

Situating Crossover Fiction in Children's Literature

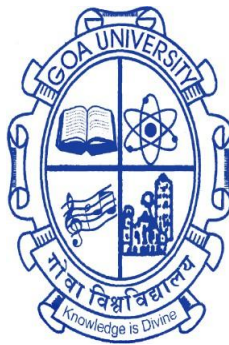
A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

IN SHENOI GOEMBAB SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

GOA UNIVERSITY



By

Ibha Gupta

Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature

Goa University

Goa

June 2024

DECLARATION

I, Ibha Gupta, hereby declare that this thesis represents work which has been carried out by me and that it has not been submitted, either in part or full, to any other university or institution for the award of any research degree.

Place: Taleigao Plateau.

Date:

Ibha Gupta

CERTIFICATE

We hereby certify that the above Declaration of the candidate, name of the candidate is true and the work was carried out under our supervision.

Professor K. Sripad Bhat (Guide)
Rtd. Professor and Former Dean
Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature
Goa University

Professor Nina Caldeira (Co-Guide)
Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature
Goa University

Acknowledgements

After completing the research for this thesis, writing this page has been the most significant undertaking and I hope I'm able to communicate the depth of the sincerity and appreciation that I feel in my heart.

Firstly, to my guide Professor Bhat, who has been a fixed north star in these tumultuous years, I extended my deepest gratitude. His invaluable advice and support, his sense of humour that lightened anxious days, and his immeasurable patience have all made the successful completion of this thesis possible. I also thank Prof. Nina Caldeira for her support and encouragement as co-guide.

Thank you also to Prof. Rafael Fernandes and Prof. Prema Rocha who, as part of the DRC, gave me timely suggestions and guidance, and helped polish the various drafts into an actual thesis. Their approving nods and smiles, over the years, have come to mean the world to me.

I am also grateful for the encouragement I received from my dear friend and mentor, Prof. Anjali Chaubey. Her openness, kindness, and genuine empathy are truly special and I've been lucky to have been able to depend on a quick chat with her to clear my doubts and confusions.

I would like to formally acknowledge the impact Prof. Kiran Budkuley has had on my academic life. As my guide for the MA thesis, she lit my passion for research and her words of encouragement, the opportunities she brought my way, and the

wisdom she imparted in my early years have left a lasting impression. Thank you for always being a ray of hope and inspiration as I undertook this gargantuan project.

I will be remiss without mentioning the camaraderie and genuine friendship I shared with my former Goa University colleagues Kshama, Shourya, Schubert, Lorraine, Nafisa, and Poorwa who kept reminding me that I could actually do this.

The institutional support during these years was instrumental in helping me achieve my goal. I am grateful for the Goa University Research Studentship that funded my initial years as a full-time scholar. I am also thankful for all the administrative assistance provided by the office staff of the English program and the knowledgeable staff of ARPG and the Library who ensured smooth running of my registration and final submission.

To my friends – Vaidehi, Sanjana, Anthea, Shrey, Prateek, Esha, Aveek, Rahul D, Rahul P, Noaman, Nadia, and Rochelle. I thank them for staying by my side through the years of fears, mistakes, triumphs, and celebrations that were all part of this process and for seeing my worth as a scholar on the days I didn't.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the infinite love and boundless gratitude I have for my family. Thanks to my father, Vivek, for being my best friend, my advisor, my savior, and my compass. Thanks to my mother and the queen of my heart, Neelima, for showing unconditional love and tenderness, even at ungodly hours

in the night when I sat up writing chapters. Thanks to my baby sister Kuhu, who is my hero and my muse. Thanks to my parents-in law, Rohit and Jaysu, for believing in me. And thanks to my spouse Aayush, who has empowered me, coddled me, protected me, and pushed me to achieve this degree. Without them, these pages would still be entangled yarn in my brain.

Lastly, I would like to thank every adult reader out there, who like me read these children's books and saw them for what they were – everlasting, brilliant, powerful pieces of literature that brought joy, hope, and courage into our lives.

Dedicated to Vivek, Neelima, Kuhu, and Aayush who embody all that this thesis stands for – always
nurturing the childlike heart within us!

Dedicated also to Veer – my son, born at the end of this journey but the beginning of everything hence.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Introducing the term Crossover Fiction.....	1
1.2	The Research Gap.....	6
1.3	Delimiting the Scope.....	11
1.4	Introducing the Primary Texts.....	12
1.5	Outlining the Methodology.....	16
1.6	Relevance of the Thesis.....	18
1.7	Conclusion.....	18
2	Literature Review	22
2.1	A Brief Overview of Children’s Literature.....	22
2.2	Situating Crossover Fiction.....	31
3	Why Adults Read Crossover Fiction: A Narrative Analysis	44
3.1	Introduction.....	44
3.2	Thematic Preoccupations.....	45
3.2.1	Death as Positive, Natural, and Inevitable.....	54
3.2.2	The Ambiguity of Love.....	61

3.2.3	The Reluctance of the Chosen One.....	66
3.2.4	Parent- Child Relations and Finding a Chosen Family.....	71
3.3	Examining Endings.....	78
3.4	Considering Character.....	87
3.5	Languages of Childhood and Adulthood.....	112
3.6	The Appeal of Fantasy Genre.....	132
4	The Adult Reader of Crossover Fiction	149
4.1	Introduction.....	149
4.2	Making a Case for the Adult Reader of Crossover Fiction.....	150
4.3	The Rise of Children’s Literature.....	162
4.4	Conclusion.....	174
5	Finding Kinship – Conclusion and Future Directions	181
6	Bibliography	192

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introducing the term Crossover Fiction

The latter half of the 19th century is often referred to as the Golden Age of children's literature in academic parlance (Sorby 96). Some of the biggest, most enduring children's classics like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *The Wizard of Oz* were published in this era as children's books became a recognised presence. This century also experienced an increased interest in the condition of childhood and the well-being of children and expanded on the understanding of children as a separate market entity which lead to a proliferation of child-specific texts exclusively meant for young readers to learn from or enjoy¹. The presence of children's literature continued to grow, yet, in the initial decades of the twentieth century, these texts remained in the realm of the popular and in the larger context of literature, these books remained on the margins of literary discussion and theory. This was not due to lack of merit, but rather because of the perception that all children's texts were formulaic, overtly didactic, or meant for frivolous entertainment. Children's literature was seemingly distinguishable from 'adult literature' due to the alleged lack of seriousness and literariness.

Nonetheless, with the influence of margin-focussed theories like Feminism, Post-Colonialism, Cultural Studies, and Postmodernism that came about in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties, children's literature too rose to prominence in the academia and there have since been many debates, deliberations and theorizations upon definitions, form, functions, and

¹ Heywood (2001) provides an excellent summary of the changing definitions and perception of Western childhood in the book *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West From Medieval to Modern Times*

aesthetics. Through the eighties and nineties, the work of early theorists like Lissa Paul, Perry Nodelman, Peter Hunt, Jacqueline Rose, Karen Lesnik-Oberstein, Jack Zipes, and Maria Nikolajeva led to the beginning of a vibrant, robust body of scholarship that specifically deals with children's books and media. Various esteemed awards like the Newbery Medal, the Caldecott, and the Carnegie were already established and encouraged further innovation in the field. Organizations like the Children's Literature Association, the American Library Association, Children's Book Council and the International Board on Books for Young People led focussed research and development of children's literature. Finally, the increase in commercial interest by prominent publishing houses and media conglomerates, all added to making children's literature increasingly mainstream.

