer - novels that have a different intended audience to those I write. I think this is healthy. I think it helps prevent the YA ideas pool from becoming too cross-contaminated.

I love the idea of a story unfolding against the time-scale imposed by a journey or event, such as Ally's day-long train ride in *Fire and Water*. What made you decide to use that device to structure your novel and what do you make of its effects on Ally's narrative?

For me, the structure is the hardest and most crucial part to writing a novel. It's the key to everything. It's the route map if you like. It's the device by which your story gets told. A plot is just a story. It's not too hard to come up with the basis of some sort of story but unless you know *how* you are going to tell it – you can get in a right old muddle. I know this for a fact. I've been in the middle of that muddle. *Fire and Water* was my first

published novel and the structure was simple and effective. If you measure your main narrative against a train journey happening in the present tense, you've instantly got a nice alternating structure - the physical journey in the here and now versus the main story in the past tense as the passenger reflects. Ta-dah! And THIS is how the story shall be told. Right now, I've got several possible stories in my head but it's figuring out a structure which is the difference between whether I have a novel or not.

You have written engagingly in *Downside Up* about young peoples' negotiation of social media. Do you feel that the digital opportunities available to young people now have ultimately a positive or a negative effect, and for what reason(s)?

This is a tricky one and my answer may make me sound like a total Luddite. The world has changed and the internet is not going away. On the plus side, that's an enormously liberating and exciting world to live in; it enables us to have access to all sorts of information in seconds, to talk online to people we never would have dreamt of talking to and to have our say and publish whatever we like at the press of a button. That's the good bit. There is a downside though. The first is the pressure that social media puts young people under. Surviving in the real world is no longer enough; kids now have to survive in a virtual world too. Likes and Follows are pretty much seen as badges of acceptance and approval – who dares to be that kid who has only ten friends on Facebook when everyone else has got nine hundred plus? What might those nine hundred 'unfriends' be saying about you? But even without that paranoia, the whole online friend thing is pretty much a nonsense. NOBODY has that many friends. Most of these Likes and Follows aren't even friends of friends. But they all have access to each other's thoughts and photos and personal information. I don't see how this can be a good idea. And all the online friends in the world aren't worth a single real one – someone you can actually spend time with and talk to face to face. So that's one concern: Is an online life replacing a life that is well lived? My other concern is about concentration. We have access to all this information but how rewarding is that? Effort is part of the process of understanding but I worry that the fast fix approach of the internet is turning us all into passive readers who just want to be gratified. And I say this from experience because I'm as bad as anyone. I spend way too much time scrolling through my Twitter feed. What did I used to do with all that spare time? What could I be doing with that time now? I read *Bleak House* last year and it nearly killed me. The sentences were so long; the text so dense – it was a real struggle. Yet when I was twelve, I was reading books by Dickens and the Brontës. What has happened to me? Why do my eyes keep slipping off the page? I seriously worry that the internet – and social media in particular – has chipped away at my ability to concentrate. And that's a real worry. Because it's obsessive concentration that gets difficult things done. Put it like this: Anyone who can read a hefty nineteenth century novel, possesses powers of concentration which will make them a success at something. I hope we don't evolve away from that.

Anne Fine, among others, has expressed disapproval of the trend in children's book publishing of the gender-focused marketing of authors such as Jacqueline Wilson, (who's

books are clearly marketed at a young female demographic). How focused are you, as a writer, on audience, and do you worry that children's / YA fiction often appears to be divided along gender lines? If so, what do you think can be done to redress this balance?

