

Negotiating Selfhood

**Historical Societies and Identity in Young Adult
Fantasy Fiction**

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Summary

Fantasy literature has occupied an ambivalent position in literary criticism. Hunt describes it as having been either enthusiastically defended or seriously rejected.¹ One of the most derided genres of fantasy is that of 'sword and sorcery', alternatively labelled 'high', 'immersive', or 'marvellous' fantasy; the genre is criticised for the nostalgia apparently typified by its 'historical' or 'pseudo-medieval' setting.

This thesis seeks to re-examine 'immersive' fantasy that utilises pseudo-medieval settings through three modern young adult texts: *Finnikin of the Rock* by Melina Marchetta, *Rebel Spring* by Morgan Rhodes, and *Touch of Power* by Maria Snyder. Of particular interest is the implicit claim that 'immersive fantasy' lacks sophistication and that the pseudo-historical setting is simply an expression of nostalgia rather than representative of any greater textual significance. Focussing particularly on the 'medieval' constructions of gender and class within the fantasy society, the thesis aims to demonstrate the way that these fantasy texts utilise historical motifs in order to articulate models of agentic subjectivity to their young adult readers. In doing so the thesis will attempt to contribute to the literary discussion of fantasy and further suggest the need for the re-examination and re-entry of 'immersive' or 'high' fantasy into critical discussion through examining the implications pseudo-historical settings have for the way that the genre models the construction of identity and the subject's interaction with society.

¹ Peter Hunt, "Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds," in *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction: Ursula Le Guin, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman and Others Including the Amber Spyglass*, ed. Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz (London: Continuum, 2001), 2.

Declaration

I, Olivia Catherine Hartley, certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Introduction

Fantasy literature has occupied an ambivalent position within critical discourse. For some, the phrase 'fantasy literature' seems paradoxical – fantasy being understood in this case as 'childish', 'escapist' or 'unsophisticated'. For others, it has been cause for celebration – a great achievement in literary experimentation, the deepest expression of literature and imagination. As such, fantasy has typically either been 'taken seriously (and enthusiastically), or seriously rejected'.² It should come as no surprise that the author of a thesis titled 'Negotiating Selfhood: Historical Societies and Identity in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction' falls firmly within the first of these critical camps described by Hunt, but I would like to comment briefly on the typical trends that exist within the discourse that discredits fantasy. One of the many pieces of evidence cited in order to discredit the fantasy genre as childish or escapist is its use of archetypal representations of characters, plot structures, and societies. Of particular insult to 'serious literature' is the tendency for fantasy to use historical settings or 'motifs' for the basis of the fantasy society. Rather than addressing these issues, and in particular texts that are representative of these features, a common trend in defensive fantasy criticism is to either ignore them in favour of other types of fantasy texts (for there are many subgenres) or to deny their existence. Rosemary Jackson, for example, creates a hierarchical system with which to assess the value of texts. While she upholds the 'fantastic' as a supreme form of literature for its subversive nature, she limits the definition of fantastic texts to those that impose fantasy elements onto the reality of the reader, thus creating a sense of unease and disrupting the sense of consensus reality. In contrast, she characterises the 'marvellous' as invariably narrated by an omniscient narrator and concerns events in a land far away. Formula and archetypes are in the nature of the marvellous, and when combined with the aforementioned narrative style and setting, Jackson argues, it creates a passive and unengaging reading position. For this reason, it is suggested in the one paragraph she devotes to this genre, the marvellous warrants dismissal from critical discussion.³ Considering this attitude, it is unsurprising that the function of archetypes and formula have not gained much critical attention. Even when the marvellous is defended, there has been a critical tendency to define them as texts that allow for the clean polarisation of 'good' and 'evil'. The

² Ibid.

³ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), 33-36.

'marvellous' fantasy texts, it is argued in these cases, are thus representative of an adult yearning for innocence and simplicity, where such polarisations and unambiguous moral realities might exist.⁴ In this context, the archetypal modes are rarely examined for their functions and, while initially intended as a defence, explaining the existence of archetypes in the genre as an attempt to simplify reality has been further cause for the uncritical engagement with the genre.

Mendlesohn breaks from this tradition in her work on 'immersive' fantasy, a label interchangeable with that of the 'marvellous' or 'high' fantasy, and focuses specifically on the narrative rhetoric of the language used in fantasy fiction. She argues that this language creates an 'irony of mimesis';⁵ the text assumes the reader's familiarity with the unfamiliar fantasy world and further encourages them to work to construct the fantasy reality that the text presents them with. This consideration of the nature of language and how it works to construct the reality within 'marvellous' or 'immersive' fantasy texts is significant for the reconsideration of the fantasy genre, firstly for its suggestion of the sophistication and literary value of the text and secondly for its challenge of previous claims of unsophistication and unengaged reading positions. Furthermore, Mendlesohn's argument suggests that this fantasy enables readers to consider the ways in which they construct and understand their own reality. Considering, then, her re-examination of the language of 'immersive' or 'high' fantasy, it is perhaps time to reconsider other structural elements of this fantasy genre, such as the inclusion of pseudo-medieval societies, and the implications these have for the meaning-making of the text.

This thesis seeks to address the textual function of pseudo-medieval societies in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction, a topic that has not so far received significant critical attention. For the sake of clarity, this specific genre will be labelled 'historical otherworld fantasy'; texts are 'immersive' or 'marvellous', that is they depict a fantasy otherworld separate from our own, but of a pseudo-historical nature. Where their presence is mentioned in the criticism, it is seen to merely create simplicity and a sense of nostalgia⁶ and as not to merit further exploration or discussion. Of particular interest is the way that pseudo-medieval societies influence the representation of identity and agency, that is, the capacity for an individual to act within and upon society against

⁴ Pamela S. Gates, Susan B. Steffel, and Francis J. Molson, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2003), 4; Hunt, "Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds," 5.

⁵ Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 59.

⁶ Hunt, "Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds," 5.

social and political pressures. Important to my discussion of subjectivity is the concept of dialogism as defined by Bakhtin and McCallum, both of whom see subjectivity as constructed in dialogue with other selves and through the navigation of social and political pressures, norms, and expectations of society.⁷ This thesis will explore the effect of pseudo-medieval societies on the representation of such subjectivities, and by extension individual agency, in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction through examining the constructions of gender and class norms within three historical otherworld fantasies: Morgan Rhodes' *Rebel Spring*, Melina Marchetta's *Finnikin of the Rock*, and Maria Snyder's *Touch of Power*. These texts were selected primarily for the fantasy world within the text, which utilises pseudo-medievalism as a foundation for their societal structure, and their differing narrative styles. While older fantasy texts may conform to the descriptions and definitions given by theorists such as Jackson, these newer and more modern texts represent a shift in the genre in its treatment of subject matter both in the language of fantasy and more traditional character models and roles. In many cases, these traditional fantasy modes are challenged and subverted by these more modern texts, suggesting the need for a re-examination of trends in the 'otherworld' or 'marvellous' fantasy genre within modern fantasy literature.

In order to best explore the impact of pseudo-medieval social structures on the representation of agency and identity in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction, this thesis will focus specifically on the societal structures of gender and class. There are, of course, other elements of medieval society that exist within these types of fiction all deserving of further consideration and study such as racial relations, war, science and religion, but these might be better covered in a longer thesis and so exist beyond the scope of this project. Furthermore, issues of gender and class are closely interconnected, as the class to which the individual belongs often affects gendered behavioural expectations.

Considering this focus on constructions of gender and class structures within Young Adult 'historical otherworld', the first chapter will explore what the 'historical otherworld' fantasy is, how it differs from historical fiction, and what it would mean for the representation 'historicity' in both kinds of texts and the levels to which history might be believably manipulated within the context of both genres.

Chapters two and three will focus on what it means to write gender and class societal structures historically. Thus they focus on issues of gendered behavioural codes

⁷ Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, *Children's Literature and Culture* (Melbourne: Taylor & Francis, 1999), 4.

and class hierarchies in historical settings, the adaptation of these issues into historical fiction and the extent to which these are able to manipulate and change historical attitudes, and finally how fantasy texts utilise the underlying ideological attitudes of these historically charged social structures in order to create a sense of the past within the fantasy society. Through these chapters, I hope to demonstrate that while the 'historical otherworld' fantasy creates excessively repressive models of historical social structures, the fantasy setting also allows for greater freedom in offering critique and evaluation of existing social attitudes; in contrast, historical fiction is bound by its associated expectation of accurate historicity.

Having established the comparative freedom fantasy fiction has for offering critique, as well as how it manipulates historical social structures to be excessively repressive to individual freedom and subjectivity, the final chapter will examine the overall effect of pseudo-medieval societies on the representation of subjectivity. While the previous chapters discuss how the social setting is established as repressive, the final chapter will explore specifically how this setting interacts with individual subjectivity and how this interaction is represented throughout the fantasy texts. In particular, I hope to demonstrate that modern Young Adult Fantasy uses repressive societies order to foreground the assertion of a coherent, self-defined and independent agentic selfhood rather than forcing characters to conform to passive subject positions and archetypal patterns of representation. Thus I argue that the representation of pseudo-medieval societies in fantasy fiction has a deeper textual function than has previously been thought, and is in need of further re-examination. In this way, I hope that this thesis will encourage and contribute to further critical discussions of this genre, one that has hitherto been either ignored or dismissed by academic discourse.

Chapter 1

Mimesis without Reality: The Nature of 'Historical Otherworld' Fantasy

Mimetic function has been associated with Western Literary Fiction since the emergence of the realist mode in the 19th Century,⁸ and has been at the centre of much literary discussion despite the acknowledgement of its limitations.⁹ This discussion of mimesis has also extended to considerations of the fantasy genre. Farah Mendlesohn for example, observes in her survey of the narrative trends in fantasy literature, that 'immersive fantasy'¹⁰ operates primarily as an 'irony of mimesis';¹¹ that is, the authoritative narrative voice of an immersive or marvellous fantasy, whether first or third person omniscient, assumes the reader is as much a part of the world as the characters within it. It creates a 'real' world that the reader is assumed to be familiar with and comfortable in navigating. Similarly, Todorov deals with concepts of mimesis in his seminal discussion of the genre of the 'fantastic', but he defines the genre within the context of its ability to cause hesitation in the reader as to whether or not the events are representative and derived from (consensus) 'reality'.¹² Thus he defines fantastic literature according to its capacity to represent and convince the reader of its 'reality'. While he is not speaking specifically of 'fantasy' as it is commonly conceived of in modern scholarship, his and other subsequent discussions of Western literature nevertheless demonstrate the tendency to frame critical discussion in terms of literature's capacity to replicate the real, hence, a critical preoccupation with a text's relationship with reality.

This preoccupation is no less important to this thesis, which aims to study the use of pseudo-historical societies within Young Adult Fantasy texts. Indeed, fundamental to the survey of the use of historical allusion within fantasy literature for young adults is the examination of the function of mimesis within the fantasy text and in particular its relationship with consensus 'historical reality'. Through this examination we might best ascertain the textual function that allusion to historical settings may serve for the process of meaning making, and the ideological positioning of the reader in terms of constructing models of subjectivity and agency. In order to achieve this, the first aspect

⁸ David Lodge, "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction," in *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 30-31.

⁹ Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1984), xi.

¹⁰ Alternatively known as the 'marvellous', 'high fantasy', or 'otherworld fantasy' depending on the literary critic dealing with the genre.

¹¹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 59.

¹² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41.

to be studied in this chapter is the way that historical fiction for children and young adults invokes a sense of time and place, and the extent of the mimesis operating within historical fiction along with the expectations for 'accurate'¹³ representations of historical periods, attitudes, and events that readers bring to works of historical fiction. Examination of the expectations placed upon historical fiction will reveal how the invocation of time and place within fantasy literature operates and how it creates a sense of an historical time or place as a framework for the socio-economic realities of the fantasy world. Following this examination, I will turn to the issue of mimesis within fantasy literature and the extent to which that literature is able to represent the 'real' world and resonate with it, without the associated expectation for 'realistic' representation.¹⁴ Finally, this chapter will examine the combined effects of allusions to history through the invocation of a sense of time and place, and that of fantasy literature, which, while free from the expectation of accurate or 'realistic' representation, can still maintain a mimetic quality. These three factors will hence contribute to an understanding of the possible functioning of an a-historical historical world within fantasy literature, by which I mean a world that is constructed as separate from our own, which demands a sense of familiarity and association of certain attitudes and societies without carrying the expectation of an accurate or 'realistic' representation of history.

Historical fiction by its very name and nature makes a 'concomitant claim and disclaimer to historical legitimacy'; it is history and fiction.¹⁵ This notion draws out the tension surrounding the definition of historical fiction – the events described in texts of historical fiction are not intended to be understood by the reader as an accurate portrayal of the historical events as they occurred; however there still lies an expectation of historical 'accuracy' in the adherence to a 'spirit' or a 'sense' of the age in which the text is set.¹⁶ Yet despite the apparent forfeiture of 'accuracy' as it relates to historical events, the historical fiction writer still researches extensively, emphasising their adherence to historical 'reality' and the accuracy of their portrayal of a 'sense' of

¹³ This is, of course, a problematic notion when discussing literary representation of history and reality, as both are in themselves an authorial interpretation and also subject to shifting cultural interpretations – think about the 'history' wars in Australia throughout the 1990s.