O'Sullivan, in his introduction to the history of children's literature, summarizes the major historical changes in Western society

“...very briefly, [as] the evolution of the middle-class, nuclear family, with the separation of family and work and the liberation of children from working life; the perception of childhood as a phase of life differing fundamentally from adult existence...; the definition of children as objects of serious responsibility in need of protection and education; the emergence of a class of parents who could afford to invest in their children; the development of a school system and an increased demand for educational books for children; and changes in the literary market...” (7)

which ultimately lead to commercial interest in producing more and more children's books. Despite this growth, the ontological status of children's literature remained in binary opposition to adult literature (and by extension, adult readers). What was read as children was not meant to be taken forward into adulthood, and anything remotely childish or child-like was still

considered mediocre and undemanding when compared to the adult canon. This perception, however, began to be challenged when adults started becoming active readers/consumers of children's literature.

By the turn of the twentieth century, as the new millennium set in, interesting trends emerged. In the year 1997-98, Phillip Pullman's *The Subtle Knife*, the second book of his trilogy *His Dark Materials*, was released. As was, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling, the first in the *Harry Potter* series. Though specifically categorized and marketed as children's books with child protagonists, both these texts found immense popularity with an adult readership, as evident in their release as two separate editions – the adult and children editions. What was of special note was that the two editions were identical. There was no change in the narratives. No additions were made to the adult narrative to make it more palatable to an audience considered traditionally mature and serious. On the other hand, there were no subtractions from the children's editions to make them more 'age-appropriate' or simplified. Which, in essence, meant that in modern western culture, where childhood and adulthood were often professed to be contrary, mutually-exclusive states of existence, children and adults were reading, appreciating, and gaining value from the same story.

In the same year, the term 'cross-writing' was first put forth by Mitzi Meyers and U.C Knoepfmacher, in an essay titled *Cross-writing and the Reconceptualising of Children's Literature Studies* published in the Yale journal, *Children's Literature* (qtd. in Cullinan 207). There were also reports in publishing journals and magazines, with the British media referring to a 'crossover phenomenon', describing books that "blur(ed) lines between children and adult categories" (qtd. in Falconer 48). In the September 1997 issue of the American trade news magazine, *Publisher's Weekly*, a featured article titled *Breaking the Age Barrier*, interviewed the heads of various publishing houses and bookstore owners, outlining the strategies, resources and efforts they were investing in marketing "crossover titles" (Rosen 28). The same

article also featured an annual list started by Children's Book Council which offered "110 Children's Books That Adults Will Enjoy and Buy for Themselves" (Rosen 30). And through all these terms, 'Crossover Fiction' rose to prominence.

The term 'crossover' is not new. The word has been used in several definitions. The most popular usage is for when two distinct fictional worlds or timelines meet, and their narratives converge to form one story. This type of crossing over can most often be found in screenwriting and screenplays, comic books, anime and other serialized fiction. 'Crossover' can also refer to works that defy genre-specific expectations, or integrate differing styles, especially in music with categories like pop-rock, RnB-hip hop, and rock-opera amongst others. Or it can be used as a term for when authors crossover their characters in different works, for example Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

In children's literature scholarship, however, Crossover Fiction has become a distinctive area of study and research. It is used to refer to books that crossover from the standpoint of readership – adult books to child readers, children's books to adult readers or a sort of all-ages literature or *allalderslitteratur* that can be enjoyed by differently aged readers at once. A simple, working definition of Crossover Fiction is that it refers to a work that addresses two audiences simultaneously, specifically young readers and adults alike even though they are not necessarily written or marketed intentionally for both audiences (Beckett, Keywords 59).

Although the beginnings of the term can be traced to the turn of the century, Sandra Beckett in her illuminating study *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* builds an impressive case for the existence of Crossover Fiction for much longer than is normally believed, pointing out the common audience for oral traditions and folktales shared amongst adults and children all the way to modern manifestations across the West. She develops a historical context of crossover fiction across literary traditions and genres, emphasizing on the

diversity of crossover texts. She highlights that crossing over can happen in several directions and there have been many historical precedents of children reading what was originally meant for adults (for example, books by Defoe, Dickens), or a mixed audience enjoying a common literature or *alldesliteratur* with books that were never written for a specific age. However, she remarks, “Prior to *Harry Potter*, the crossover took place predominantly in that [adult books to child readers] direction” and while “Authors and readers have always crossed the borders in both directions, with or without the help of publishers...” (Global and Historical Perspectives, 5), the crossing over of children’s books to adult readers is an increasingly interesting contemporary trend. In her chapter that surveys child to adult crossovers, she showcases titles before *Harry Potter* that were evidently children’s texts but crossed over to adults in various ways but maintains that it was Rowling’s success that put child to adult crossover fiction on the map. Grenby, too, echoes Beckett’s views, further observing that, “Children’s books – and not only J.K. Rowling’s – have become the bestsellers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. They have crossed over into the reading lives of adults, and into cinema, theatre, computer games and many other media. This phenomenon demands scholarly attention” (Children’s Literature 200).

In the epilogue of her book, Beckett observes that “Many hypotheses have been put forward to try to explain the current crossover trend, particularly the wide appeal of children’s books to adult readers. However, it is probably a combination of many different factors” (Global and Historical Perspectives 253). She briefly outlines some of the factors she believes allowed crossing over – the role of the publishing houses and market forces in promoting children’s books; the breaking of conventions and stereotypical expectations by children’s authors; wide ranging, dark, complex themes; focus on story and narrative techniques – which all contributed to adults “reclaiming their right to these so-called children’s stories” (Global and Historical Perspectives 255).

Another scholar who has worked extensively on child-to-adult crossover is Rachel Falconer. In her book *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and its Adult Readership*, she calls crossover fiction “a new genre emerging as a response to a particular moment of cultural crisis and change” (3) and attributes the rise of crossover to “our reading tastes [which] are shifting to reflect changing views of childhood, adulthood and the ambiguous spaces in between” (7) and a “hybridization of child and adult cultures” (32). She discusses the kidult phenomena comprehensively, refuting the “infantalization of adults” argument purported by cultural gatekeepers, instead offering a much more nuanced reading of the condition of adulthood in the twenty first century and vindicating the right of adults to choose what they read. She also offers content analysis of select crossover titles, highlighting each work’s particulars that appeal to adults.

Maija-Lissa Harju further deconstructs the binaries of child and adult, instead offering a continuum model and emphasising on the continuity of experience between childhood and adulthood. She proposes “*the crossover continuum*: a philosophy that recognizes and explores continuity between human experiences in various life stages. With this notion of continuation, I do not mean to suggest that young people and adults are exactly the same, but rather, that they share relatable joys and ordeals... This philosophy of continuance values the progression of knowledge between distinct phases (infancy, childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, seniority), considering them unique but interdependent, equal parts of the whole” (Crossover Continuum 365).