First and foremost I write for myself. I once tried to write in a very practical way and provide a publisher with what I thought they wanted and it was a horrible experience – it was like pulling words out of my head with forceps and it made me depressed. So these days I write what I like and hope that a publisher will like it too! In this sense then, - beyond that moral responsibility I spoke of earlier and also the practical matter of accessibility - I don't suppose I'm deliberately trying to please an audience. And I don't involve myself too much with marketing questions and covers. Perhaps I should have done because in the past my books were very obviously targeted at girls. But it was only the original cover of *What's Up with Jody Barton?* that ever worried me. Most of my other books were, in fact, rightly marketed to appeal to girls because they were 'girls' books'. I don't see why that should be in any way a shameful viewpoint. I do wonder sometimes if 'gender neutralizing' actually means eradicating and, in fact, demonising anything that's obviously associated with femininity. After all, the issue always seems to be with covers like those on the books of Jacqueline Wilson or Cathy Cassidy – nobody seems to have any problem with the covers on books by Darren Shan! Are a generation of adults pointlessly outlawing pink for girls? Some girls like pink! That's cool with me even though I've never been one of them! I really can't get too fired up about it. For me, what's important is what is written inside the book. If the messages for girls and boys are equally strong and positive then I don't have a problem. And the most important thing of all is just to get young people reading novels at all.

There has been a growing trend in the last few years of dismissing higher education in the Arts and Humanities as 'worthless' in the context of a culture of work that increasingly rewards graduates entering with highly specialised and vocationally-based qualifications. As a fellow English graduate (and teacher), how do you perceive the future of Arts and Humanities degrees, and what were your own experiences both during and after studying for a degree in English?

The question of where an arts degree can take you has always been asked. Having said that, I think there will always be plenty of people who opt to pursue those courses. I hope so anyway. I think it would be a very dull world which had no arts graduates in it! But maybe the question has become more potent because the criteria for assessment has been changed. It used to be the case that a degree in the arts or the humanities was evidence of the ability to write well; this meant it was good currency for anyone hoping to pursue a career in journalism, advertising or anywhere where a confident command of written English is needed. But somewhere along the way, the quality of written communication has been dispensed with as a necessity. And that reaches right back through the education system. Time and time again, I've heard the words, 'It's the content that matters – not your ability to write well.' I think this is unhelpful to everyone – including those graduates who *can* write. At an academic level, good written English should not be seen as an advantage which must be countered – it should be a requirement. After all, if something is being written in a way which is so lacking control that it doesn't

communicate, how can the content be meaningful or convincing? I did my degree quite a while ago. It was in English Literature and being able to write was an expectation of all students. Writing essays unaided was the most practical and useful thing I got out of it – that and the experience of living away from home. I'd say that these things were actually invaluable to me and changed the course of my life. They were certainly worth much more than any knowledge I gained about literature. The literary stuff was just a bonus.

Your novels are quite firmly rooted in place, from Aberystwyth in *Fire and Water*, to suburban Cardiff in the *Lottie Biggs* series and Willesden Green in *Jody Barton*. Do you see recognisable settings as being integral in terms of writing realist YA fiction, and is there anywhere you haven't previously written about where you would like to set a novel?

Settings are hugely important to me. They are often my starting point and they are certainly as important as any of my characters. I think this was because I moved around a lot in my twenties; I had a real travel bug and a love of places. I don't have the opportunity to move around like that anymore but every book I've written has revisited somewhere I've lived and where I know – or used to know – very well. I know there are other writers who also use setting as a starting point but everyone writes differently. Plenty of books have no recognisable setting at all – just a generic one. I recently re-read Lynne Reid Banks' wonderful children's novel *The Indian in the Cupboard*. That could be set in any town anywhere but it doesn't stop the story from working tremendously. But I couldn't do that. I need a location. My next novel is out in September. It's called *Sophie Someone* and it's set in Brussels where I lived for a while during that nomadic time in my twenties.

Have any of your books been optioned for film / television? If not, which would you most like to see adapted for the screen and why?

No. Any of them. Because I could stop worrying about money! In all seriousness though – I need to get with it and start writing something more filmic. I'm my own worst enemy because everything I write is largely about what's going on in the narrator's head. This doesn't translate well to the screen.

What writing project(s) do you have planned for 2015?