¹⁴ Again, this concept of 'realistic representation' is in itself, of course, a well-documented problematic notion that will be dealt with later in the chapter.

¹⁵ Kim Wilson, *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Adults: The Past through Modern Eyes* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

the age.¹⁷ Rahn adds to this by emphasising the translation of culture, as well as a 'sense' of the age to the definition of historical fiction. She argues that the primary concern for authors of historical fiction for children and young adults, is to bring the 'culture of some former age to life for a generation with little or no knowledge of it ... [to] show children what it was like to live and grow up then'.¹⁸ This suggests that the main focus of historical fiction is to explore the reality of life within the text – what it was like to live in a certain time period – while the events surrounding the narrative perform the function of a backdrop that affects the character's society and consequently their own development within that society. The focus and primary interest of historical fiction is on the character and their development and progression towards adulthood, rather than historical events, often accompanied by an ideological emphasis on progression.¹⁹ Given this focus, it is understandable then that the expectation laid upon historical novelists is that they extensively research the culture and historical period, making the *world* as accurate as possible,²⁰ while being prepared to 'abandon most of it, to pare down to the necessary minimum for the success of the plot'.²¹ Despite the necessary willingness of the historical novelist to abandon research for the sake of plot, there is nevertheless an expectation that the historical novelist be 'faithful' to the past and bring as accurate as possible a portrayal of its cultural assumptions, attitudes, and social reality to young readers. To fail in this regard would be to do nothing more than 'simply dress up modern characters in pseudo-ancient dress and so make the characters tamer and more like ourselves than historical people' as Katherine Paterson has suggested.²²

The problems identified by Paterson in outlining the apparent success or failure of a historical novel contribute to this discussion on fantasy and the historical in two ways. The first is that there is an expectation placed upon historical fiction that it will be grounded in the construction of the historical world, and that, hence, the genre has an inherent mimetic function – the world of the text must be historically accurate on the level of culture and social reality as it existed within the past. Secondly, her comments

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸ Suzanne Rahn, "An Evolving Past: The Story of Historical Fiction and Nonfiction for Children," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 15, no. 1 (1991): 3. (my ellipsis)

¹⁹ John Stephens, "Contemplating Otherness: Ideology and Historical Fiction," in *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1992), 238-39.

²⁰ Katherine Paterson, "Where Is Terabithia?," in *Innocence and Experience: Essays and Conversations on Children's Literature*, ed. Barbara Harrison and Gregory Maguire (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1987), 227.

²¹ Celia Keenan, "Reflecting a New Confidence: Irish Historical Fiction for Children," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21, no. 3 (1997): 370.

²² Paterson, "Where Is Terabithia?," 227.

suggest that for historical fiction to properly succeed in relating the past to young readers, it must create a world and society characterised by an 'otherness'; its readers will simultaneously find it unfamiliar and also be expected to know the fantasy world to the same extent as the characters that inhabit it. As such, historical fiction straddles the divide between 'realist' fiction (and concomitant expectations that it portray an 'accurate' picture of a time that actually existed) and fantasy (and concomitant assumptions that it create an 'other' fantastic world, the culture of which is unfamiliar and exotic to readers).

There are various problems regarding the narrativisation of history and the interpretive nature of historical record, and subsequently the question of how one can be 'accurate' in capturing a 'sense' of an age given these issues of interpretation. Hayden White in particular problematises the ability to 'know' history, pointing out that the only record we have is through documents, archives, and artifacts – effectually rendering our knowledge of the past entirely dependent upon previous textualisations with their associated culturally determined language codes.²³ The past, in this context, is only knowable through representation²⁴ thus demonstrating the problem of expecting 'historical accuracy' from any work of historical fiction. However to deal with these questions extensively would be outside the scope of this project. The primary concern relevant to this thesis is that audiences bring with them an expectation of a coherent and 'realistic' mimesis of an historical period's culture, attitudes and predilections, or historical accuracy, which in turn directly affects the text's reception, believability, and success.

In contrast to historical fiction, mimetic expectations are brought to bear on fantasy insofar the fantasy world has an internal logical consistency. That is 'high', 'marvellous' or 'immersive' fantasy demands its readers be familiar with the world and as much a part of it as the characters within the text; readers thus are positioned to understand and believe in the world as long as it follows its own previously established physical laws. The audience similarly makes no other demand on the text other than the expectation for internal consistency. Where historical fiction also has the demand for internal consistency placed upon it, this internal consistency is informed by the intertext of an historical period. It is informed by the outer world of 'reality', while the 'immersive' or 'high' fantasy is self contained and self-sufficient. It must establish laws

²³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

²⁴ McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, 230.

for the world, but these laws are entirely self-defined and independent of the 'real' world. For example, it would be disturbing to engage with a fantasy text in which magic can only be wielded through great physical cost to the user, only to have a character suddenly use it for inane and frivolous purposes with no physical consequences or explanation from the text. Breaking the established internal laws of the text risks breaching what Tolkien referred to as 'Secondary Belief', the immersion and ability for the audience to believe in the story and the world as it is being told for as long as they are present within (that is reading) the secondary 'created' world.²⁵ When belief in the secondary world is broken the fantasy text fails, as fantasy relies on readers' acceptance of and belief in that world in order for it to operate. Thus a successful 'immersive' fantasy creates a world that is complete and internally consistent and logical. This is not an exclusive feature of fantasy, however, as Mendlesohn points out:

The immersive fantasy is both the mirror of mimetic literature and its inner soul. It reveals what is frequently hidden: that all literature builds worlds, but some genres are more honest about it than others.²⁶

What becomes evident from this comment is that, while fantasy is not expected to be mimetic of 'reality', it nevertheless draws attention to the nature of all literature – that every world is a construction rather than a reflection of reality and that this reality may take various and different forms. For example, in historical fiction the limitations of the genre demand that the construction of the world be one of the past and sufficiently believable within this context, to some extent 'realistic'. Fantasy on the other hand is not so limited by the expectation of realism but the world is nevertheless expected to conform to its own internal logic.

The comment that fantasy 'reveals ... that all literature builds worlds'²⁷ also problematises the concept of 'realism' in that it questions how a text can ever truly be 'realistic'. Realism is, in itself, an illusion of reality. It is limited by the author's interpretations and thus can never be truly 'accurate',²⁸ but texts of realism operate through their ability to recreate a world as similar to 'consensus reality' as possible.

²⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Tree and Leaf: Including "Mythopoeia" and "the Homecoming of Beorhtnoth"* (London: Harper Collins Ltd., 2001), 36-37.

²⁶ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 59.

²⁷ Ibid. (my ellipsis)

²⁸ Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, 39-44.

Fantasy, on the other hand, operates within the realm of 'impossibility' in that the world and narration exists beyond any 'remotely conceivable extension of our plane of reality or thought'.²⁹ It deliberately violates the norms and facts that constitute and construct our own reality and creates 'fact' from 'non-fact'.³⁰ It is through this creation of reality from non-reality that fantasy literature develops a mimetic – or rather an ironically mimetic – quality. Despite there being no possibility within consensus reality that the events of immersive fantasy literature might have any effect on or relation to our own world, the creation of the world nevertheless has a relationship with mimetic literature. Along with claiming that the immersive fantasy reveals the imitative nature of all literature, Mendlesohn suggests that it is a 'mirror of mimetic literature'. It creates a world that must be believed in as much as the world of any other fiction. The characters do not remark how unusual, remarkable, impossible or fantastic the events or the world are, but rather take these elements as normal and completely familiar, approaching them with 'interest rather than amazement'.³¹ The world is presented to the reader using the language of realism without any expectation for 'realistic' content.³² While fantasy worlds are governed by an internal consistency, however, the laws are fluid and subject to constant invention. Returning to the previous example where in a hypothetical fantasy world magic can only be cast at great cost to the user, and one character can use magic apparently freely and with little consequence, it needs to be explained and incorporated into the plot in a way that upholds the internal consistency and physical laws of the fantasy world are in a believable way, rather than undermining the consistency of that world. Within realist fiction, and in particular historical fiction, this kind of freedom to manipulate the physical laws of the created world is not possible, without transforming the genre of the text. Thus if the author of realist or historical fiction is attempting a verisimilitude which will convince the reader that the events are representative of 'reality', then there are expectations and laws that they cannot break.

While Immersive Fantasy literature might not be bound by the expectations of representing reality 'faithfully', and the fantasy world seemingly has no relation to consensus reality, it is held by many authors of fantasy criticism that fantasy fiction

²⁹ C. N. Manlove, "On the Nature of Fantasy," in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. Roger C. Schlobin (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 18.

³⁰ Gary K Wolfe, "The Encounter with Fantasy," *ibid.*, 1.

³¹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 60; W. R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 69.

³² *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*, 70.

nevertheless maintains an element of 'truth'. Ursula Le Guin states in her essay 'Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons' that fantasy

is true ... It isn't factual but it's true ... its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living.³³

While impassioned and based largely on her opinion, this comment nevertheless reflects a common notion that fantasy literature reveals truths to its readers, whether these be social truths, individual truths, or philosophical truths. Indeed, Hume argues that when the fictive reality confronts the reader's own reality through its difference, the audience is drawn to compare and contrast the social and physical world of the fiction with that of their own.³⁴ Fantasy texts are thus in the unique position of being able to encourage their audiences to question the societal norms and ideological assumptions that constitute their own reality without risking the adversarial reaction that realism would evoke. The same might also be said of historical fiction, whose otherness invites its readers to compare and contrast the historical societies with their own. Unlike fantasy however, historical fiction for children and young adults is typically positioned in such a way that emphasises an ideology of progress away from a past that is apparently 'scientifically ignorant and technologically undeveloped'³⁵ toward a future (more civilised) end point, at which the reader is often situated. Historical fiction is often thus 'embedded with a humanistic metanarrative of positive progression',³⁶ that subsequently positions the audience to view their own reality as superior to that of the text. Fantasy, while still maintaining a sense of humanistic ideologies of the continuity of human experience, makes no such ideological assertions regarding positive progress, as there is no 'future' to which the narrative is moving towards that the audience is already aware of and familiar with. Thus the comparison between the fantasy world and the reader's 'reality' is less directed and more open to reader interpretation, allowing greater freedom for critiquing their own societal assumptions.

³³ Ursula Le Guin, "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?," in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Susan Woods (New York: Berkley Books, 1979), 44. (my ellipsis)

³⁴ Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, 82-83.

³⁵ Stephens, "Contemplating Otherness: Ideology and Historical Fiction," 204.

³⁶ Wilson, *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Adults: The Past through Modern Eyes*, 5.

The question remains however as to why the comparison between historical fiction and fantasy is being made, and, furthermore, how this affects the representation of identity within young adult fantasy narratives. What I have hoped to demonstrate is the way that both fantasy and historical fiction create worlds of otherness, encouraging the conscious comparison between the fictive worlds and the social reality of their young adult readers. Where they differ, however, is in the expectations placed upon the representations of their respective realities. Whereas historical fiction is expected to conform to a sense of 'realistic' historical representation, the worlds and possibilities of fantasy fiction are bound by their own self-defined physical laws. What I find interesting, however, is the effect of combining elements of each of these genres on the representation of identity and agency. In other words, how does the use of historical socio-cultural allusions within a fantasy setting influence the construction and representation of the formation of identity and agency within young adult texts?

To use an 'historical' time period within fantasy fiction is to adapt a setting that would otherwise be the background for a (realist) historical fiction, but for a fantasy setting, thus creating an historical 'chronotope' – a term coined by Bakhtin and literally meaning 'time-space', referring specifically to ideas about the 'interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.³⁷ The chronotope then, refers to 'spatio-temporal relations within narrative, and ... spatio-temporal images or concepts which structure and organise a narrative'.³⁸ This thesis is particularly interested in the use of western medieval chronotopes within fantasy fiction for young adults. Similar to the issue of 'accurate' representation that is of constant interest to the writer of historical fiction, the 'historical' fantasy social setting is not and cannot be an 'accurate' representation of the historical time period. Unlike the historical fiction, however, the use of unfamiliar fantasy settings releases the fantasy author from the expectation of 'accuracy' or 'faithful' representation. For the fantasy writer, it is accepted and even expected that the 'history' utilised within their text is essentialist in nature – capturing and emphasising any element of a 'spirit' of an age that they desire. In this way historical elements within fantasy fiction are able to be adapted, altered or exaggerated without breaking the state of immersion – so long as the fantasy world is internally coherent and in accordance with its own self-defined physical laws.

³⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 81.