1.2 Research Gap

Through the works of these major theorists, it becomes clear that child to adult crossover fiction is new, exciting, happening around us right now and there are many ways to approach its study. While Beckett focuses on tracing the historical roots of crossover fiction

and establishes its legitimacy, Falconer and Harju examine adults as readers and how the contemporary condition of adulthood has changed. Maria Verena Peters ,too, has worked on adult readers and in her thesis, *Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century*, focuses on the construction of age in crossover texts and offers a discussion of Kidults, fandom cultures and the cultural panic around children’s literature and the popular. Beyond academic discussions, today one quick search on Google yields multiple opinion pieces, suggestions and lists of children’s books that “all adults must read”², proving that the status of child to adult crossover has become mainstream and accepted. Yet, I believe there is a gap when it comes to examining crossover texts as narratives, since the focus has mostly been on examining and constructing the adult reader’s motivations for picking a children’s book. What has, then, been overlooked is a narrative study of the crossover texts and an enquiry into the specifics of the story that invite and engage adults, especially since not every children’s book that is published crosses over to an adult readership. Finding common patterns between the child to adult crossover texts allows us to gauge what lies within the contents of these books that engrosses and empowers adult readers. Looking at such commonalities will provide us another reason, apart from historical precedents and the condition of adulthood, of why texts crossover. The essential question to answer here is – why these texts – what about them sustains adult interest. For this inquiry, I will examine *His Dark Materials Trilogy* by Phillip Pullman, *The Harry Potter Series* by J.K. Rowling, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler and, *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman. These texts are all published between 1995 – 2010 and feature a protagonist(s) who, to begin with, is between the ages of seven to eleven. Moreover, these texts were intended and marketed first and foremost as children’s books, when initially released.

² Searching for “adults reading children’s books” will yield articles from imminent sources like BBC, The Spectator, The Guardian and BookRiot. The latest is an excerpt from Katherine Rundell’s Essay – *Why You Should Read Children’s Books, Even Though You are so Old and Wise* published by BBC in 2023.

Falconer believes that crossover fiction cannot be defined, and states that there are “no stable traits, no themes or motifs or modes of address or narrative dynamics, which are common to all [crossover books]” (Crossover Novel 27). Harju rightly contradicts the assertion and through her work on Tove Jansson, arrives at three attributes that according to her characterize crossover fiction. These are – diverse address, complexity in form and/or theme, and evidence of diverse readership (Crossover Continuum 363) (Reader Responses 30-33). However, Harju herself points out that she gives very brief descriptions for these terms, without illustrating how these play out in crossover texts (Reader Responses 34).

Building on this work, I take the criteria further by examining firstly the common thematic preoccupations between the selected texts, their treatment and their particular significance to adults. All texts share the themes of naturalizing death, the ambiguities of love, the reluctance of being a child of prophecy, and parent-child relations and finding your chosen family. The narratives function in various ways to naturalize death as expected, final, and necessary, examine the ambiguities of various kinds of love which can be both negative and positive, dwell on the alienating yet empowering experience of taking on responsibility as a marked ‘chosen one’, and brings out the intricacies of parent-child relations, emphasizing on the importance of forming your own, self-reliant support structures beyond biological family. I illustrate that while the themes in common are complex, subversive, and especially resonate with adults, the endings of the narratives are aetnonormative (a term coined by Nikolajeva) and uphold traditional, adult values, which make these stories particularly soothing and affirming to adult readers.

Next, I look at the characterization of the child protagonists and the adult characters that surround them to find shared characteristics. All the protagonists are orphans/orphan like, they are all the reluctant “chosen one”, they are accomplished liars/tricksters yet at the end, are righteous heroes. The adults, on the other hand, are dead or absent, powerful but disempowered,

and morally gray and ambiguous. Although the child protagonists follow Campbell's monomyth pattern, they are not Frye's Romantic Heroes or Mythic characters. Rather they traverse between high and low, making them much more relatable and realistic, and thus acceptable to adult logic and sensibilities.

I, then, turn to the diverse address aspect and find that all books are, in Bakhtinian terms, heteroglots wherein languages of both childhood and adulthood can be found. Apart from that, bureaucratic language, political language, professional jargon, nonsense, colloquial slang – all clash, combine and co-exist within the texts which provide adults diverse ways of engaging with the created world and meanings.

Finally, I comment on the success of speculative fiction in crossing over, acknowledging that while there are realist fiction and non-fiction texts as well that crossover, speculative fiction seems to enjoy a much easier acceptance by adult readers. *Harry Potter* is a low fantasy, *His Dark Materials* is a high fantasy, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is absurdist, *The Graveyard Book* is a supernatural feral child tale and *Coraline* is a gothic horror, and all share elements of magic, myth, legends and fantasy world building. I offer the term "Literary Imaginations" for consideration as a characteristic of these fantasy worlds. I show how the fantasy world building in the crossover texts follows internal reason and logic as compared to the 'Wild Imaginations' of previous children's fantasy where worlds were full of irrational whimsy and/or literary nonsense.

Thus, by comparing and collating the commonalities between the selected texts, I arrive at conclusions about the narrative aspects within the text that appeal to and attract adult readers to crossover children's stories.

Harju also includes evidence of diverse readership, which she sees as prizes, awards, lists and other indicators of the fact that the book has been adopted by adult cultures (Readers

Responses, 34). Although Beckett and Falconer provide comprehensive analysis of such indicators, I include a brief discussion on the ways market forces, academic and other institutions marked these books as crossovers and highlight how these books were never meant for adults but were adopted by adult readers before such interventions. A popular counter argument against crossover fiction is to relegate it as merely a marketing hype. However, it was only after adults had declared their willingness to engage with these texts as reading material, that marketing campaigns, publishing houses and other organizations started paying attention to the potential of crossover books. Beckett acutely observes, “Those who suggest that adults are reading crossovers merely to see what all the hype is about ignore the fact that it was adults reading children’s books that created the hype in the first place” (Global and Historical Perspectives 254). Falconer further asserts that “...it is worth emphasizing the individual reader’s moment of discovery because, however aggressive the marketing of children’s fiction has become, reading by definition is still an individual experience. Publicity can bring a book to a potential reader’s attention, and it can induce the reader to buy the book, but no amount of publicity can make a book speak to individual hearts and minds” (Crossover Novel 1). Of course, the role of publishing houses, marketing budgets and the general consumer driven expansion of books into other meta-narratives and trans-media like movie adaptations, video games, merchandise, theme parks and other iterations cannot wholly be ignored when trying to examine the reasons of adult interest in children’s books. However, the individual choice made by an adult reader to dedicate sustained time and effort into reading a children’s book remains the most important consideration of them all.