I've got two books just about dusted and ready to go. *Sophie Someone* – which I mentioned before – is the most daring and difficult novel I've ever written. That's out in September. For me, it's the biggest book in my life so far. I literally turned my head inside out writing out. I also have a non-fiction book out in June – *Being a Girl*. This is the partner book to James Dawson's very successful *Being a Boy* and deals with all aspects of, well... being a girl. It's illustrated by the amazing sketcher of pugs, Gemma Correll – so I'm very excited about it. And right now, I'm working on a new novel. Still a first draft – still a long way to go. But I'm writing freely, I'm writing what I want to write and I'm enjoying it.

Social, political and cultural contexts- Chronology:

2001 - 9/11 attacks.

|
2002 - Education Act.

|
2003 - Re-introduction of 'Anti-Social Behaviour Orders' (ASBOs).

|
2005 - 7th July London bombings.

|
2007 - National Borders Act.

|
2009 - Reporting on groundswell of 'Ephiphobia' in British press.

|
2010 - David Cameron's 'Big Society' speech.

|
2011 - Summer riots.

|
2012 - 'Fair press for children and young people' document submitted to the Leveson Inquiry.

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17

Dear Parents.

My name is Ben Screech, I am a PhD candidate and Associate Lecturer in Education at the University of the West of England. I am conducting research into literary representations of 'Otherness' (the various ways in which people, specifically children and young people, may be 'other' or 'different' to the mainstream), in twenty-first century children's literature and as part of this research, I am endeavouring to gather 'reader responses' from Year 6 pupils. From September 2015, I aim to run a weekly reading group on Friday afternoons for half an hour which your son / daughter has been invited to participate in. The purpose of the reading group is to read and discuss two of the key primary texts which provide the foundation to my study and explore the theme of Otherness. In order to have a record of the discussions and responses the children provide in these sessions, I will be recording them using an audio recorder. The weekly reading groups are going to run until Christmas and in this period, the two books we will be reading and discussing are:

Dustbin Baby (2007) – Jacqueline Wilson

The Unforgotten Coat (2012) – Frank Cottrell Boyce

(The children will be given a copy of both books to bring home and read).

These novels are age-appropriate and aimed at an upper-primary / early-secondary aged readership. I have received university 'ethics committee' approval to pursue my project, and also have the full backing of ██████████ Primary School.

No participants quoted in my thesis will be named.

On concluding my research, I will ensure that the audio files and transcriptions containing the children's discussions are deleted.

Any pupils who wish to withdraw from the reading group are, of course, welcome to do so at any time they like without giving a reason.

This process is intended to be completely transparent and, as such, although the final thesis will not be published and publicly accessible until July 2017, I will gladly forward any chapter drafts for your consideration and discuss them with you, as well as making alterations in regards to ethical aspects of the work, given any parental concerns. I am also happy to provide a 'summary of findings' documenting the outcome(s) of my research.

If you would like more information about my research please feel free to contact me at:

ben.screech@live.uwe.ac.uk

Please complete this slip expressing consent or otherwise by deleting the appropriate:

I am happy / am not happy for my child to participate in this research project.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

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34 - APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

This application form should be completed by members of staff and Phd/ Prof Doc students undertaking **research which involves human participants**. U/G and M level students are required to complete this application form where their project has been referred for review by a supervisor to a Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) in accordance with the policy at <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics>. For **research using human tissues**, please see separate policy, procedures and guidance linked from <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/researchethicsandgovernance.aspx>

Please note that the research should not commence until written approval has been received from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) or Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). You should bear this in mind when setting a start date for the project.

This form should be submitted electronically to the Officer of the Research Ethics Committee (see list above at page 1) together with all supporting documentation (research proposal, participant information sheet, consent form etc).

Please provide all the information requested and justify where appropriate.

For further guidance, please see <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics> (applicants' information) or contact the officer for UREC/your Faculty Research Ethics Committee (details at page 1).