³⁸ McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, 261. (my ellipsis)

The use of historical social structures as a basis for the creation of a fantasy world has not been widely or extensively discussed within literary criticism. Rather than engaging with the functions and contributions to textual meaning that the use of pseudo-medieval societies might have, it has been the tendency of modern criticism to explain these settings as symptomatic of the genre's simplification of complex issues and character. Peter Hunt, for example, argues that the 'tendency to exploit pseudo-medieval settings' substitutes the real world, with its 'arbitrary, adult-controlled restrictions' with another that is characterised by 'even more arcane restrictions'.³⁹ This substitution, he states,

suggests a regressive element, a romantic yearning (by adults) for earlier 'innocence', for an alternative world where motivations, actions, needs and gratifications are simpler and more direct than in the desperately complex and subtle real world.⁴⁰

In this understanding, utilising historical societies as a basis for the fantasy world is a purely escapist enterprise. This escapist understanding is characterised by nostalgia for a 'simple' time in which people and their motivations, desires, actions and thoughts are transparent. However, what have not been adequately explored are the implications of using an historical time period as a basis for the creation of the socio-economic and cultural reality of the fantasy society. What does it mean to use history within a fantasy context?

Essential in considering the use of history within a fantasy fiction is remembering that because of the fantasy context it is not necessary for the history to be a faithful representation of the period to which it is alluding. It is important, however, to use enough motifs and stereotypes, commonly believed or considered to be representative of an historical time period, in order to create a sense of time or place. This is similarly the case with stereotypical representations of societal norms and attitudes. For example, it is commonly believed that women in the medieval period had few rights and were disallowed from active engagement with public and political life. Similarly, medieval class dynamics are often understood within the context of a feudal-like system in which the rich exploited and repressed the poor for their own personal gain. Once these two

³⁹ Hunt, "Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds," 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

aspects are portrayed within a fantasy text that has already established a medieval setting through the use of historical motifs, the fantasy author has successfully created a medieval chronotope within their fantasy world without necessarily needing to be faithful to the reality of the historical period. This process does however, despite lacking 'accuracy' in its representation, encourage an engagement with the intertext of the historical time period through the text's stereotypical socio-economic representations of the past society.

The engagement with the intertext of the historical time period, and in particular with stereotypical socio-economic representations of medieval or early middle-ages societies, in turn allows fantasy authors to create societies that are often characterised by overly restrictive expectations for social behaviour. Furthermore, the fantasy elements of the setting not only allow for the manipulation of history, they also allow for the exaggeration of socio-economic realities and relational dynamics within the society, while still invoking a sense of the historical. Far from being representative of a simple predilection for a time of simplicity and innocence, the creation of harsh socio-economic structures creates a society in which acts of freedom and autonomy by the protagonist are foregrounded and further positions the audience to consider and compare their own society with that of the text, as well as their place and ability to act within it. This function that historical societies serve within fantasy fiction will be further explored throughout the thesis, particularly as the use of historical societies relates to the representation of gender and class behavioural expectations and dynamics within fantasy fiction.

Mimesis operates in similar ways within historical fiction and fantasy fiction. In each case, the narrative structure and the narrative voice assumes the reader to be familiar with an unfamiliar 'other' world. These 'other' worlds engage the reader with foreign cultures and societies, in particular foreign and unfamiliar value systems, which in turn encourage comparison with the reader's own social 'reality'. Both fantasy fiction and historical fiction thus produce what Mendelsohn refers to as an 'irony of mimesis', a state where the narration assumes reader familiarity with the unfamiliar. Therefore, rather than being mere escapism, the differences between 'consensus reality' and the fictional worlds cause an awareness of the process of creation as well as position their audiences to compare and contrast the fictional worlds with their own. Where fantasy and historical fiction differ, however, is in the audience expectation for their respective representations of reality. Whereas historical fiction carries with it the weight of

expectations for historical 'accuracy', particularly when it comes to capturing the 'spirit' of an age, mimesis as it is presented in fantasy fiction is limited by its own self-definition for the successful creation of 'secondary belief'. Thus when the creation of a fantasy world draws inspiration from an historical time period, the text creates an interesting dynamic in which stereotypical representations of historical motifs and socio-economic realities are both accepted and encouraged, while the fantasy element of the text allows for the believable manipulation and alteration of these historical motifs and societal values. This often, though not always, results in an exaggeration of perceived social restrictions placed upon the individual within society, creating an environment in which individual autonomy and the construction of a coherent and agentic selfhood is emphasised in accordance with modern (humanistic) notions of selfhood. Considering this, the use of historical time periods as a basis for the creation of the fantasy world is a meaning-making feature of the fantasy text, rather than a symptom of adult yearning for simplicity and innocence. This will be explored further in the following chapters through the consideration of gender and class structures within fantasy texts, demonstrating how these social structures both create restrictive societies and are exaggerations of historical realities, thus impacting the representation of identity and selfhood within Young Adult fantasy fiction.

Chapter 2.
Damsels, Lords, Knights and Ladies: Writing Historical Genders in 'Otherworld'
Fantasy Fiction

That fantasy fiction has a tradition of utilising stereotypical gender constructions, particularly when it depicts a quest narrative or a fantasy society that adopts medieval chronotopes, should come as no surprise to one familiar with the genre. Indeed, the presence of gendered archetypal characters and plots has been the foundation of many criticisms of a simplistic and formulaic nature levelled at fantasy fiction.⁴¹ Hunt argues that fantasy as a genre, has typically been denounced due to its formulaic structure and cites as an issue the way that this formula affects the writing of gender roles within fantasy fiction. He states that

The hero tale, still the staple of contemporary fantasy, has been essentially a male preserve: in fantasies ... women are marginalized ... or mothers ... or dangerous.⁴²

There is ground for such criticisms of earlier works of fantasy fiction, particularly in fantasy fiction for children and young adults, and the specific fantasies that Hunt cites. In many more modern fantasies, however, these gender roles are either challenged or subverted throughout the narrative, despite, and on occasion in spite of, the societal construction of and expectations for gendered behaviour.

While Hunt argues that the hero tale is predominantly male oriented, the model of masculinity that is constructed within the context of the fantasy society must also be considered. Where traditional models for femininity are increasingly being challenged and subverted throughout modern fantasy novels for young adults, the typical construction of the 'male hero' is more often met with less of a challenge or resistance.⁴³ In this light, this chapter will consider the models of femininity that are constructed through modern young adult fantasy fiction, but also the models of masculinity that are presented throughout these texts.

A further consideration to this discussion on gender, is the use of pseudo-medieval societies, that is, how the medieval 'chronotopes' that operate upon the fantasy world affects the construction and operation of gender norms within the fantasy society.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2-3.

⁴² Ibid., 3. (my ellipsis)

⁴³ Susanne Fendler and Ulrike Horstmann, "Foreword," in *Images of Masculinity in Fantasy Fiction*, ed. Susanne Fendler and Ulrike Horstmann (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), iv.

Thus, this chapter will also be examining the way in which modern 'historical' otherworld fantasy literature for young adults constructs and adapts perceived 'historical' gender norms for the fantasy society, and subsequently how these gender constructions and the way that they are interacted with throughout the text affect the overall consideration of gender as a societal pressure on the individual. In order to examine the operation of pseudo-historical models of gender within the context of fantasy societies, this chapter will first consider how gender is written 'historically', the genre of historical fiction and the way that masculinity and femininity is constructed within the context of a represented historical time period. Following this, the chapter will then turn its attention to the way that fantasy literature adapts these methods of writing gender 'historically' and how these societal models are adapted for the fantasy. I will be examining the construction of 'historical' gender models through the consideration of three modern young adult fantasy novels: Morgan Rhodes' *Rebel Spring* and Melina Marchetta's *Finnikin of the Rock*. Through examining these three texts, I hope to demonstrate the way that the use of pseudo-historical societies affects the representation and construction of societal gender norms in fantasy fiction, and how the context of the fantasy society allows for the believable transcendence or challenging of these norms by the individual. In this context, I hope to demonstrate how the construction of restrictive societal gender norms foregrounds acts of individual resistance and thus questions the pervasiveness and widespread acceptance of these gender models by society.

As already explored in Chapter One, Historical Fiction carries with it an expectation, and in some cases a claim for, historical accuracy. This accuracy, however, lies in the fiction's ability to capture the 'spirit of an age'. When faced with the issue of portraying gender roles in adolescent historical fiction however, historical fiction is faced with the conundrum of representing to a modern age, influenced by the feminist movement, an age where 'women – and girls especially – of preceding centuries have enjoyed considerably less independence of mind and body than their counterparts in the modern age'.⁴⁴ It has been the trend in many historical fictions to project modern reactions to restricted gender roles from the past onto that (represented) past. Given the reactionary nature of the feminist movement, its discourses 'will inevitably forge a problematic relationship with historical texts'.⁴⁵ The effect of this problematic

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Adults: The Past through Modern Eyes*, 63.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

relationship is the projection of modern attitudes that may not be representative or even accurate for the time period in which the fiction is set, and modern Western ideologies and expectations for female gender roles may, thus, be imbued with trans-historical and universal qualities. The primary issue with this process, as it relates to historical fiction, is that the fiction consequently breaks from the expectation placed upon it to represent the 'spirit of an age'. It is not only accepted, but also expected in the modern era, for female heroines of historical fictions to represent often anachronistic modern ideologies of female power.⁴⁶ Wilson argues that this process is largely symptomatic of the preoccupation of historical fiction with the 'humanistic metanarrative of positive progression', in which present models of female subjectivity are held as ideal, and through using heroines with modern attitudes the fictions attempt to demonstrate how the past falls short of this ideal.⁴⁷ The unfortunate drawback of this preoccupation with imposing modern ideologies onto representations of the past, particularly as those representations concern the experience of women, can occasionally result in the underplaying or failure of fictions to demonstrate the historical consequences for agentic subjectivities. While there may have been historical precedents for events such as cross-dressing or refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, the consequences for these actions in historical fictions are much less severe than they would have been in the historical reality.⁴⁸ In some ways, denying the severity and seriousness of holding a modern attitude within a supposed historical context downplays the extent of the heroine's strength and agentic self, as it takes less courage to represent this attitude than may have been the case in the historical reality. Nevertheless, imbuing representations of the past with modern attitudes does result in anachronism and a failure to truly contextualise historical female experience when the primary emphasis of the narrative is on contrasting the past and the present, upholding the latter as ideologically and socially superior.

Writing Masculinity historically, on the other hand, has not received as much critical attention. The study of Masculinity has been a relatively modern academic inclination, developed in response to the success of the twentieth century feminist movement, which left masculinity itself 'in a state of crisis'.⁴⁹ This deconstruction of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68-72.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Ruddick, "Preface: Another Key to Bluebeard's Chamber: Ideal and Fundamentalist Masculinity in the Literature of Fantasy," in *Images of Masculinity in Fantasy Fiction*, ed. Susanne Fendler and Ulrike Horstmann (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 1.

masculinity (particularly hegemonic modes of masculinity) as the 'normative' state of humanity by the feminist movement has led to a period of reconstruction or 'rehabilitation'⁵⁰ of masculinity that emphasised an "unbroken pedigree" of chivalrous masculinity.⁵¹ This model of 'chivalrous' masculinity, championed by the Romantic knight schema of the Renaissance, is characterised by "Honour tempered by prudence, ambition tempered by compassion for the suffering and the oppressed, love restrained by delicacy and honour toward the beloved",⁵² and signifies a gradual movement away from a hegemonic masculinity characterised typically by violent inclinations, anti-intellectualism, and often-implicit homophobia and racism – the 'macho'.⁵³ Despite this provision of alternative schemas of masculinity, masculinity itself is typically defined against the feminine 'other'. As such this 'chivalrous' ideal becomes defined through a patrolling of the self and controlling of the feminine other, rather than embracing an emotional connection with the feminine. Such a 'heroic' or 'chivalrous' masculinity is characterised as 'self-sufficient, self-contained, and impenetrable', necessitating the control and domination of the feminine other, derived from patriarchal behavioural social codes.⁵⁴ In its denial of the feminine other and assertion of masculine power then, the 'Romantic' knight model becomes a curious combination of the more 'Sensitive New Age Guy' (SNAG) and the macho hegemonic masculinity it seeks to provide an alternative to. The schema of the 'Romantic knight' relied not only on his ability to act 'honourably', but also on his ability to assert his own martial and physical ability when confronted with the weaker feminine other. For the knight to succeed in his designated archetypal role, it was thus necessary for the feminine other to fail.⁵⁵ This model of masculinity is not only privileged in literature throughout the Renaissance and well into the 20th Century, but is also given a trans-historical status, if this masculinity is indeed considered to be an 'unbroken pedigree'. It is taken for granted that this 'heroic' masculinity is essentially male and furthermore that it pervades the way that masculinity is conceived of throughout literature, particularly in medieval historical

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Waller R Newell, *What Is a Man? 3,000 Years of Wisdom on the Art of Manly Virtue* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), xviii.