Keeping in mind the individual choice made by the reader, I will also discuss the “kidult phenomena” where I discuss some of the newer terms that have sprung up to relay the condition of western adulthood in the twenty-first century like “delayed adulthood”, the shifting of

traditional markers signifying adulthood, and I highlight the shift to a more optimistic view of adults reading children's books.

1.3 Delimiting the Scope

Since the breadth and scope of Crossover Fiction is large, as shown by Beckett in her historical study, it becomes important to delimit and clarify the verbiage, timeline and texts that will be used in this thesis.

- To begin with, as discussed above, since the term “crossover” can be used for various types of texts, it's imperative to clarify that this thesis is interested in the child to adult crossover and thus, any reference to and analysis of crossover fiction only refers to texts that crossover from a children's readership to an adult readership.
- I also acknowledge that there are many traditions of crossover fiction to be found in various genres, countries, and languages, however, this thesis only pertains to children's novels that are written in English, primarily by British or American authors and were first published in United Kingdom or United States of America.
- This thesis will also limit itself to the examination of middle grade fiction series. Crumpler and Wedwick provide a comprehensive analysis of the differences between middle grade and adolescent fiction, constructing a useful table that condenses various arguments (Readers, Texts, Contexts in the Middle 67). This thesis subscribes to those distinctions and will not examine any books categorized as “Young Adult”.
- It is important to emphasise that these texts were not written with the authorial intention of dual address or engaging two audiences simultaneously but were meant specifically for children. In other words, this thesis is mainly concerned with books that are read by a dual audience i.e. children and adults and not intentionally written for both.

- The thesis is also interested in examining the moment crossover fiction began to emerge in these contexts. There are newer trends in crossover fiction now, with even more genres, writing styles and book formats that are moving across boundaries and those texts deserve a nuanced, dedicated approach which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, the books selected are published between the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first century, the earliest being Phillip Pullman's *Northern Lights* in 1995 and the latest being *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman in 2008. Also, all these books have children as well as adult editions published, almost simultaneously.
- Since the main focus is narrative analysis of the written story, the dissertation will only focus on the book formats of the texts and will refrain from any analysis of the various media and game adaptations of the books.
- Finally, I would like to acknowledge that the authors and protagonists in the selected text are white, Anglo-American, heterosexual, and male or female identifying. There is not much representation of historically marginalized communities within the texts, and consequently within the thesis. Hence, all ideas and cultural definitions pertaining to childhood and adulthood are discussed from the lens of mainstream, western, Eurocentric discourses specific to the context of white, Anglo-American lifestyles and families.

1.4 Introducing the Primary Texts

As outlined above, the texts have been chosen under a number of criteria. Firstly, they were all published as children's books that were then later, also released with adult editions which only changed the cover artwork. They were all published in English between 1995 and 2008. And both Beckett and Falconer have, in their works, established the status of these texts as

crossover fiction. Beyond that, I personally was introduced to these books as a child and they made up much of my reading catalogue throughout my years of schooling. And as an adult, I have continued to consume these stories repeatedly, enjoying them as much as I did when I was a child. Thus, having read these books both as a child and an adult places me in a very unique position as a researcher and analysing these books keeping my own crossover reading experience in the back adds a layer of depth and nuance to my analysis.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy*

The epic fantasy novels were published from 1995 – 2000 in United Kingdom and US by Scholastic. The trilogy consists of *Northern Lights* (published as *Golden Compass* in the US), *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*. The books follow the story of Lyra and Will, as they battle extremist, theocratic institutions and a number of other antagonists, as they fight for the right to knowledge, consciousness and free will. The books are heavily inspired by Christian mythology and the works of William Blake and John Milton, subverting the legend of Adam and Eve and encouraging rebellion and access to knowledge. The books have won some of the most coveted children's literature awards including the Carnegie Medal for *Northern Lights* and an Astrid Lindgren Memorial Awards for Pullman's contributions to children's literature. The books also created a watershed moment in the history of children's literature when *The Amber Spyglass* won Whitbread Book of the Year Award in 2001. It was unprecedented for a children's book to be nominated in the general book category, let alone win it. This momentous achievement propelled the academic discourse around the validity of children's literature and obviously, crossover fiction as well.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series*

The series consists of seven books, published from 1997 – 2007 in United Kingdom by Bloomsbury and Scholastic in the US. The titles of the books all begin with *Harry Potter and...*

followed by *the Philosopher's Stone* (*The Sorcerer's Stone* in US), *the Chamber of Secrets*, *the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *the Goblet of Fire*, *the Order of the Phoenix*, *the Half-Blood Prince* and *the Deathly Hallows*. The story follows 11-year old orphan Harry, who discovers he is a wizard and over the years unravels secrets of his identity, the mystery surrounding his parent's murders and eventually faces his nemesis, a dark, evil wizard, all while having adventures at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The books deal with topics like good vs. evil, facism, racism, and the paranoia around purity of blood, name and title. The series has been the recipient of several awards like Whitbread Children's Book of the year Award (1999), WHS Smith Book of the Year (2006) and Hugo Award for Best Novel (2001). But Rowling's success went beyond critical appreciation, and the books have enjoyed record-breaking commercial success, catapulting Rowling to a celebrity status. In 2017, *Philosopher's Stone* completed twenty years and according to latest data, the books have sold more than 400 million copies.³ Scholars have also presented research on how the books caused a resurgence of interest in childhood reading as well as acknowledged the role the *Harry Potter* series has played in raising literacy levels, and bringing children's literature to the mainstream.

Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

The series consists of thirteen novels published from 1999 to 2006 by Harper Collins in North America and Egmont in the UK. Written by Daniel Handler, who uses the pseudonym Lemony Snicket, the books are narrated by the doleful Snicket who records the misfortunes and tragedies that befall the Baudelaire orphans. The siblings, Violet, Klaus and Sunny, embark on a long, arduous, terribly sad journey after their parents are killed in an arson attack. They are shunted from guardian to guardian, all the while trying to escape the clutches of the murderous Count Olaf who is after their fortune. The books are written in the postmodern style, laden with

³ See articles in *Fortune* magazine, official records by scholastic, read *Harry Potter: the Story of A global Business Phenomenon* by Susan Gunelius, *How Harry Potter Changed the World* article in VOX.

meta-commentary, self-awareness of the narrative, unreliable narrator, moral ambiguity and layers within the narrative, which are fragmented and open-ended. The series subverts the trope of innocent, happy endings in children's books and are famous for constantly warning the readers to put down the books for they are filled with misery and hardship. Using dark humour, absurdism, gothic aesthetics, caricatures, and numerous literary allusions, the books create a unique world within which adult authority and logic is questioned. The books dwell on existential themes of facing adversities, nature of morality, resilience and the importance of independent thinking.