Project Details:

Project title	Peripheral Voices: Constructing Otherness in Contemporary Children's Fiction.		
Is this project externally funded?	Yes		No X
If externally funded, please give details of project funder			
Proposed project start date	01/10/14	Anticipated project end date	01/09/17

Applicant Details:

Name of researcher (applicant)	Ben Screech
Faculty and Department	English (ACE)
Status	PG Research Student

(Staff/ PG Student/MSc Student/Undergraduate)	
Email address	Ben.Screech@live.uwe.ac.uk
Contact postal address	72 Lawn Rd, Bristol, BS16 5BB
Contact telephone number	07789282799
Name of co-researchers (where applicable)	NA

<p><i>(for completion by UWE REC)</i></p> <p><i>Date received:</i></p> <p><i>UWE REC reference number:</i></p>
--

For All Applicants:		
Has external ethics approval been sought for this research?	Yes	No X
If yes, please supply details:		

For student applicants only:	
Name of Supervisor / Director of Studies (for PG/MSc and UG student applicants) ¹	Dr Catherine Butler
Details of course/degree for which research is being undertaken	PhD English

'For student applications, supervisors should ensure that all of the following are satisfied before the study begins:

- The topic merits further research;
- The student has the skills to carry out the research;
- The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate;

- The procedures for recruitment of research participants and obtaining informed consent are appropriate.

Department of Supervisor / Director of Studies	English (ACE)
Supervisor's / Director of Studies' email address	Catherine3.butler@uwe.ac.uk
Supervisor's / Director of Studies' telephone number	+44 (0)117 32 84457
Supervisor's / Director of Studies' comments:	

Details of the proposed work:

PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS. IF YOU THINK THE QUESTION IS NOT APPROPRIATE, PLEASE STATE WHY.

1. Aims, objectives of and background to the research:

To research the theme of 'otherness' in contemporary (post-2000) children's fiction, with specific reference to a 'reader-response' approach.

Key research questions:

- Why have certain children's authors, now more than ever, been attracted to the image or idea of the child as other in their work?
- To what extent, and in what way, is this othering of children specific to a British post-millennial context?
- How do children and young people critically, creatively and emotionally engage with such themes of difference and otherness in their reading - particularly in relation to child protagonists in contemporary writing for children, and how can this be used to support textual analysis?

(I am able to provide a working bibliography of key (primary) texts for your consideration if this is necessary).

2. Research methodology to be used (include a copy of the interview schedule/ questionnaire/ observation schedule where appropriate):

- I will be conducting reader-response research in the context of a reading focus group with higher-ability Year 6 pupils. This will essentially follow the 'guided reading' strategy regularly used by teachers when reading with primary-aged children. Prior to each reading group session, I will have prepared a series of discussion prompts relating to thematic concerns in the chapter(s) we are intending to read. I aim for my role to be primarily as 'facilitator', prompting and observing the children's discussions, rather than becoming an integral part of them. I aim for textual discussions to be allowed to develop organically, with me occasionally 'stepping in' to 'anchor' them back to the criteria for discussion we had begun with. These criteria will necessarily relate to the focus of the research, ie: otherness & difference, and how these themes are presented in the given novels.

3. Selection of participants:

Will the participants be from any of the following groups? (Tick as appropriate)

Children under 18

- Adults who are unable to consent for themselves²
- Adults who are unconscious, very severely ill or have a terminal illness
- Adults in emergency situations
- Adults with mental illness (particularly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)
- Prisoners
- Young Offenders
- Healthy Volunteers (where procedures may be adverse or invasive)
- Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, medical students
- Other vulnerable groups
- None of the above

(² Please note, the Mental Capacity Act requires all intrusive research involving adults who are unable to consent for themselves to be scrutinised by an NHS Local Research Ethics Committee – Please consult the Chair of your Faculty Research Ethics Committee, or Ros Rouse (UWE Research Governance Manager) for advice: ros.rouse@uwe.ac.uk)