⁵³ For further discussion on differing schemas of masculinity see Robyn McCallum and John Stephens, "Unbronzing the Aussie: Heroes and Snags in Fiction and Television for Australian Adolescents," in *A Necessary Fantasy?: The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture*, ed. Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 343-45.

⁵⁴ Ruddick, "Preface: Another Key to Bluebeard's Chamber: Ideal and Fundamental Masculinity in the Literature of Fantasy," 2.

⁵⁵ Susanne Fendler, "The Return of the Knight? - Heroic Fantasy and the Romance Tradition," *ibid.*, 104.

fiction, being set in the time period during which the image of the 'Romantic (Christian) Knight' gained cultural traction.⁵⁶ This model of masculinity is, however, highly restrictive and repressive of the male subject, dismissing alternative models of masculinity that are characterised by emotional maturity and/or a lack of physical and sexual aggression. Furthermore, the 'heroic' model of masculinity is typically in a position of privilege or power yet, unlike representations of female experience, this masculinity is rarely challenged or questioned within historical fiction. Thus the normative models of masculinity are as limited and repressive as representations of female experience, although the male protagonist rarely finds the need to resist or fight against the societal models that seek to define him, particularly when situated within a highly patriarchal historical context.

What it would mean, then, to write gender historically is to represent gendered experience within its historical context, so as to thus demonstrate the consequences of resisting socially imposed gendered expectations and, in particular, the repressive and restrictive nature of these expectations. Where fantasy and historical fiction differ, however, is, as discussed in Chapter One, in the lack of an expectation that fantasy adhere to any guidelines of 'accurate' representation as regards female experience, beyond the expectation that there be a 'strong, assertive, independent female' focaliser present within the text as a 'suitable role model' for young people.⁵⁷ The 'historical otherworld' fantasy mode is uniquely positioned to adapt, exaggerate, and manipulate normative modes of 'historical' representation in order to create environments from which it might critique the societal constructs of gender. While it is a genre 'in which diverse roles can be tested',⁵⁸ there are fantasy texts within the genre that fail to challenge or comment upon gendered experience and restrictive societies. Indeed, in many earlier fantasy texts, the image of 'heroic masculinity', based on the mythological archetype of the 'knight proper', appears to be upheld and idealised. This construction not only places the expectation on masculinity to be 'strong' and 'heroic', but also places the expectation upon women to become by comparison 'weak' and in need of rescuing. For example, C.S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian*, one of the instalments of the Narnia series, polarises the respective roles of men and women following the children's rediscovery of Aslan. While the two boys are taken to meet the Prince apparent in preparation for war, the girls are swept away with Aslan and roam the countryside as he frees civilians

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Adults: The Past through Modern Eyes*, 64.

⁵⁸ Fendler, "The Return of the Knight? - Heroic Fantasy and the Romance Tradition," 107.

accompanied by Bacchus and Maenads.⁵⁹ The girls, while accompanying Aslan, do not actually do anything but watch until they and the party

at last, with leaping and dancing and singing, with music and laughter and roaring and barking and neighing, they all came to the place where Miraz's army stood flinging down their swords and holding up their hands, and Peter's army, still holding their weapons and breathing hard, stood round them with stern and glad faces.⁶⁰

Furthermore, earlier during the fight, Peter steps back from his opponent when the opponent trips and falls, to which Edmund responds with 'Need he be as gentlemanly as all that? I suppose he must. Comes of being a Knight *and* a High King'.⁶¹ In this text, the idea of the 'knight proper' is reinforced as an ideal masculinity, a masculinity that not only acts in certain ways towards opponents, but also rids the land of danger before it need threaten the weaker female sex. In comparison with the battle Peter and the army he is leading are facing, the experience of the girls is characterised by frivolity and passivity, led by a not-so-subtle allusion to the Roman god of wine and merrymaking or parties. It is ideologically asserted through this text, that this existence of frivolity and general 'merrymaking' is all that women need and should experience, leaving more serious concerns of conflict and politics to men. Much has been said on Lewis' writings, particularly the *Narnia* series, so I will not say any more on the matter. The previous example was given in order to illustrate the prevalence of the 'knight proper' and 'heroic masculinity' within fantasy texts well into the twentieth century and the lack of resistance these models of gender have, and still can be, met with. In more recent developments within the fantasy genre, these models of masculinity and femininity have been challenged, altered and toyed with, particularly in 'historical otherworld' fantasy for Young Adults to the effect of both drawing attention to the prevalence of these gender constructions and further encouraging the contemplation of gendered expectations within modern society.

The archetype of passive femininity as a counterpart to 'heroic' or hegemonic masculinity is increasingly being challenged and commented upon in modern Young Adult Fantasy texts. This archetypal oppositional construction of gender relies on the privileging of male power over female passivity and, further, designating femininity to

⁵⁹ C.S Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: Fontana Lions, 1980), 161-74.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

the realm of frivolity and, essentially, decoration, with limited opportunities for agency and a coherent selfhood. Attempts to subvert this have varied from attributing more traditionally 'masculine' qualities to female characters, to adopting more poly-focalised narrative forms in order to develop heroines with agentic and coherent selves, to subverting typical hero stories through the submission of the hero's will to that of the heroine. These strategies when combined with the use of a medieval chronotope serve to foreground agentic actions and strong senses of self, and are utilised variously in the two modern Young Adult fantasy texts *Rebel Spring* and *Finnikin of the Rock*.

Morgan Rhodes' *Rebel Spring* is the second instalment of a fantasy series still being written, the third instalment due to be released at the end of 2014 and many of my observations made of this novel regarding constructions of gender may become irrelevant depending on the character development. However, the first two instalments make it clear that traditional societal expectations for gender are being played against each other through a poly-focalised narrative structure that deals with three primary female characters and three primary male characters, with occasional chapters focalised by supporting characters. The effect of this poly-focalisation not only serves to give attention to multiple plots, but also allows for a multifaceted interpretation of both events and characters. This is particularly important when considered in the context of constructions of gendered expectations.

The setting of the novel utilises a medieval chronotope which carries with it notions of gendered expectations for behaviour and honour that operate within the society. Following her forced betrothal to (and imprisonment by) the son of the king of a foreign realm, with whom late father had been at enmity with before being overthrown, it is revealed that Princess Cleiona (hereafter Cleo) was 'defiled'⁶² by another before she was married. While the conversation leading to this revelation is focalised by Cleo, the moment she admits to consenting to her sexual encounter the focalisation shifts to that of Magnus, the prince to whom she is forcibly betrothed. This is ensued by a stark contrast between the opposing expectations for sexual conduct within this pseudo-medieval society. Upon Cleo's admission to consensual sexual activity, Magnus' father states that he has betrothed his son to 'a whore',⁶³ while Magnus reflects on the oddity of the princess admitting to being 'defiled before her wedding night'.⁶⁴ The use of demeaning and devaluing words such as 'whore' and 'defiled' suggests a direct

⁶² Morgan Rhodes, *Rebel Spring* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 34.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

connection between Cleo's expression of her sexuality and her public persona and perceived selfhood. This is further emphasised through the shift away from her as a focalising character to Magnus following her admission, suggesting his perceived dominance and higher value within the society, now that Cleo has given the only part of herself she has to offer. This suggests a cultural commodification of the female body and thus denies female access to a subject position, reinforced by the narrative focal shift. This is contrasted with the social reaction to Magnus, who freely admits to having also engaged in sexual conduct with little if any repercussion. His comment is flippant and receives little attention from the king, nor is his perceived social value or personhood affected as a result of his lack of chastity, as the societal construction of gender allows him to exist outside of his sexuality. Cleo's social value and 'honour', on the other hand, is bound by her sexuality as well as the ability for men to gain exclusive rights to her body. Through this comparison, the narrative contrasts the different value systems placed upon male and female sexuality within a societal context. This view of 'acceptable' femininity is not only challenged through later chapters, but also through the voice of Magnus who refutes the king's dismissal of her as a 'whore' directly. He states that 'Quite honestly, [he does not] see this as much of a crime as you do. In case [the king] is unaware, [Magnus] has not retained [his] chastity either'.⁶⁵ This statement draws attention directly to the disparate expectations regarding sexual conduct applied to femininity and masculinity and further suggests them to be trivial or arbitrary. Furthermore, the continued focalisation of Cleo in later chapters allows her to have a voice and an opinion on the events of her life, with her own desires and ambitions. In this way, the narrative presents her with the opportunity to resist the process of her dehumanisation and devaluation (as 'transgressive' female), allowing her to develop an independent and agentic selfhood.

This scene in *Rebel Spring* also places expectations upon constructions of masculinity, casting it as both cold and unemotional in relationships with the opposite sex, as well as both sexually active and sexually dominant. Magnus, although defending Cleo, is not doing it out of kindness but is rather using the event as an opportunity to test his power and sway over the king.⁶⁶ This is further demonstrated by his decision to continue with the betrothal because

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

Cleo would continue to be a valuable asset during this tenuous time of transition.
A piece of golden power to light the dark path ahead.

Power mattered to his father. And it mattered to Magnus as well ...

Perhaps she didn't realize that this distasteful match was all about *Magnus'* power and nothing else.⁶⁷

Although he hesitates for a moment as to whether or not there have been other sexual partners in Cleo's past, Magnus considers this as more of a curiosity. He does not wish to marry her for her companionship, but rather is interested only in using her as a political piece. What does give him hesitation to continuing with the betrothal is her obvious hatred for him after he has killed a guard she loved by stabbing him in the back. This moment, Magnus understands as 'reflected in her eyes ... [is] the act of a coward, not a prince'.⁶⁸ This is an interesting moment in the construction of masculinity; Magnus' value to others as well as his self-perception is directly determined by his actions in combat. Cleo not only sees him as a coward, but that cowardice is also an aspect of his own self-perception as it is reflected back to him, as well as to other characters, making him the object of despise. The act of despising additionally implies an attitude of moral superiority, creating a complex power dynamic between Magnus and Cleo, each having betrayed the individual codes of honour to which their society holds them and thus compromising their social value. Unlike the feminine code of honour based on sexual history however, the honour codes and construction of masculinity is not so obviously subverted in the narrative. Rather, through the focalisation of both Magnus and Cleo, masculinity as a cold and domineering force is gradually and subtly challenged through Magnus' emotional development and eventual rejection of this socially constructed mode of 'normative' masculinity. It is evident, considering these differing models of gendered honour codes, that *Rebel Spring* utilises a pseudo-medieval setting with highly limiting patriarchal values. This patriarchal power is undermined however through the narrative voice and shifting focalisation, allowing assertions of the self and personal agency, despite the restrictive environment in which Cleo finds herself, as well as the development of an emotional dimension to the character of Magnus outside of the boundaries of traditional hegemonic masculinity.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 37-38. (my ellipsis)

⁶⁸ Ibid., 36-37.

In contrast with *Rebel Spring*, *Finnikin of the Rock* is focalised primarily through the character of Finnikin, a member of the former king's guard in exile. While this appears to be aligned with typical fantasy narratives and, in particular, images of 'knightly' masculinity, pseudo-medieval constructions of masculinity and femininity are challenged through the direct speech of other characters that conflicts with the opinions and interpretations of Finnikin. This challenging is, however, developed throughout the narrative and only becomes clear within the final chapters of the text.

Finnikin of the Rock follows the story of a young man who, following a curse that shut off access to his home kingdom, Lumatere, and the murder of the royal family by an 'imposter king', travels through other nations taking account of other Lumateran exiles and attempting to negotiate land to resettle. He receives word, however, from a temple that one of the novices had a vision that the king, who Finnikin assumes to be his childhood friend, is alive. Throughout their travels, Finnikin begins to form an attachment to the novice Evanjalín, causing the novel to follow conventional archetypes of fantasy romance until the final moments of the text. Upon discovering that Evanjalín is in fact the exiled queen Isaboe and that she, rather than her brother and Finnikin's childhood friend Balthazar, is the heir that survived, Finnikin begins to withdraw from her once the two have succeeded in leading their people back home. While the narrative voice justifies this withdrawal as Finnikin doing his duty and conducting a census of the survivors, the direct speech of those around him cut through this narration, revealing the foundation of his reluctance to see her, forcing him to confront his own assumptions of gender roles and power dynamics. When speaking to his father's former lover, he is asked directly if he would choose to marry the queen 'if [he] were king and she were a mere novice';⁶⁹ Finnikin's response highlights that he would follow his feelings and marry her, but that he is unwilling to enter into a romantic relationship in which he is not the dominant partner. This reluctance exposes the normality of morganatic marriage typical of fantasy where the female partner is married to a man of higher social status, but unable to inherit his titles or property. Thus the construction of the marriage relationship as inherently patriarchal is questioned through the subversion of that model. Finnikin's reluctance to submit himself to a matriarchal marriage is representative of the more traditional romantic 'knightly' masculinity in which patriarchal authority is absolute, yet it is also deemed an unacceptable model to follow through the intrusion of the direct speech of others, disrupting the representation of

⁶⁹ Melina Marchetta, *Finnikin of the Rock* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2008), 347.