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

The dark fantasy novella published in 2002 by Harper Collins in USA and Bloomsbury in UK, has won a Bram Stoker Award for Best Work for Young Readers (2002), a Hugo Award for best Novella (2003), and a Nebula Award for Best Novel (2003). The books follow the story of eleven year old Coraline who has shifted into a new house and finds a locked door that leads to nowhere. Driven by her parents' inattentiveness and her own unceasing boredom, she sets out to seek what lies behind the door, only to find the Other Mother and a world that mirrors Coraline's life, only that it is now perfect. Soon, however, Coraline realises the demonic nature of the Other Mother as she kidnaps her parents in a bid to entice Coraline to stay in her world forever, eventually wanting to kill the little girl. Coraline gathers her courage and sets out on a mission to escape the Other Mother and rescue her own parents from this terrifying fate. The book deals with themes of isolation, moral responsibility and using courage when things difficult. It uses gothic horror tropes and elements of dark fantasy to create a tone and atmosphere of fear and repulsion within the text. It has, over the years, gained a cult classic status amongst horror lovers and children's literature readers.

Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*

Published in 2008 by Harper Collins in USA and Bloomsbury in UK, this book is one of those rare texts that has been awarded two of the highest children's literature awards – both the British Carnegie Medal and the American Newbury Medal for best book. It also has award winning illustrations by Chris Riddell to accompany the text. The books begin when Bod is a baby and his parents and sibling are brutally murdered. However, Bod manages to crawl to the local graveyard where his dying mother's ghost convinces the ghost inhabitants of the graveyard to adopt and protect him from the men trying to harm him. Mr and Mistress Owens become his adoptive parents and Silas, the undead keeper of the graveyard, appoints himself the baby's guardian. In an episodic structure, the readers learn of Bod's adventures as he grows up with his unusual family, eventually learning of his own identity and avenging his family's murders, finally free to leave the shelter of the graveyard and go forth into the world. The book is a creative reimagining of the feral-child narrative and follows the conventions of the genre. It dwells on themes of identity, familial bonds, preparing for a life beyond domestic shelter and coming of age. Both *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book* are considered modern classics and have cemented Gaiman's status in as one of the most prominent speculative fiction writers in children's literature.

1.5 Outlining the Methodology

In his book, *Ursula Le Guin Beyond Genre : Fiction for Children and Adults*, Cadden constructs a continuum of her works, tracing the common threads in her characters and thematic content, providing a deeper understanding of how Le Guin wrote various types of fiction and non-fiction that appealed to such readers with such a large age range. While his work is a monograph of Le Guin's oeuvre, taking cues from this book's methodology, this thesis, too will trace commonalities in theme, character, voice and genre within these diverse crossover books to arrive a conclusion of why these stories appeal to adults. Harju's concept of the

Crossover Continuum, as discussed above, also informs the examination of the texts. For the narrative analysis, the thesis will utilize Nikolajeva's definitions of narrative theory in children's literature, especially her study of content and character. Bakhtinian concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia are applied to study the voice within narratives. A genre history of fantasy in children's literature is studied to contrast the function of genre in the contemporary crossover texts.

Also, employing Harju's self-study method, the thesis will also include insights from my own personal reading experience as a cross-reader i.e. of reading these books, both as a child reader and as an adult reader. Harju in her research includes a detailed chapter on creating her storied self, stating that "Conducting self-study allowed me to consider one reader's personal motivation for cross-reading and explore notions of continuance (between child and adulthood) in reading practice that I believe may attract readers to crossover books" (Exploring Reader Responses 57). She uses memory work as one of her ways to create her storied self and analyse her own experience in cross-reading. Since the scope of the present thesis is limited to narrative analysis and does not expand to reader-response theory, it will not provide as exhaustive an account as Harju however, it will include brief insights into my own memory work and reading experience of crossover fiction.

Finally, the examination of texts and the ideological stance of this thesis is also inspired by Marah Gubar's Kinship Model. According to her, treating children as deficits of adults is condescending. She instead calls upon researchers to view children and adults "as akin to one another, which means they are neither exactly the same nor radically dissimilar. The concept of kinship indicates relatedness, connection, and similarity without implying homogeneity, uniformity, and equality" (Risky Business 453). She encourages the starting point of any theoretical inquiry into children's literature to be based on the assumption of multiple, existing similarities between the child and adult. It chooses to focus on what is shared across

generational divides and constructed age categories, rather than what divides children and adults. For her, children and adults are separated by differences of degree, not of kind (Risky Business 454).

The thesis will use discourse analyses to comment on the cultural contexts that encouraged adult readers to interact and engage with children's stories, beginning with a discussion of terms like "kiddult" and "infantilized adults", and arriving at the updated discourse in western media and scholarship about the condition of adulthood in the early twenty first century.

1.6 Relevance of the Thesis

The thesis is relevant to the academic study of children's literature as well as adult cultures in the twenty first century. It is also relevant to the study and application of narrative theory to children's books. Since the primary texts chosen are contemporary, the study is also an opportunity to further discussions in the present literary field and theory.

1.7 Conclusion

This thesis hopes to add to the body of scholarship around crossover fiction, and children's literature. Like Grenby states, "The fundamental argument presented here is simply that a book written for children should be treated no differently than a book written for adults. Both can make equally artistic statements. Both have a place in particular literary traditions. And both maybe analysed without theorising about how the intended audience, rather than the text itself determines meaning" (Children's Literature 8). What Grenby means is not a return to rigid formalism but to acknowledge that books written for children have equal value in academic scholarship and thus, rather than worrying about who is reading what, these books deserve serious attention for their artistic and literary contributions to language and culture.

Stephanie Zvirin too believes that “The idea of books written for one age group having appeal for an entirely different age group certainly is not new. What is different these days is that everyone is starting to pay more attention” (Crossovers 211) and rightly so.

Beckett, in her conclusion, observes that “The need for story is timeless and the crossover phenomenon is proving that it is also “ageless”. Adults as well as children need stories” (Global and Historical Perspectives 265). And where these stories come from, should not matter. Falconer terms it as adults “rediscovering the pleasures of a good story” (Crossover Novel 559) which is at the heart of all discourse and debate around crossover fiction. Bruce Handy echoes the same stance, remarking, “It should go without saying that the best children’s literature is every bit as rich and rewarding in its concerns, as honest and stylish in execution, as the best adult literature – and also as complicated, as stubborn, conflicted, and mysterious. Like any worthwhile art, great children’s books are capable of speaking in many different ways to many different readers.” (Wild Things 9).

Le Guin, one of the most prolific crossover fiction writers, invokes nostalgia as reason for children’s books being re-read. She states “Revisiting a book loved in childhood may be principally an act of nostalgia...you may well discover a book far less simple and unambiguous than the one you remembered. That shift and deepening of meaning can be a revelation both about the book and yourself” (qtd in Bukhina, 174). While crossover fiction is not based on nostalgia evidently since these books are not re-read but read simultaneously by children and adults, however the examination of crossover fiction definitely reveals something about the book as well as the person reading it, as will be discussed in the coming sections.

Works Cited

Beckett, Sandra L. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2009.