If any of the above applies, please justify their inclusion in this research:

As part of my study I wish to conduct reading-focused groups specifically geared towards reading texts where the theme of 'otherness' is prevalent. I wish to conduct this 'reader-response' element of my work with upper-primary (Year 6) pupils in a local Bristol school. I will be recording the reading discussion groups, and ultimately including sections of children's responses as part of chapters in my PhD thesis. These will act as a secondary / alternate form of literary analysis in terms of the primary texts in each chapter. My second supervisor, Jane Carter has organised for me to set up a lunch-time reading group at a UWE partner school, Ashley Down Junior School in Bristol.

Note: If you are proposing to undertake research which involves contact with children or vulnerable adults, you may need to hold a valid DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service, formerly Criminal Records Bureau – CRB) check.

Where appropriate, please provide evidence of the check with your application.

- **I have a current DBS check (photocopy attached).**

4. Please explain how you will determine your sample size/recruitment strategy, and identify, approach and recruit your participants. Please explain arrangements made for participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information in English.

As discussed previously, I am going to set up a lunch-time reading group focused on reading some of the key texts in my study. I am ideally looking to approach high-ability readers in Year 6. The

school (Ashley Down) have already expressed interest in participating in my research and the English coordinator will support me in terms of choosing suitable children to participate. Language issues are unlikely to be an issue in this aspect of my research.

5a. What are your arrangements for obtaining informed consent whether written, verbal or other? (where applicable, copies of participant information sheets and consent forms should be provided)

A letter / information sheet (attached) will be sent home for children interested in participating in the reader groups signed by both me and the school literacy coordinator. It will explain the purpose of my research with children in school. Children have total choice over whether or not they wish to participate and are under no obligation to attend these lunch-time reading groups. The letter / information sheet also contains a tear-off slip at the bottom where parents must either give or decline, informed consent; this would go straight to the school, and be kept securely as a record.

b. What arrangements are in place for participants to withdraw from the study?

Again, children will be made aware prior to beginning the project that they are able to withdraw any time they like, and without stating a reason. In order to withdraw they may simply tell me or another adult in the school (most likely their class teacher), and there will be no ramifications whatsoever to this decision.

6. If the research generates personal data, please describe the arrangements for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality or the reasons for not doing so.

Readers-responses to texts cited in my PhD thesis will not be attributed to any individual participant. Neither will I refer to reader's names or the institution / school in which the research took place in the study (except for as an acknowledgement at the start of the thesis).

7. Please describe how you will store data collected in the course of your research and maintain data protection.

I am going to record the reading groups with an MP3 recorder and transcribe the discussions afterwards. These will be accessible only by me and will be destroyed / deleted on completion of the project. These will be kept secure for the duration of the project in a locked filing cabinet in my private study at home. This is therefore, completely inaccessible to anyone other than me, thus maintaining data protection.

8. What risks (eg physical, psychological, social, legal or economic), if any, do the participants face in taking part in this research and how will you overcome these risks?

This research is low risk. I will also ensure that the texts I choose to read with the children are entirely age-appropriate as stipulated by the texts themselves (under the guide age-range) and the school will be aware of which texts we are reading and parents will have been given the list of primary texts prior to beginning the research. In the event of any strong emotional response to the material, I would seek advice from the school in regards to how to proceed.

9 Are there any potential risks to researchers and any other people impacted by this study as a consequence of undertaking this proposal that are greater than those encountered in normal day to day life?

There will be no potential risk to any parties involved in this study.

10 How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated?

(Select all that apply)

- Peer reviewed journal
- Conference presentation
- Internal report
- Dissertation/Thesis
- Other publication
- Written feedback to research participants
- Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
- Other (Please specify below)

11 Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of the Faculty and/or University Research Ethics Committee?

N/A

Checklist

Please complete before submitting the form.