Finnikin's thoughts and assumptions as accurate. His friend Lucian jokes that he told the queen Finnikin had been 'flirting with [his] scribe. [His] sweet and passive scribe who lets [him] be in charge', before stating that 'in Lumatere, [they] do whatever [their] queen wants'.⁷⁰ These statements both expose Finnikin's expectations for femininity, as well as the assumptions he holds about his own masculine power and dominance, before subsequently refuting them through the reminder that he is not the lawgiver of the land. Finnikin's expectations for femininity as inherently passive are again revealed through the narrative voice when describing a haircut given by a woman, Tesadora. He reflects that 'it was easy to hate her. There was no gentleness in her hands, no softness in her eyes, despite the beauty of her face'.⁷¹ This comment reveals an assumption of association between beauty and weakness, softness, or mildness – attributes of more traditional femininity. That Tesadora could be both beautiful and rough with him is narrated as confusing and somehow inconsistent in Finnikin's eyes, and is thus presented as justification for his hatred of her. Furthermore, it reveals the underlying assumption that femininity should be synonymous with weak and servile. That he is being dominated by a woman is further cause for hatred. These assumptions are, however, subsequently dismantled through the women's direct speech. Upon being accused of hating all men, Tesadora states:

if you believe that it is all men I hate, you are wrong. I despise those who use force and greed as a means of control. Unfortunately for your gender, such traits are found more often in the hearts of men than women.

This bleak assessment, rather than being a comment on the behaviour of all men, might rather be read as a statement on the assumptions of traditional fantasy archetypes in which masculinity is a controlling force while femininity is subjugated. Thus the direct speech cuts through the assumptions of masculinity that Finnikin has been holding and dismisses them as inappropriate and fundamentally problematic. She finally subverts the traditional archetypal construction of masculinity through wondering what it is about Finnikin

⁷⁰ Ibid., 385.

⁷¹ Ibid., 386.

that stirs the blood of the strongest in [their] land? For she [Isaboe] is the strongest, make no doubt of that ... It is not her youth that keeps her hair from going white from such images of horror ... it is her strength.⁷²

Despite Finnikin's objections citing Isaboe's vulnerabilities, Tesadora's assertions that she is the strongest in the land for being able to withstand horror, darkness, and terror undermines images of traditional constructions of gender and, in particular, suggests that there are more ways than one to have strength. Indeed, these comments directly place Isaboe's mental strength over Finnikin's physical strength, and it is revealed that Finnikin's own inability to cope with the horrific images are the cause of Isaboe's weakness.⁷³ It is this that leads Finnikin to finally submit himself and his own sense of power and dominance to her, reflecting that

she would be the Queen of Lumatere.

But he would be king to her.⁷⁴

Finnikin is forced to re-evaluate his own sense of self, and in particular his expectations for power and dominance both politically and relationally. As such, although his tale ends in marriage, it is not framed within the context of his 'winning' of her. Rather, it is framed within the context of his submission to one stronger than he, allowing her to rule him within a relationship of mutuality, while in her eyes only and only by her decision she deems him her king and her partner rather than her conqueror. This is reiterated throughout the remainder of the novel, beginning with his change of heart:

The memory of a look that spoke to him of power. His. A look that made him want to kneel at the feet of his queen and worship her.

Because it made him feel like a king.⁷⁵

It is in his relationship with her directly, and particularly through his submission to her position, that allows him to feel like a king, his power lying specifically in his ability to

⁷² Ibid., 388.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 393.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 389.

comfort her and bring her out of the despair of the dead – in his ability to be a partner. This is further symbolised in his negotiation with her, stating that

‘If I become king, we declare war on Charyn’ ...

‘Without involving Belegonia’.⁷⁶

The use of the word *we* signifies the idea of partnership and furthermore the inclusion and assertion of Isaboe’s power and involvement in politics. This mutuality is finally expressed in the final agreement to become king:

‘This hand says you spend the rest of your life with me,’ he said, holding out his left hand, ‘and this one says I spend the rest of my life with you. Choose.’ ...

She took both his hands in hers’⁷⁷

The marriage relationship in fantasy is thus redefined as one of mutuality. He gives her the choice – matriarchal or patriarchal – to which she responds with neither. Rather than one spending their life with the other, each will spend their lives together. The ending of the novel thus subverts the archetypal medieval romance, which insists the knight’s role a protector of the weak and especially women,⁷⁸ rather than a reaffirmation of it. Through the subversion of this archetype, the text further questions and exposes underlying societal assumptions for gender dynamics and expectations for the way we conceive of relationships and marriage, as well as issues of political and personal power and strength.

The use of pseudo-medieval societies in fantasy literature often includes the construction of restrictive and limiting gendered expectations within the fantasy society, based upon medieval ideas for masculinity and femininity, where masculinity is a domineering and powerful, established against a soft and yielding femininity. Representing resistance to these constructions within a fantasy setting, does not, however, compromise the integrity of the text nor its ability to create ‘Secondary Belief’. In this way, utilising pseudo-medieval societies within fantasy texts allows for the freedom to interrogate gendered expectations and ideals prevalent within society without the risk of becoming ‘a-historical’ and thus unbelievable. Where historical

⁷⁶ Ibid., 397.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 398. (my ellipsis)

⁷⁸ Fendler, "The Return of the Knight? - Heroic Fantasy and the Romance Tradition," 104.

fiction is limited by historical record and believability, fantasy texts when using historical chronotopes are able to manipulate the 'spirit' of the medieval age without making any claim to accuracy. It is from this position that 'Historical Otherworld Fantasy' is able to manipulate social realities of the past in order to create highly limiting and restrictive social realities within the fantasy text.

This chapter has examined the way in which gendered expectations are able to be interrogated, challenged, and subverted through fantasy texts. This is achieved through various narrative strategies such as shifting focalisation; direct speech undermining the assumptions of the focalising character; or the subversion of archetypal roles, plot structures, and characters. While this may not be representative of all fantasy texts throughout the twentieth century, it is becoming increasingly common throughout modern fantasy fiction for young adults to examine social expectations for gendered power dynamics and to furthermore foreground the resistance to or development from these expectations. In this way, female characters are increasingly finding a voice against the context of restrictive and limiting societies in fantasy fiction, while male characters are increasingly able to be both physical and emotional despite a society that emphasises masculine power and dominance. Thus modern fantasy fiction that utilises pseudo-historical societies foregrounds individual resistance to limiting societal expectations regarding gendered behaviour, and furthermore allows for the believable transcendence or challenging of these expectations by the individual.

Chapter 3

Serfs and Lords: Class Systems and Struggles in Young Adult 'Historical Otherworld' Fantasy Fiction

Fantasy literature has traditionally been interested in and oriented towards representations of the nobility. The Knight Romance of the medieval period, with its preoccupation with courtly love, was focussed on the central knight character as one 'representative of the ruling class who was destined by birth and education to govern and lead. In this position he kept the responsibility to protect and take care of the less fortunate and less mighty'.⁷⁹ These fictions formed the basis for the Romance tradition as it developed into the 19th Century and not only promoted gendered models of behaviour to their audiences as previously discussed, but also promoted the notion of inherent rule and natural order – naturalising the privileging the nobility above that of the peasant class. The focus on the nobility in fantasy fiction continued into the 20th Century, and is still present within modern fantasy fictions for both adults and young adults. There is however an increasing trend within 'historical otherworld' fantasy fiction, that focuses on both the lower and upper classes and, in particular, the class dynamics of the two. Often, in these cases, focalisation by the lower class exposes the upper class as corrupt, inconsiderate and exploitative and thus questions the prevalence and pervasiveness of hierarchical social structures and ideologies of wealth.

This chapter will focus on the representation of class dynamics within modern Young Adult fantasy fiction, and in particular implications that medieval chronotopes have on these representations. In order to explore this issue, I will first discuss what it means to represent class dynamics and struggle within an historical context, utilising both historical commentary as well as considering how this might affect the writing and representation of class within historical fiction. Following this, I will seek to demonstrate the ways in which Fantasy Literature for Young Adults represents class relationships within a pseudo-medieval context. To this end, I will be focussing particularly on the representation of wealth and class in the texts *Rebel Spring* by Morgan Rhodes and *Touch of Power* by Maria Snyder. Through the study of these texts, I hope to demonstrate how 'historical otherworld' fantasy manipulates historical realities of class divisions and relationships in order to question and criticise social hierarchies as they deal with issues of opulence and poverty, and peasant rebellion. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the influence of medieval chronotopes on the representation of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

class, and how this historical context foregrounds agentic acts of resistance to, and attempts to gain equality within, oppressive hierarchical social systems. A central concern in this chapter, then, is with the effect of pseudo-historical societies on the construction and representation of ideologies of identity in Young Adult Fantasy fiction.

Theories of social class, and in particular histories of class relations, are unsurprisingly influenced by the works of Marx and Engels, both of whom claimed that a society's methods for the production and exchange of its means of subsistence not only influenced but also defined the social structure and class relationships of that society.⁸⁰ Thus, in a feudal society, the relationship between the peasant and lord class was defined by their relative roles within the process of production: the peasants on the one hand producing food on independently maintained plots of land, and the nobility on the other, maintaining itself by 'by the politically and legally enforced appropriation of the surplus food (in money or in kind) produced by the peasants on their plots'.⁸¹ Considering this relationship, it is evident that the nobility very much relied on the productivity of the peasant class for their own subsistence and survival. With an increase in peasant mobility, urbanisation, and production specialisation in order to compete in a growing market came the replacement of serfdom with the emerging proletariat class of wagedworkers towards the end of the fifteenth century.⁸² This 'dissolution of serfdom' and increase in peasant mobility as they moved from a rural to an urban setting in search of more 'diverse occupational opportunities',⁸³ resulted in a 'crisis of income' for the previous ruling class of the landed elite, having relied on the agrarian production of food by the peasant class as a primary source of income.⁸⁴ The increasing urbanisation of the society, in combination with the gradual movement away from the feudal model of serfdom created a new social system that theoretically allowed for greater economic mobility. This, in turn, allowed for the emergence of a newer mercantile 'ruling' class within a capitalist model and thus a greater possibility for class mobility while still maintaining an emphasis on productivity by the new lower class of wagedworkers for the sake of profit.

⁸⁰ S. H. Rigby, "Historical Materialism, Social Structure, and Social Change in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2004): 474-75.

⁸¹ Spencer Dimmock, "English Towns and the Transition C. 1450-1550," *Past & Present, 2007 Supplement* 2(2007): 270.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 271-72.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 272.

Representing these two social systems necessitates representing the symbiotic relationship between the ruling and lower classes. In the case of feudalism, in exchange for land and property, peasants pay a feudal levy on the goods they produce. Meanwhile, in the newer capitalist society in exchange for wages, the proletariat produce goods for the mercantile class to sell in markets and export. While ideally each of these systems would work as a mutually beneficial one, there is nevertheless the suggestion of exploitation of the lower class for the benefit of the upper class as well as the national economy. In the feudal system, this exploitation is founded in the 'transfer of *surplus labor* from the producers to the owners of the conditions of production' or the demand from the 'owners of the conditions of production' (landlords in this case) to labour 'over and above' the necessary amount for the producer's survival for the sake of the survival and profit of the owner such as the 'Norman Lord'.⁸⁵ In contrast, where the surplus labour of the feudal state is defined and separate from the necessary labour of the worker in order to directly produce what is needed for his own survival, in the case of the capitalist state this separation between necessary and surplus labour is extinguished. Within this system, 'only a part of the laborer's working day goes to produce the goods whose value pays his wages'⁸⁶ with the remainder of his work contributing to the benefit of the 'buyer of labor-power' and the profit of the business, no longer separating the 'labor of the producer for himself and the labor for his landlord ... by time and space'.⁸⁷ Considering this new state, although it allows for a greater sense of agency, mobility, and opportunity for the working class to advance, it is nevertheless based upon a system of legally enforced exploitation of the lower class by the upper class, which profits from the former's labour.

To write about class historically in fiction, then, is to create a society in which exploitation of the lower classes for the profit and gain of the upper class is not only normalised but also legally constituted and enforced. Given these social realities, and expectations that historical fiction will 'accurately' represent at the very least (if indeed possible) 'how it was to be alive in another age',⁸⁸ it is not surprising that historical fiction deals with these issues of exploitation. While in older texts (such as those

⁸⁵ Rigby, "Historical Materialism, Social Structure, and Social Change in the Middle Ages," 477-78.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 479.