- . "Crossover Literature." *Keywords for Children's Literature*, edited by Philip Nel, Lissa Paul, and Nina Christensen, Second ed, New York University Press, 2021, pp. 47 – 50.
- Bukhina, Olga. "Why Are They So Afraid of Children's Books? The Subversive Power of Imagination (Part 1)." *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura*, vol. 1, no. 2, Dec. 2019, pp. 170–87. <https://doi.org/10.32798/dlk.163>.
- Crumpler, Thomas P. and Linda Wedwick. "Readers, Texts, and Contexts in the Middle: Re-Imagining Literature Education for Young Adolescents." *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- Falconer, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. Routledge, 2009.
- Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Gubar, Marah. "Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature Criticism." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38 no. 4, 2013, p. 450-457. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2013.0048>.
- Handy, Bruce. *Wild Things: The Joy of Reading Children's Literature as an Adult*. Simon and Schuster, 2017.
- Maija-Liisa Harju. *'Being Not Alone in the World' Exploring Reader Responses to Crossover Books*. 2012. McGill University, PhD thesis.
- . "Tove Jansson and the Crossover Continuum." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2009, pp. 362–75. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.0.0472>.
- O'Sullivan, Emer. *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, 2010

Rosen, Judith. "PW: Breaking the Age Barrier." *PublishersWeekly.Com*,
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19970908/34610-pw-breaking-the-age-barrier.html>. Accessed 3rd February 2017.

Sorby, Angela. "Golden Age." *Keywords*, NYU Press, 2 June 2015,
<https://keywords.nyupress.org/childrens-literature/essay/golden-age/>. Accessed 7th June 2017.

Zvirin, Stephanie. "Crossovers: Children's Books for Adult Readers." *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, edited by Bernice E. Cullinan, Diane, Goetz Pearson, Continuum Publishers, 2005, pp. 209 – 211.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 A Brief Overview of Children's Literature

John Newbery's publication of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* in 1744 is often considered the landmark of commercial beginnings of children's literature. However, a much longer literary history of children's books exists. One of the first of its kind was F.J. Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, first published in 1932, which offered an academic yet personally motivated history of children's literature, utilizing Darton's own knowledge as a publisher. He traces the beginnings to fables read to children in the Middle Ages and continues all the way to the end of the 19th century, one of the most productive eras in children's writing and publishing, which he sees as the growing up of children's literature. He acknowledges the importance of Puritan values, the rationalism and moral didacticism of the 18th century, the eventual replacement of high-handed moralism and religious fervour with levity, playfulness and whimsy, and also offers an interesting chapter on the apparent early theorists of children's literature – Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth and the influence of the French schools of thoughts inspired by Voltaire's writings on childhood. Throughout his history, Darton did what had not been done before, which is go beyond a bibliographic record of children's books into a deeper understanding of how each period impacted the definition of children, childhood, and what they read. His statement that throughout history, children's books have always been “the scene of a battle between instruction and amusement, between restraint and freedom, between hesitant morality and spontaneous happiness” (v-vi) became the foundation of children's literature criticism and theory.

In 1980, Jane Bingham and Grayce Scholt's book titled *Fifteen Centuries of Children's Literature: An Annotated Chronology of British and American Works in Historical Context*, considerably expanded the area, tracing the existence of children's literature all the way from the Anglo-Saxon period to 1945. Their reason for choosing to begin at the Anglo-Saxon period is explained - "The starting point, ca. 523, was chosen as the starting point because it is the generally accepted date for the introduction of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* to England, where it was used with young scholars in monastic schools" (xi). This reasoning gave insights into what can and should be considered children's literature, raising questions about definition and form, which were eventually addressed by scholars like Perry Nodelman, Maria Nikolajeva, and Jacqueline Rose. Although bibliographic in nature, offering an extensive list of available children's books in each era, they contextualise the books listed by giving a historical background and the reigning cultural attitudes towards childhood in that particular period, which makes the book a valuable source beyond a bibliography. In their own sources, they not only mention Darton but also "Meigs's *Critical History of Children's Literature* (Macmillan, 1969), Thwaite's *From Primer to Pleasure* (Horn Book, 1975), and Muir's *English Children's Books 1600- 1900* (Batsford, 1954)" (xiii) which points to the widespread research being undertaken in the twentieth century to establish children's literature as legitimate.

While there are subsequent works that have greatly added to the development of children's literary history, Deborah Stevenson's chapter aptly titled *History of Children's Literature* gives a succinct overview of the various periods that are significant to children's book, summarizing the dominant, acceptable history in contemporary scholarship. She begins from the Classical era, goes on to illustrate the importance of Caxton importing Gutenberg's printing technology to England, leading to material being printed which would be read by children; the influence of religion and Puritan values on stories for children, who were considered innately sinful; rise of genres like folklore, novels, and poetry in the Enlightenment-

era; Newbery and the targeted, purposeful publishing of children's books and the commercialization of children's literature with the establishment of child as consumer; the continued growth of didacticism, moralizing, the development of children's literature for instruction and literacy purposes in the 18th century; the switch in 19th century towards imagination, fantasy, delight, literary nonsense, as well as realism; finally ending with a section on how children's literature became a global conversation in the modern world. She points to various players in the twentieth century, beyond academic circles, like institutions, awards, publishing houses who have truly legitimized the field as a distinct area of scholarship and commercial interest. Especially emphasizing on the importance of libraries that have contributed to the popularization and dissemination of children's books, and have created resources, reviews, databases, lists, awards and conferences dedicated to the study of children's literature. She proclaims that, "The American Library Association, founded in 1876, was also the source of children's librarianship, a professional category that is probably the single biggest force behind children's literature as we know it today" (Stevenson 192). Such histories help in understanding the foundations of children's literature and trace the historical reasons for why crossover fiction has gained popularity over the years. By examining the underlying thematic preoccupations, social dynamics and adult perceptions of childhood in each age, it is easy to contextualize the rise of crossover fiction.

Another work that provides a fantastic overview of the history and development of children's literature is Emer O' Sullivan's *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature* recently published in 2010. In this exhaustive work, O'Sullivan not only compiles a dictionary of the terms associated with children's literature but also constructs a useful chronology that presents the major landmarks in the field, beginning at the publication of Aelfric's *Colloquy*, Latin text for pupils at monastery schools in ca. 990 and ends at the publication of *The Invention of Hugo Cabaret*, the award winning epic fantasy text written by Brian Selznick in 2008 (xiii

– xxix). She also provides a comprehensive chapter on the development of children’s literature from both, historical and theoretical lenses, encapsulating the major academic discourses that are found in the field. Her discussions on the definition of children’s literature and the inherent tensions the child- adult relationship that mark the discipline are particularly useful in understanding the foundations of crossover fiction.

Other works that facilitate the understanding of crossover fiction from a historical perspective are Seth Lerer’s *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter* which looks at the status of children’s literature from a deeply cultural perspective, offering a study of particular moments in history that have impacted the study of children’s literature. Of most interest are Lerer’s central focus on establishing how children’s literature has always been caught between the two functions of ‘docere et delectare’ – to teach and to entertain – and how this tug of war between the two sides has informed the notions of what is appropriate and authentic children’s literature, impacting the themes and subject matter most often found in children’s stories. His discussions on John Locke’s influence on the educational and didactic aspects of children’s literature, the development of imaginative fiction in the Victorian period, and his observations on contemporary children’s literature entering “an ironic age” help with understanding how the social definition of childhood has evolved in the western contexts and how each epoch’s literature reflected the anxieties around childhood and the hopes of adults writing these children’s books.