	Yes/No
Is a copy of the research proposal attached? <i>(I will be able to forward you a copy of the final proposal following the project registration on 1.1.15.)</i>	NA
Have you explained how you will select the participants?	Y
Have you described the ethical issues related to the well-being of participants?	Y
Have you considered health and safety issues for the participants and researchers?	Y
Have you included details of data protection including data storage?	Y
Have you described fully how you will maintain confidentiality?	Y
Is a participant consent form attached?	NA
Is a participant information sheet attached?	Y
Is a copy of your questionnaire/topic guide attached?	NA
Where applicable, is evidence of a current DBS (formerly CRB) check attached?	Y
Is a Risk Assessment form attached? (HAS only)	NA

Declaration

The information contained in this application, including any accompanying information, is to the best of my knowledge, complete and correct. I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the right of the participants.

Principal Investigator name	Ben Screech
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Signature	BEN SCREECH
Date	04/11/14
Supervisor or module leader name (where appropriate)	Dr Catherine Butler
Signature	
Date	04/11/14

The signed form should be emailed to Committee Services: researchethics@uwe.ac.uk and email copied to the Supervisor/Director of Studies where applicable.

35**Issues and challenges associated with the reader-response project.**

From a logistical standpoint, there were certain issues and challenges that had to be 'worked around' in the process of carrying out this type of research in school. Although the school, participants, literacy coordinator and both Year 6 classes involved remained generally supportive of the research throughout the duration of this project, certain practical issues did have an impact:

- **Size of groups and (non)-attendance issues:** Because the groups were small, when participants were absent (a frequent occurrence in the winter term due an abundance of colds and flu), the discussions lost some of their momentum. A group of five or six readers is enough to form an effective 'interpretive community'; but with three or less I realised that this was more challenging. If undertaking a similar project in the future, I would ideally prefer to conduct research with a larger group of approximately eight to ten participants. This would ensure that absences do not interrupt the functioning of the group dynamic.
- **Timings:** In the first year, the book group was held at lunchtime, from 12:30 to 1:00pm. However, delays in the lunch hall sometimes meant that participants were five or ten minutes late, resulting in us only having approximately twenty minutes for discussion, rather than the required half an hour. Similarly, in the second year, the group was supposed to meet in the first period of the afternoon, from 1:00 to 1:30pm. However, delays during registration meant that lateness often occurred, again resulting in a much shorter period being available to discuss the books. Although I asked on more than one occasion, the school would not allow me to extend this due to concerns about the 'knock on effect' on lesson time. Ideally in the future, I would try and negotiate a longer period of time to allow for lateness etc.
- **Other events coinciding:** During particularly busy periods (primarily the period surrounding SATs and Christmas), the participants were not always able to afford the time required to attend the book group. As a result, there were occasionally a few weeks' gap between meetings which meant that recalling thoughts on the books and sustaining the momentum of discussions could be challenging. On two occasions, having

already travelled to the school, I was informed that the children required would not be able to attend due to other commitments.

- Rooms: Both years, the rooms that were allocated were problematic. During the lunchtime period in the first year, I was given access to a Year 6 classroom which I was told would be a 'quiet environment'. However, after continual interruptions from both pupils and staff using the room for other activities, I eventually asked if another room was available. The library was subsequently suggested. This was relatively quiet and worked well when the groups were held at lunchtime. However, in the second year of the project, (when the time moved to the start of afternoon lessons), the library became much busier, which sometimes had a disruptive impact on the book group.

- Technical aspects of data collection: On more than one occasion, the audio (MP3) recorder failed; either running out of charge, storage space, or simply stopping recording mid-way through the discussion before I had noticed. Also, due to background noise (for the reasons discussed previously), certain parts of the recordings were unintelligible. In future, to combat this, I would employ a 'backup' recorder as a failsafe. I would also look into the possibility of using an auxiliary high-definition microphone to both deal with background noise, and to ensure the voices of quieter members of the groups were consistently clear on the recording.