⁸⁷ Ibid. (my ellipsis)

⁸⁸ Sheila A. Egoff, *Thursday's Child: Trends and Patterns in Contemporary Children's Literature* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1981), 4. Miriam Youngerman Miller, "'Thy Speech Is Strange and Uncouth': Language in the Children's Historical Novel of the Middle Ages," *Children's Literature* 23(1995): 71-72.

following the Robin Hood tradition, for example, Pyle's 19th Century *Robin Hood*,⁸⁹ Green's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1956), and Sutcliff's *The Chronicles of Robin Hood* (1950)) these issues constituted a more indirect social commentary, the hierarchy of the society not being questioned or challenged, many modern historical novels not only engage with hierarchical societal structures and class barriers directly but also seek to challenge and criticise them.⁹⁰ While these attempts to challenge hierarchical systems through character interactions with the setting and a refocussing of the narratives on the poorer classes, it must be questioned whether this challenging is believable within an historical fiction context. The fact that the flawed hierarchical social systems leading to the poverty in Pyle's *Robin Hood* are not questioned or challenged⁹¹ suggests that a resistance to such social systems are not as universal as might be suggested through more modern historical texts. In Pyle's case, the fault of the exploitation of the poor by the rich is explained as a result of 'bad men' rather than a social system allowing for such exploitation to take place.⁹² Read in the context of the conservative "Robin Hood" tradition, of which Pyle, Green and Sutcliff are exemplary, a revolutionary attitude directed against the social system, rather than specific people in authority, seems somewhat anachronistic and jarring to the processes of Secondary Belief, as it retroactively applies modern ideologies of socio-economic equality onto societies that would not have espoused such views and indeed are not transcendental. Rather, the imposition of such an attitude as championed by the protagonists of modern historical fiction acts to reinforce the ideological metanarrative of progression, promoting the present as a more advanced and civilised society than the comparatively primitive society being written about.⁹³

In contrast, fantasy literature does not carry the expectations for 'accurate' medieval chronotopes when considering the construction of social attitudes and ideologies of class systems. In many cases, the construction of the class system in fantasy literature is able to be both more rigid and more susceptible to criticism by the protagonists within society than they are in medieval or early-modern historical fiction. In each case, the social class systems of the fantasy society, and the reactions towards them, are exaggerated forms of medievalism with extreme exploitation and repression

⁸⁹ Anne Scott MacLeod, "Howard Pyle's Robin Hood: The Middle Ages for Americans," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2000): 47.

⁹⁰ Rahn, "An Evolving Past: The Story of Historical Fiction and Nonfiction for Children," 17.

⁹¹ MacLeod, "Howard Pyle's Robin Hood: The Middle Ages for Americans," 47.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Stephens, "Contemplating Otherness: Ideology and Historical Fiction," 238-39.

of the lower classes, while the upper classes enjoy extreme comparative opulence. In these cases, the chances for social mobility are limited, despite a late-medieval or early-modern chronotope in which such mobility, historically, was possible if not necessarily common. Furthermore, the fantasy setting allows for otherwise anachronistic elements, such as individual attitudes towards the social order and agentic protagonists within a restrictive society. These themes of class struggle are explored throughout the texts *Rebel Spring* and *Touch of Power*, particularly through the use of medieval chronotopes allowing for the establishment of overly restrictive hierarchical models that might be criticised and challenged through the representation of the individual's navigation of their society.

The concept of the world of Morgan Rhodes' *Rebel Spring* is built and sustained by a system of extreme exploitation and class struggle. In the land of Mytica there are three kingdoms – Auranos in the south, Limeros in the north, and Paelsia between the two. Auranos is characterised as soft, opulent, wealthy and ostentatious; Limeros as hard, unyielding and cruel, while not necessarily any less powerful or influential. Paelsia, situated between the two kingdoms, is poor, weak, and exploited by both kingdoms as well as their own leader until his death at the end of *Falling Kingdoms*. The state of Paelsian poverty is established in the first novel, describing how the kingdom

had been in a state of steady decline for generations ... while their closest neighbors continued to live in luxury and excess, refusing them aid, refusing them even the right to hunt on their overstocked land when it was their fault in the first place that Paelsia lacked the sufficient resources to feed its people ... a century ago, the Paelsian chief of the time had gone to the sovereigns of Limeros and Auranos ... and asked for help ... Prosperous Auranos ... struck an agreement with Paelsia. They subsidized the planting of vineyards over all the fertile farmland in Paelsia – land that could have been used to grow crops to feed its people and livestock. Instead, they promised to import Paelsian wine at favourable prices, which would in turn enable Paelsia to import Auranian crops at equally favourable prices ... After fifty years, the set prices on imports and exports would expire. And expire they did. Paelsians could no longer afford to import Auranian food – not with the falling price of their wine since Auranos was

their only customer and could ruthlessly set the cost, which they did, ever lower and lower.⁹⁴

In this world, there is a serious imbalance between necessary and surplus labour. The wealthy Auranos had caused the Paelsians to be unable to engage in necessary labour to keep themselves alive, forcing them to become dependent upon the generosity of Auranian trade prices. All labour they perform is for the sake of Auranian luxury gained at increasingly cheaper prices, while they are unable to either grow or import enough food and resources to survive. This imbalance is an exaggerated image of the feudal system of the middle ages, characterised by extreme exploitation. Furthermore, through this picture of inter-kingdom relations, class struggle is portrayed as not only societal but universal, and exploitation does not occur only within one realm but extends to a power struggle between different kingdoms. This situation of enforced poverty is taken advantage of by Limeros, again with the more powerful and prosperous nation exploiting the Paelsians poverty, misfortune and hatred for the excessive Auransians in order to garner their moral and political support for their war. Following the takeover of Auranos by Limeros at the conclusion of the first novel, this exploitation of the poor by the wealthy is greatly exacerbated and is the cause for much of the novel's conflict. Rather than improving the state of Paelsian society, King Gaius instead institutes a system of slave labour on the country while maintaining a façade of generous and benign leadership for the sake of easily gaining the support of the conquered Auransians. Upon their first meeting, an escaped rebel from Paelsia, Lysandra, details the current circumstances of their homeland to the focalising rebel leader, Jonas. The conversation that follows draws the class dynamics, and in particular the animosity between the wealthy and poor, into stark relief.

“[The king is] enslaving our people to build his road. Our Paelsian brothers and sisters throughout our land are being forced to work for him against their will – or they’re being murdered for trying to resist.”

“I had not heard of this.” The thought of such an atrocity made him see red. “The king spoke of the Imperial Road in his speech as if it would unite all of Mytica as one people, and Auransians are lapping it up like cream offered to a housecat.”

⁹⁴ Morgan Rhodes, *Falling Kingdoms* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 26-28. (my ellipses)

“Auranians are idiots ... They deserve a king like this forced upon them, but Paelsians do not.”⁹⁵

The poverty of Paelsia has placed them in a vulnerable position from which they cannot escape or effectively resist the power of the wealthier and more militarised Limeros, whose king deems them weak and thus unable to resist a cruel regime. Thus, understanding them as weak, he deems their support of his reign unnecessary and inconsequential, placing them in the position of serfdom and, essentially, forcing them into a system of slave labour. In contrast, the wealthier and prosperous Auranians, although used to an existence of luxury, are nevertheless in a position that necessitates their support of the new regime having controlled and sustained the economy and prosperity of the kingdom. This luxury, however, is cause for derision from the Paelsians, the Auranians having never suffered from hardship or hard work and furthermore being willing to believe the words of their conqueror. This derision is demonstrated through Jonas' likening the people of Auranos to a 'housecat' offered 'cream'. The image created is one of luxury, frivolity and, ultimately, superfluity and extreme domestication. Given this characterisation of the Auranian people, it is suggested that the oppressed lower classes do not see the wealthier as agentic individuals or even as people worthy of their own opinions and thoughts. Rather they have been trained and fattened by a system that keeps them under the control and subject to the whims of a cruel ruler and which they are unwilling and disinclined to object to or even question the character of its perpetrator. This unwillingness to question or understand the realities of the class system to which they are subjected leads Lysandra to the conclusion that the Auranians deserve the oppressive results of the system, rather than the Paelsians who in contrast are able to see and understand plainly the implications of the extreme exploitation of the poor. The conversation between Lysandra and Jonas not only demonstrates the animosity and disparity between the wealthy and the poor of Mytica, but also suggests a broader application to the audience. Through the course of the discussion and particularly through the focalisation by members of the lower class, detailing and representing their experience as an exploited component of society, the text challenges the unquestioning acceptance of hierarchical social structures and in particular naturalised, legally enforced and championed hierarchical structures. Thus through the shift in focalisation away from the

⁹⁵ *Rebel Spring*, 67. (my ellipsis)

upper class, *Rebel Spring* not only breaks from the more traditional focalising characters of fantasy literature but in doing so also offers a critique of hierarchical social structures and foregrounds resistance to politically and socially exploitative societies, thus encouraging the critical assessment of the possible presence of such paradigms within modern society.

Touch of Power by Maria Snyder focuses on the character of the young healer Avry who, as representative of an oppressed class, subverts the traditional metanarratives of class dynamics in fantasy in a similar manner to *Rebel Spring*. As a healer, Avry belongs to a group of people with magical abilities that have become ostracised and persecuted following the spread of a plague throughout the various realms that has wiped out a large percentage of the population. In this ostracised capacity, she belongs to the lowest class of society. Throughout the course of the novel, she inadvertently gets caught up in the politics of the remnants of the kingdoms due to her ability to heal at the expense of her own health and, in some cases, life. Although Avry is able to heal others, her abilities rely on her taking on the injuries and illnesses of those she helps. It is for this reason the healers refused to heal those suffering from the plague – as their bodies were not able to heal fast enough and would eventually succumb to the illness. The story is told through a first person narrative, which serves to emphasise the focus on the lower class and in particular their agency and individuality despite their exploitation, as well as the attitudes held towards those in positions of power and resistance towards the process of exploitation. This clash between the lower and upper classes over the issues of exploitation is demonstrated particularly towards the conclusion of the novel. Following Avry's coerced agreement to heal Ryne, the prince of Ivdel, of the plague, she is willingly captured by Tohon's forces, a king in enmity with Ryne's faction and at war with another, in order to access the prince and sneak him back to those still loyal to him. Once under Tohon's control, the first person narrative voice allows for the exposure of the assumption of ownership the kings and princes make over the lives of their people. The access given through the narration to Avry's thoughts, opinions, and personal resistance to being owned allows for a distinct contrast between her own subjectivity and agency and the external attempts to own and control her, as well as her perspective on these attempts. For example, once under Tohon's control Avry states that 'No one has [her]', and that although she is there, under his military

control, she is not his,⁹⁶ actively denying his ability to own her and further drawing a distinction between control and ownership as well as asserting her ability and control over her own self-definition. Following this she engages in contract negotiation, which she initiated,⁹⁷ again demanding she has direct control over her own actions:

“I need you to heal my subjects as needed – not that it matters to me if they die, but they’re easier to train while alive – to assist with an experiment I’m working on and to promise not to run away”

Other than the experiment, his terms matched what I had been expecting. I addressed them in order. “I’ll heal the sick and injured, but *I* decide who is healed and who can be treated by herbs or time. I want to be in charge of the infirmary. You can’t force me to heal anyone.”

“Agreed.” Tohon wrote down the conditions

...

“What type of experiment? I won’t work with your dead soldiers.” ...

“I’ll explain later.”

“Not if you want me to agree. I won’t hurt anyone.”

“How about you’ll help me with my research as long as *your* tasks don’t harm anyone?”

...

“What do you consider running away?”

“Leaving the castle complex without *my* permission. I don’t wish to lock you up every night or chain you to a chair in the lab. It would become tiresome ... In the highly unlikely event that I’m defeated or dead, you’re free to go. How’s that?”

“How long do I have to stay here?”

“As long as I say. I will be king of all the Realms soon, which will make me *your* king. Then I don’t need a contract.”

More incentive to find a way to stop him.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Maria V. Snyder, *Touch of Power* (Sydney: Harlequin Teen, 2012), 295.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 288.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 296-98. (my ellipses)

This conversation constitutes a battle of wills between a person in power attempting to exploit and own those under him. Yet despite her lack of physical power, Avry nevertheless is still adding conditions to her imprisonment and, in particular, his expectations for her actions. Thus the narrative asserts her own sense of self, and her ownership over her own self, despite attempts by the upper class to own her. Furthermore, this conversation provides insight into the understanding of power and position held by Tohon, and further draws into question issues of entitlement in relation to this understanding. With the first demand, it is evident that Tohon regards his subjects as *his* subjects in every sense of the word; he exercises direct decision-making power over whether they live or die. The only reason he cares for their lives is because, alive, they are easier to deal with and train, rather than because of any concession for them as uniquely individual human subjects. This is further emphasised in his final statement, revealing the belief that kingship denies the need for any need of legal agreements with his subjects but rather they are his to command as he wishes regardless of their own thoughts or feelings on the issue. This concept of ownership, held by Tohon, is again an exaggeration of the ideology of feudalism. Rather than admitting the right to work for themselves and establish a self separate from the lord, Tohon is firmly of the belief that the entirety of a person of the lower class and within his sphere of political influence belongs to him, and so too is their labour, their life, and even their death. His disregard for the personhood of the lower classes is further emphasised through his army of dead soldiers, literally asserting his control over not only his subjects' life but also their death. This is further critiqued through the contrasting positions of Avry and Tohon – Avry being willing to suffer for the sake of the health of others and her horror that Tohon would reanimate the dead,⁹⁹ while Tohon actively uses others' suffering for his own personal gain and profit. Avry's final reflection following his assertion that as '*her*' king he would no longer have to gain her consent or agreement, that it added 'More incentive to find a way to stop him',¹⁰⁰ adds a dissenting voice to this construction of power and class relationships that, had the fantasy followed the more traditional narrative style of privileging the nobility over the peasantry, would not be heard. Thus the narrative voice of *Touch of Power*, its shifted focalisation onto the lower class, and its exaggeration of a feudal attitude to the lower classes, work to critique models of absolute power and the exploitation of the lower classes by the upper

⁹⁹ Ibid., 247-49; 307.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 298.

class. In this way, Snyder's text utilises and adapts medieval chronotopes and social systems, thus questioning the prevalence and presence of exploitative attitudes within society.