Fiona McCulloch’s study titled *Children’s Literature in Context* is a complete guide to both literary and historical contexts that have impacted the formation of children’s literature, including individual analysis of key texts in the canon, and an overview of critical, theoretical discourses. The first two chapters provide a useful contextualization of the development of children’s literature, beginning with Reformation and ending at the start of the twenty first century. In the first chapter, she focuses on cultural movements that have impacted the

definition of 'child' and shows how the figure of child has been, at various points, constructed as the sinner, the weak, the inferior, and the innocent. She states that contemporary children's literature is highly influenced by "the Romantic notion of childhood as innocent and a child's right to enjoy this happy time dependent on adults, and this happy state is regarded as fundamental to healthy adult development" (27). At the same time, the influences of 18th century rationalism that constructed the child as *tabula rasa*, in need of moral and educational instruction persist as "children are expected by adults to behave well and to achieve success along their journey to adult responsibility" (27). However, she concludes that the perceptions of danger are heightened in today's society and that the Romantic innocence is susceptible to modern day dangers like gun violence, sexual predators, drug and alcohol abuse, breakdown of the family unit, economic instability, and climate change.

When it comes to the literary contextualization of children's literature, McCulloch constructs not one but three golden ages of children's literature, each shaped by the reigning literary movements of the time. The first golden age she analyses relates to the proliferation of imaginative speculative fiction in the aftermath of the Romantic Movement and as the Victorian age centered the child as innocent/other/significant, the literature reflected the shift in the texts produced that were full of fantasy, adventures, and playful nonsense. The second golden age she explores is the emergence of new genres like writing for teens and young adults in 1960s, and she remarks on the tension "between the adult world of conservatism, with its pastoral tropes and the child's world of modernity, corruption, and danger" (Children's Literature in Context 41). Finally, she views the rise of crossover fiction as the potential third golden age of children's literature and characterizes contemporary children's fiction as subversive, open-ended, more inclined to deal with social issues like gender discriminations and environmentalism, mature in its perspectives, and though texts may retain some semblance

of the Romantic notions, they don't guarantee a happy ending (*Children's Literature in Context* 42-43).

The book, *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*, contextualizes children's literature from a pointedly theoretical perspective, situating the development of children's literature within the most important literary movements. Two chapters, contributed by Deborah Thacker, titled *New Voices*, *New Threats* and *Playful Subversion* study how Modernism and Post-Modernism have affected the development of children's literature. In the former chapter, Thacker illustrates how post-war alienation, pessimism, and uncertainty affected children's writing and states that many Modernist features like "the struggle to find identity, the uneasy relationship between the imagined and the real, and the changing perception of time" (*New Voices, New Threats* 110) could be found in the fantasy of this time period and highlights how adults were increasingly finding it difficult to embody narrative relationships that maintained their role as protector, provider, and authority. In the latter chapter, *Playful Subversion*, Thacker reflects on the postmodern aesthetics that permeated children's literature, elevating its status and concludes that many contemporary titles contain "Parodic gestures, narrative fractures and metafictional strategies which call attention to the improving qualities of literature...Such features act as a challenge to dominant constructions of childhood..." (140). She also analyzes crossover fiction as a symptom of the postmodern condition, characterized by fractures and fluidity.

In her study, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic*, Maria Nikolajeva compiles the new trends and innovations that are embodied in contemporary children's literature. She believes that children's literature has finally come of age, as it sticks lesser to conventions and formulaic styles, rather it has now "grown more 'literary' and artistically elaborate" (6). She provides a detailed analysis of the history of children's literature from a semiotic approach, discusses canon building endeavours within the field and illustrates

various narrative techniques like polyphony, chronotope, intertextuality, and metafiction that can now be popularly found in children's texts. Her study is useful to not only appreciate the paradigm shifts that have occurred in the new millennium but also confront the stereotypes and prejudices against children's literature, that lead to cultural panic and accusations of infantilization of adults who read these books. Other similar texts that evaluate, analyse, and collate the shifts in children's literature in the twentieth and twenty first century are *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle* edited by Rodrick McGillis, and *Children's Literature: From the Fin de Siècle to the New Millennium* by Kimberley Reynolds. In the introduction to the collection of papers, McGillis lays out his analysis of the defining characteristics of the literature produced for children at the end of the twentieth century, illustrating his points using the crossover texts *His Dark Materials* trilogy and the *Harry Potter* series. He says that both these texts are representative of an 'unease' that was the consequence of inherent contradictions of the age. For him, the two texts symbolize the twentieth century preoccupations with the binaries of utopia/dystopia, protection and independence, finality and open endings, pessimism and optimism and the blurring of the traditional boundaries between children and adults (xii-xiii). Reynolds, in her study, also notices the growth of ambivalence towards childhood as the defining characteristic at the turn of the twentieth century. She tracks the development of children's literature in the nineteenth century, how it was positioned in contrast to 'serious' literature, yet it functioned to preserve adult nostalgia for stability, traditional values, and normative behaviour in a world that was rapidly changing. For the most part, children's books remained innocent and good, even during the war periods in the twentieth century, for pretty much similar reason – to offer comfort and familiarity. However, it is in the post-war period that Reynold notices a shift where social upheavals and political movements allow more permeability in the themes of children's literature, as both readers and authors become

cognizant of its ideological function that promoted innocence and nostalgia, and shed such expectations, challenging the definitions of both childhood and the literature for children.

A text that also sheds light on the evolving definition of ‘child’ and the construct of childhood is a recent publication *Reading Children’s Literature: A Critical Introduction* that came out in 2019. In this expansive study, Carrie Hintz and Eric Tribunella examine many aspects of children’s literature, and unlike other critical works, develop the discussions to include the uncertainties and moral complexities of discussing and critically analysing children from various lenses of race, disability, human rights, legal rights, and sexuality. However, the most useful section for the purpose of analysing crossover fiction is their categorization of the figure of ‘child’ and the various ways in which childhood has been viewed in western society. They discuss the Romantic child, sinful child, working child, sacred child, child as radically other, developing child, and child as miniature adult. This section greatly enhances the understanding of the diversity and dichotomy of the child figure in western society as well as highlights the value systems that have affected the definitions of childhood and what social role children have been expected to play by adults.

Finally, two more texts that offer interesting approaches to children’s literature are Perry Nodelman’s seminal text *The Hidden Adult* and Barbara Wall’s *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*. Both these texts are quintessential in this field’s scholarship for they have problematized the definition of children’s literature, showing how adults have impacted its creation, production, and consumption. They both theorize the power dynamics between children’s literature and the adults who are writing, studying, and selling them.