This chapter has focussed on how medieval constructions of class dynamics operate within modern Young Adult fantasy texts. Through considering first the implications for medieval feudalism, and in particular the attitudes towards the poor and wealthy that system encouraged, I have attempted to show how this historically charged paradigm of exploitation operates within fantasy texts. While it has not always been the case, more recently fantasy texts have shifted away from the exclusive focalisation by the nobility and instead utilised characters from the lower class, typically cast as inconsequential. This shift in focalisation allows for the perspective of the oppressed and creates a position from which societal hierarchical systems might be critiqued and questioned through providing insight into the effects of such systems on the identity, agency, and selfhood of members of the lower class. In this way, Young Adult fantasy fiction utilises medieval chronotopes, exaggerating class power structures and dismissive attitudes towards the poor and lower classes in order to create restrictive and repressive societies. The construction of these societies and power dynamics are then directly challenged by the individual's navigation through it, thus encouraging the questioning and criticism of hierarchical social structures and their effects upon the individual.

Chapter 4.

The Rebel Rises: Developing Agentic Selfhoods in 'Historical Otherworld' Fantasy

Ideas about subjectivity and identity are closely associated with modern adolescence, a period in an individual's development typically thought of as constituting 'rapid and radical transformation' of selfhood, and as such underpin much of Young Adult Adolescent fiction.¹⁰¹ Subjectivity is the 'sense of a personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct from other selves, as occupying a position within society and in relation to other selves, and as being capable of deliberate thought and action'.¹⁰² This explanation of subjectivity thus describes identity as intrinsically connected with an individual's own self-perception and particularly the perception of their place within a society and their ability to act within and upon that society. Subjectivity is thus 'formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people [... their] consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses constituting the society and culture s/he inhabits'.¹⁰³ This model of subjectivity therefore essentially argues for the influence of others, and the discourses and societal norms of the culture that the individual inhabits, on the construction and formulation of the individual's sense of self. What is important about this construction of identity formulation to my thesis is how ideas about dialogical construction of identity within the context of society are articulated in fiction for young people, focussing in particular on representations of an individual's ability to assert, form, and express their own sense of personal self within a socially restrictive setting.

This thesis has so far examined the how Fantasy Literature for Young Adults utilises historical settings in a similar way to historical fiction, but lacks the associated expectation of historical accuracy. I have attempted to explore this function through examining the two themes of gender and class within the context of fantasy fiction, and in particular how these societal behavioural paradigms are historically affected representations. This chapter will seek to demonstrate how 'history' operates within Fantasy Literature for Young Adults to directly affect the constructions and models of identity presented by the texts. In order to achieve this, I will be utilising the models and ideas of subjectivity or identity presented by Bakhtin and developed by Robyn McCallum, who argue for a model of subjectivity that is dialogically affected and

¹⁰¹ McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, 3.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

determined, and demonstrating how this operates especially within the context of 'historical' fantasy fiction. In particular, this chapter will attempt to draw out the implications of 'historically charged' societal models, such as gender and class structures as explored in previous chapters, and demonstrate how these affect the construction of selfhood, identity and agency within the text. Through this analysis I hope to demonstrate one of the more complex functions of 'historical' societies within Young Adult Fantasy Fiction and so intimate the subgenre's value to modern audiences, as well as to contribute to the ongoing debate concerning modern fantasy literature and suggest a critical re-examination of the 'sword-and-sorcery' genre.

In 'Discourse of the Novel', Bakhtin argues that an individual's subjectivity is formed through the selective appropriation and assimilation of the ideological discourses within their own social context.¹⁰⁴ In practice, this means that an individual finds their identity and position within society through the adaptation of socially and ideologically charged linguistic modes through which they find a way to express their 'self'. The selectivity involved within this process suggests that the cultural and social discourse of any given era or society is in no way heterogeneous, rather within any culture there is an intersection of differing ideological positions and social groups each with their own languages and linguistic codes. These differing language systems cohabit within the same society and are differentiated according to various stratifying factors such as level of education, country, generational group, and socio-economic level.¹⁰⁵ Considering this socio-ideological nature of language, it is a logical conclusion that individuals might define their own positions within a society discursively, that is, through language, and that discourse might also shape the ways in which individuals define and are defined by others. In this way, language use has wide-reaching implications for structuring socio-economic and socio-political hierarchies within societies, particularly with regards to societal constructions of gender and class, and further indicates how societies impact the formation of an individual sense of self. This is further indicated through Bakhtin's discussion of the 'authoritative discourse' and 'internally persuasive' discourse, the first being discourses such as political, religious, or moral and thus external to the individual's consciousness and enacted upon it. 'Internally persuasive' discourse, on the other hand, is internally defined and separated

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 102; M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 341-42.

¹⁰⁵ "Discourse in the Novel," 290-91.

from societal authority and acknowledgement.¹⁰⁶ Initially there is no separation between the authoritative and societally influenced, authoritative discourse and that of the internally persuasive discourse; however as the development of 'one's own discourse' as distinct from, while partially adapted from, the discourse of others comes into conflict with the authoritative discourse, there occurs a development of individual consciousness and thus a personal identity and sense of self.¹⁰⁷ Thus, both the ideological discourses of society and direct contact with the expressed perceptions of other selves as enacted upon the individual, affects the development of personal and individual identity.

The implications of these ideological discourses and their interaction with the individual discourse, insofar as they contribute to the construction and development of an individual identity, is that the more overt the societal ideologies are, the greater the effect they will have on the construction of identity. If these ideologies are characterised as more restrictive for the individual, the identity will either be subsumed with ideological force into the broader cultural identity or alternatively encourage the development of a strong, coherent identity distinctly separate from other selves and as such considered transgressive to the wider social context. Within the context of historical fiction, the believable construction of transgressive identities is extremely unlikely, given expectations of historical 'accuracy'. In the cases where transgressive identities are believably formulated, that is their 'anachronism' is justified, the cultural acceptance of the individual is similarly extremely unlikely, because this would break with internal consistency of the fantasy and hence with 'Secondary Belief'. The effect of this breach of Secondary Belief is that it not only undermines the identity being constructed but also the text itself, discouraging true reader engagement and the ability for the text to challenge or question cultural and societal assumptions. Thus, it diminishes the ability for the text to create meaning. If the expectation of historical accuracy is discounted, however, 'anachronistic' transgressive identities do not create such problematic consequences for the meaning of a text. Rather in the case of a genre such as fantasy, which is characterised by the exploration of the impossible¹⁰⁸ and is thus an ever-changing genre subject to constant invention, socially transgressive

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 341-42; McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, 103.

¹⁰⁷ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 345; McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, 103.

¹⁰⁸ Hunt, "Introduction: Fantasy and Alternative Worlds," 2-3; Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*, 63.

identities are not so opposed to the sustenance of Secondary Belief. Rather, given the 'impossible' nature of fantasy fiction, identities that develop to be transgressive within the context of socially and individually restrictive societies, and opposed to the society's restrictive nature, are plausible within the context of fantasy fiction so long as their development is demonstrated – having no historical 'reality' with which to compare. The effect of these believable constructions of identity, characterised as combative with their society's norms, is the undermining and interrogation of these norms and, furthermore, the textual assertion and foregrounding of the development of agentic subjectivities against the context of restricted personal liberties and freedoms. The development of selfhood against the context of societal restriction is explored throughout Young Adult fantasy fiction particularly through the use of gendered social expectations and class hierarchies in the construction of the fantasy society. I will now endeavour to show, having suggested in Chapters 2 and 3 that history is used to construct restrictive and limiting societal expectations regarding class and gender, how the concept of individual resistance and so an agentic subjectivity is explored and asserted against these limiting societal expectations throughout Young Adult Fantasy, focussing on the three texts *Finnikin of the Rock*, *Rebel Spring*, and *Touch of Power*.

As discussed in Chapter 2, medieval schemas of gendered behavioural expectations persist within representations of 'historical' societies in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction. While these more archaic societal values persist as characteristic of Fantasy Worlds however, the narrative styles and focal characters of the fictions create a space in which these values might be considered critically and subsequently undermined through the construction of personal individuality and resistant attitudes in the individual characters. This is not the only method of critiquing prevalent gendered discourse and attitudes present within both the fictional and modern society. Throughout fantasy fiction male and female characters subjected to restrictive societal standards of behaviour not only maintain resistant attitudes towards their perceived 'place' but also actively oppose societal expectations of them through either their speech or physical behaviour. When combined with their oppositional attitudes towards societal codes of behaviour their actions and thoughts come to represent an agentic and self-possessed selfhood that stands in ideological opposition to societal attempts at control, definition, and ownership of the individual and their identity. Furthermore, while these such deliberate actions do subsequently place the individual outside of society, characterising them as transgressive, the possibility for change of the world and

its values is contingent with the acceptance of these alternate subjectivities rather than their rejection. Whereas in historical fictions an understanding of historical progression of events and societal attitudes causes transgressive subjectivities to represent an abject and rejected state, the lack of expectations associated with represented fantasy societies causes these subjectivities to occupy positions of hope, rather than pessimistic resignation to a life of abjection, and as indicative of the possibility for future societal change. Where historical narratives are closed and have limited possibilities for believable societal and individual development on account of their settings, fantasy narratives are distinctly open, lacking the pretext of historical context.

As I argued in Chapter 2, shifting focalisation amongst multiple characters, such as in *Rebel Spring*, lends itself to the dialogic construction of subjectivities. This is demonstrated through the construction of differing gendered models in the primary female characters of Cleo and Lysandra, one a princess and the other a poorer rebel. Similarly, models of masculinity are presented against each other in the characters of Magnus and Jonas, in particular through Magnus' perception of other male characters within his immediate social context.

The two femininities of Cleo and Lysandra are markedly different in their resistance to patriarchal attempts at control. Where Cleo resists societal attempts to dehumanise her as a 'fallen woman' through her attitude, insisting on her inherent personhood, and through focalised narration, Lysandra actively opposes the gender role to which she is expected to comply. In the introduction of Lysandra to the *Falling Kingdoms* series she is characterised as gifted with a bow and arrow and, in particular, distinctly combative in nature and oppositional to the domestic expectation touted by her society:

She'd had to beg her brother to share his knowledge of archery, but he finally relented. It was unusual for a girl to be taught how to use weapons. Most believed girls were meant to cook and clean and look after the men.

Which was ridiculous. Especially since Lysandra was a natural at this ...

Lysandra had always caused her mother grief by not being an acceptable daughter who did acceptable things. Lysandra was accustomed to not fitting in with her friends, who couldn't understand her fascination with making arrows

until she got blisters on her fingers or staying outside until her nose burned so red it practically glowed in the dark.¹⁰⁹

Escaping from her burning village, she later dresses in boy's apparel, though the reason for this is unclear – it might be assumed to be for the sake of ease of movement – and joins the rebel forces. This idea of the 'fighting' woman who dresses like a boy in order to act freely within a society that 'seek[s] to repress and limit femininity'¹¹⁰ is not an uncommon model for heroines in more recent fantasy. Indeed, it is a common enough motif for McCallum and Stephens consider texts oriented towards such heroines as a different subgenre – labelling it 'feminist sword-and-sorcery fantasy'.¹¹¹ Typically however, these heroines' engagement in conventionally masculine domains such as war and conflict has been cause for some to argue that such narratives often fail to interrogate traditional gender norms, reinscribing patriarchal masculinity instead.¹¹² While there is some merit in this argument, I find it no less agentic that heroines of fantasy novels choose to take this path. In the case of Lysandra, she is demonstrably following her natural inclinations, finding the expectations placed upon her as a girl to be limiting to her own selfhood and denying of her talents and interests. In such a case, although she is acting 'boy-like' to her social setting, she does not pretend to be a boy – unlike heroines from other areas of 'feminist sword-and-sorcery fantasy' she does not hide her femininity but rather elects to redefine the model of femininity that suits her own perception of herself. This is particularly demonstrated in her first meeting with Jonas, his first sight of her being as follows:

A girl stood at the entrance to the alleyway. As she lowered her bow ... he noticed that she wore the tunic and trousers of a boy. Her dark hair hung in a thick braid down her back.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Rhodes, *Rebel Spring*, 2-4. (my ellipsis)

¹¹⁰ Victoria Flanagan, *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 100.

¹¹¹ John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, "An Affirmation of Civilization against Barbarism: Arthur and Arthurianism in Medievalist and Quasi-Medieval Romance," in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 145-48.

¹¹² Flanagan, *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film*, 101-02.

¹¹³ Rhodes, *Rebel Spring*, 63. (my ellipsis)

Her appearance, although wearing 'boys' clothes, does not seek to mask the fact that she is a woman. As such, it represents the new amalgamated identity Lysandra has constructed for herself that incorporates both her femininity and her more 'masculine' traits and, furthermore, she does not seek to conceal this identity. Considering this attitude, it would be apt to consider fantasy heroines that follow this path not so much as 'boy like' as just 'un-feminine' according to gendered assumptions of their society. What is particularly noticeable about her rejection of 'traditional' femininity as espoused by her society is that, although her own construction is 'transgressive', she is nevertheless accepted while not necessarily understood. While Lysandra's mother is grieved by her 'unfeminine' daughter, it is nevertheless suggested that they still share a close relationship. Additionally, Lysandra is not the only girl to join the rebel forces, creating this 'militaristic' unit as resolutely ungendered and oppositional to the patriarchal society of Mytica. The rebel group, and by extension the narrative, is far more focussed on the class struggle and the fight for freedom than the gender of who is able to fight. Furthermore, Lysandra has friends, though they do not understand her inclinations, and while she does not feel as though she 'fits in', these friendships suggest a broader general acceptance of her selfhood by her immediate social context. In contrast, Cleo's femininity is much less combative – rather in many cases it can appear physically passive. As discussed in Chapter 2 however, she is nevertheless defiant and self-determined within her own mind and enacts her agency and subjectivity through her refusal to be defined by external factors and her perceived sexual nature, while still affected by them. In such a way, *Rebel Spring* constructs differing models of gender alongside each other through its shifting between focal characters, which creates a space in which individual formations of subjectivity are championed and defined against the expectations of limiting societies.

Subjectivity in *Finnikin of the Rock* is explored through the assertion of the Queen's implied subjectivity against Finnikin's own sense of self. As discussed in Chapter 2, the text is keenly interested in the notion of power and gender, and in particular Finnikin's assumptions of his own power and role within a romantic relationship as a man. This is the primary construction of his subjectivity throughout the novel – demonstrating it as dominant and exercising ownership over the feminine other. At various points throughout the novel he repeatedly questions the companion he knows as Evanjalín about whether or not she 'belongs to the king' to which she always

responds 'Yes ... I belong to the King'.¹¹⁴ What is not revealed to Finnikin at this point is that, as Queen, she has the right to choose who is 'her' king and so subverts his conception of male ownership of the female body as well as the construction of himself as in a position of dominant masculine power. His eventual decision to acknowledge her as having influence and ownership of him and his body in equal measure of his ownership of her within the context of marriage towards the end of the novel stands as representative of the development into an intersubjective subjectivity. This means that Finnikin is not only aware of his own place within society, as well as having a strong conception of his own selfhood, but further has come to recognise the selfhood of Evanjalín/Isaboe as well as his own selfhood in relation to her selfhood. In this way, ideals of patriarchal models of masculinity and femininity are interrogated and subverted through the assertion of Evanjalín's selfhood and subtle resistance to be owned exclusively by an 'other'. Through the use of limiting gendered models of subjectivity, the text promotes the assertion of selfhood and agentic actions by the individual and, furthermore, the acknowledgement of the selfhood of other 'selves' in direct relationship to the individual self.

Considering the treatment of societal expectations for gendered behaviour, both *Finnikin of the Rock* and *Rebel Spring* utilise traditional models of patriarchal society in order to assert the selfhood and agentic possibilities for the individual acting within a profoundly limiting society. Furthermore, in doing so the texts also seek to subvert the gendered paradigms of behaviour through this assertion of selves resistant to typical constructions of masculinity, femininity, and the typical power dynamics present within the relationship between each of these social constructs. The subversion of these constructs in turn develops an a-historical space in which individuals are represented as able to define their own selfhood as well as their own perception of their self and other selves, as well as their place within society.

Similar to gendered constructions within fantasy societies, the models of class hierarchies as discussed in Chapter 3 are drawn from medieval ideas of ownership of the lower class and their labour by the upper classes for the profit and gain of the upper class. This system not only demonstrates a paradigm of extreme repression of the lower class, but also has further implications for the construction of the subjectivities of individuals from these classes. Again, within the context of the fantasy, the characters constrained by the constructed class system are able to critique the system from within

¹¹⁴ Marchetta, *Finnikin of the Rock*, 249-50. (my ellipsis)

the novel without undermining the maintenance of secondary belief due to a comparatively 'modern' perspective on society. This critique is explored throughout various works of fantasy fictions, particularly through the more recent trend of shifting focalisation onto characters representative of the lower class. In this way, fantasy fiction has increasingly critiqued social hierarchies and, through this critique, has emphasised the construction and assertion of individual subjectivity against attempts at control and ownership over this subjectivity exercised by other selves, typically represented by members of the upper class. This process is demonstrated particularly throughout the two young adult fantasy novels *Touch of Power* and *Rebel Spring*.

As already discussed in Chapter 3, *Touch of Power* is particularly interested in the concept of class struggle and the ownership and control of the bodies and selves of the lower class by the upper class for the purpose of upper class gain of profit and power. Through the use of first person narration by the character Avry, this struggle of selfhood is established against a setting of political manoeuvring by the upper class and the use of lower class bodies to the effect of exerting and gaining personal power. This struggle is demonstrated particularly through Avry's interactions with Tohon, previously discussed in Chapter 3. Although subject to his control due to her lack of physical strength and political power, her identity is coherent and self-perception established enough that she is able to deny him ownership or control over her selfhood. This is particularly emphasised through the use of the first person narration, which provides exclusive access to her thoughts and understanding of her own self, as well as the assertion of her own sense of selfhood against attempts at external definition and affectation. Being representative of the lower class, this construction of selfhood and its assertion against attempts at control by the upper class thus promotes a selfhood that resists hierarchical and cultural repression, as well as societal pressures on the individual's conception of their own agency and self.

While one of the primary focal points of critique of restrictive class structures in fantasy fiction is the repression of the lower classes and their resistant attitude towards this repression, *Rebel Spring* adds a secondary consideration to the way that the upper class carries with it expectations of behaviour that are especially restrictive to its own members, in conjunction with the issue of gender. The effect of restrictive class structures on the subjectivities of individuals is interestingly contrasted again through the two characters of Lysandra and Cleo. Where Lysandra actively engages in rebellious activity against hierarchical oppression, Cleo is far more constrained by expectations

placed upon her behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 2, her expression of her sexuality is highly policed due to her gender – however the perception of her as a fallen woman is also affected by her class:

For a *royal* princess, even one from a fallen kingdom, to openly admit that she'd been defiled before her wedding night...

Well, it simply wasn't something that happened. Or, at least, it wasn't something anyone admitted to as publically as this.

The king shook his head slowly. "Whatever are we to do with you now?"

Magnus noticed that Cleo's fists were clenched by her sides. Through all this, her eyes had stayed dry, her expression haughty despite her obvious fear. She did not cry, nor did she fall to her knees and beg forgiveness.¹¹⁵

It is significant that Cleo's actions were within the context of her being a princess, and her deciding to engage in sexual activity cause for her to become 'dirty' and thus devalued – her value and purpose being directly questioned by the king. Within her societal context then, her value and personhood is intrinsically connected to her 'virtue' due to a combination of her gender and social class. Her lack of virtue is even implicitly connected with the fall of her kingdom, suggesting that the behaviour of its royal class has direct implications for the success and strength of a kingdom. This construction of behavioural expectations for class suggests that Cleo's selfhood and identity has been consumed by her place within society as both a woman and a royal rather than as an individual, a construction heavily based in medieval societal paradigms. Her personal resistance to this and the assertion of her selfhood, however, is represented through her body language. Despite facing severe consequences for her actions, she refuses to apologise for her own sexuality suggesting an assertion of self-ownership rather than societal ownership of her body and selfhood. In doing so she denies others the right to own her body and further asserts her own selfhood, further resisting the societal mechanisms that would have her identity consumed within her gendered and hierarchical position. Despite this ideological assertion of her own selfhood against a restrictive position within society, she lacks the extensive freedom Lysandra comparatively possesses to physically act against repressive social forces. Rather than literally fighting with a bow and arrow, Cleo seeks to manoeuvre within the palace,

¹¹⁵ Rhodes, *Rebel Spring*, 33-34. (italics added for emphasis)

seeking out Gaius' weaknesses that she might subtly manipulate to affect her freedom. In doing so, she asserts her 'transgressive' selfhood against the context and expectations of her society. Through the shifting focalisation between Lysandra and Cleo, the text presents differing models of agency and selfhood as affected by class while nevertheless emphasising a free, coherent, self-possessed and agentic selfhood. Thus the historical paradigms working within the society of *Rebel Spring* act to foreground the formation and assertion of individual selfhood in the face of oppression and restriction.

Subjectivity is constructed dialogically within society, particularly within the context of social attempts to define and perceive the self of an individual. In fantasy fiction for Young Adults this is a prominent thematic concern, particularly as regards the development of a coherent, self-defined and agentic selfhood despite the influence of restrictive and oppressive social structures. In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the active involvement of historical social paradigms in affecting the representation of these agentic and coherent selfhoods within fantasy fiction, and in particular the promotion and assertion of these selfhoods to its young adult audience. In this way pseudo-historical settings in fantasy societies serve to promote the development of individual identity and a coherent and self-possessed selfhood despite societal and social repression such as that exercised through historically charged representations of class and gender.

Conclusion

This thesis has endeavoured to demonstrate that the textual function of pseudo-medieval social structures in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction is more than a mere adult yearning for simplicity, a time in which character motivations and actions are portrayed as unambiguous while good and evil are polarised. More than operating in this level of comfort, pseudo-medieval societal structures as they occur in fantasy fiction are often exaggerated, causing overly oppressive and repressive realities for the individual.

In Chapter One, I explored what it means to invoke a sense of the past in fantasy fiction, and how this differs from historical fiction. Apart from the obvious case of there being the presence of 'otherworldly' elements such as magic, the primary difference between these two genres is the association of certain expectations the genre carries with it. While both genres are essentially interested in creating an unfamiliar world to the audience while simultaneously assuming their familiarity; historical fiction carries with it the expectation of authenticity – claiming that the events *could* have happened within a historical context intrinsically connected to the present world of the reader. In the case of 'historical otherworld' fantasy fiction however, there is no reference to consensus reality and thus no expectation of 'accuracy'. As such, while this type of fantasy fiction invokes a sense of time and place, drawing upon the pretext of an historical time period, there is room for the manipulation of historical realities without the breaking of Secondary Belief.

Chapters Two and Three examined how fantasy societies might be influenced by pseudo-medievalism, and focussed specifically on social constructions of gender and class. These chapters first examined how gender and class might be written historically, and what 'historical' constructions of these social structures looked like, before exploring the means and result of their application to the fantasy setting. Through close textual study, it became clear that the repressive elements of these social structures are exaggerated within a fantasy setting. It is this very fantasy context however, given the absence of expectations for accuracy, that allows for the believable challenging and resistance to societal repression of the individual.

Chapter 4 built upon the previous three chapters and was primarily concerned with the effect of repressive societies upon individual selfhood and agency. It first determined how subjectivity is formed dialogically, in relation to social pressures, society, and interactions with and the perception of other selves. Given this

understanding, the chapter then returned to the issues of gender and class, and examined how characters in fantasy fiction are placed in positions of resistance to social pressures. What became evident through textual example was that, while there were highly restrictive and repressive societal pressures placed upon the individuals, the emphasis of the narration was based in the assertion of the focal character's own self-perception. As such, the fantasy texts utilised pseudo-medieval societal models in order to emphasise a self-possessed and self-defined identity despite external pressures and other selves attempting to influence and own the individual's selfhood. Furthermore, this self-possessed identity is not represented as abject despite its resistance to restrictive societal norms. Rather, because of the fantasy setting there is room for resistant attitudes without any expectation for how the society will react. As such, a self-defined selfhood is represented as a position of hope for positive change in society, rather than one of rejection. There is possibility in fantasy, where historical fiction is bound by record. In this way, the function of pseudo-medieval societies in 'historical otherworld' fantasy literature is primarily to advocate the development of self-possessed and agentic selfhood despite situations of adversity. This is particularly significant as it is this model of subjectivity and identity formation that represents the toolset presented to young adult readers for the interpretation and participation within their own social context. Considering this function, only briefly explored through this thesis, it is evident that 'historical otherworld' fantasy is greatly overdue for re-evaluation and a return to academic discourse.

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