Published in 2008, (the same year Crossover Fiction became an established academic area of research with Rachel Falconer’s study) Nodelman’s *Hidden Adult*,

through analysis of select fiction, arrives at characteristics inherent in books written for children but more importantly it is Nodelman's thesis on the adult presence in children's literature that is extremely significant. He offers an in-depth analysis on the various ways children's literature is a site to exercise adult authority and push dominant ideologies and viewpoints that are valued by adults. Moreover, he emphasises on how children's literature functions to not only entertain and instruct an 'implied child reader' which is a literary construct as opposed to the actual child, but also covertly addresses adults like parents, teachers, librarians who must approve and validate the text for children. He highlights how these texts, though written to address children, are inherently shaped by an adult author's views, motivations, and moral systems, thus creating a complexity in the term 'children's literature'. He talks of children's literature as a site of colonization and how children's literature has always employed a dual address. He also offers the term 'shadow text' that exists in children's fiction, which implies more than it speaks, further underscoring the ambivalence of children's literature.

Though Nodelman is approaching children's literature from the side of the child and calling for the child's right to influence, produce, and consume literature instead of being subsumed under these 'hidden' adult interests and desires to control what children and their books should be like, he also, unintentionally puts forth the revolutionary idea that children's literature has always carried the inherent potential to crossover for it must on some level, appeal to adults. The key takeaways from Nodelman's work in the context of crossover fiction are that children's literature has never been simple but is a complex body of work that utilizes a "complex repertoire of unspoken but implied adult knowledge" (Hidden Adult 206) within its writing and that children's literature has never been innocent but is an ideological vehicle in which adults are invested. Although up until now, the hidden adult had aims of controlling the production and consumption of children's

literature, Nodelman, in the last few concluding pages of his book, acknowledges the possibility of the adult/child binary that had been cemented for the last couple of centuries to erode as he was beginning to see a lot more fluidity and interchanging identities, and that children were beginning to assert their own agency in the consumption and production of media, by engaging with other formats beyond the written, printed text. In other words, children's literature was becoming a more authentic space, reflective, not of an 'implied child reader' but of real children's childhoods, desires, expectations, and identities.

The other seminal text that is useful in the context of crossover fiction is Barbara Wall's examination of the narrative voice in children's texts titled *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* published in 1991. Just as children's literature was beginning to become complex and postmodern, Wall in her study, offers three ways in which the narrative voice addresses the readers in children's texts. These are – single address which aims to please only the child and addresses the child reader in playful, accessible language, ignoring any adult presence; the double address, which on the surface is written for child readers, but also exploits the child's ignorance and addresses adults through humour and language that presupposes adult knowledge; and finally the dual address which equally addresses both children and adults in one text, treating both categories of readers as capable and competent. She does however state that, "Yet few writers have shown so convincingly that writing simultaneously for children and adults is possible. Genuine dual address of this kind is, however, very rare" (35). While she is wary of trying to address adults in children's literature, asserting the right of children to have their own literature, her concept of dual-address is useful in applying to crossover fiction as a way in which it engages adult readers.

2.2 Situating Crossover Fiction

Although the idea of crossover literature is not new, the term crossover fiction itself could be considered contemporary. There are many terms in other literary traditions that have existed before “crossover fiction” rose to prominence. They have various connotations like all-ages literature (allalders litteratur), books for all ages (libros para todas las edades), all-age-Buch/all-age-Literature/all-age-Titel, and Brückenliteratur (bridge literature) (Anngraini). However, the term Crossover Fiction in academic scholarship is relatively new and as such deserves attention.

One of the first scholars to bring crossover fiction to academic prominence is Sandra Beckett, whose work is heavily referenced to through the thesis. In 1999, she published a collection of essays titled *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for A Dual Audience of Children and Adults* which grew out of the International Research Society for Children’s Literature (IRSCL) Congress held in 1995. The collection, overall, seeks to draw focus to the international existence of crossover fiction and she persuades adopting global approaches to the study of crossover fiction (Transcending Boundaries 8).

The fourteen essays written by a diverse set of scholars delve into the works of contemporary authors spanning an array of subgenres, offering a multifaceted analysis of literary boundaries within crossover fiction. In the *Introduction*, Beckett puts forward the bold consideration that: ‘More and more books illustrate the limitations of audience age as a defining category and refuse to be confined by any such arbitrary boundary constraints’ (Transcending Boundaries xviii). However, the very first essay by Helma van LieropDebrauwer (3-12) provides a contrasting notion. Her work suggests that while books may transcend the age boundaries, authors of these books continue to be categorized according to the age of their primary readership. She offers three kinds of “border crossing” – writers like Roald Dahl, who first wrote for adults but then successfully became a children’s author; those like Russell Hoban, who might start out as children’s authors but when they shift to writing for adults, they

find it difficult to create a seriousness around their work; and ‘polygraphs’ such as A.A. Milne who write for both children and adults (4). Lierop-Debrauwer posits such boundary-blurring by authors as a means to elevate children’s literature from its historically marginalized position in comparison to the adult literary canon. Zohar Shavit, in her essay too, adheres to this sense of hierarchy between children’s and adult literature, and analyses how many children’s writers adopt an ‘open’ address only to circumvent the lowly status attached to children’s literature. By positioning their work as open to all, they hope to gain legitimacy as writers instead of being associated directly with children’s literature (89).

On the other hand, French author, Michel Tournier offers a contrary position that challenges the hierarchy Lierop-Debrauwer and Zohar Shavit seem to assume. He subverts traditional expectations and recommends evaluating adult fiction based on the accessibility of its style to child readers, radically inverting the traditional hierarchy of children’s and adult literature. He considers his adult novel *Friday*, originally published in 1971, and subsequently published as an abridged version under a children’s imprint in 1977. For him, the abridged novel is superior because of its aesthetic merits for it is “purer, less cluttered and more chiselled” (40), in comparison to the adult version. Beckett, however, astutely observes that certain thematic complexities may resist adaptation for younger audiences, invoking the challenge of adapting Tournier’s own novel *The Erl-King* which takes place in Nazi Germany. The difficulties in adapting such sombre themes for children then test Tournier’s assertion that adult literature’s value lies in its mutability to children’s literature. The tension between protecting children from realities versus giving them honest depictions in fiction is also brought out in Adrienne Kertzer’s essay which reflects on the ethical dilemmas of creating trauma narratives for children, particularly in the context of the Holocaust. Her analysis interrogates the delicate balance between preserving historical accuracies and shielding young readers from

the ghastly realities of the past, raising profound questions of the authorial responsibility in both confronting collective trauma, yet retaining the optimism of childhood.

Maria Nikolajeva, in her essay, does away with hierarchy altogether, instead claiming no meaningful boundaries exist between books that are written for adults and those written for children. She compares and contrasts three primary texts, one published for children, one for a dual audience, and one for an adult readership. Through close reading, she establishes a common theme between them – the exploitation of children for scientific purposes – and compares their treatment of plot, setting, characterisation, narrative perspective, temporality and genre. She concludes that there are negligible differences in their literary merit and highlights the permeability texts intended for diverse age groups.

Essays eight and nine analyse the case of oppressive cultural/literary contexts, specifically Soviet Russia and South America in the late nineteenth century. These essays study how children's literature provided a seemingly innocent "screen" (130) that camouflaged political and social satire in a society that did not allow intellectual and political freedom. John Stephens, in his essay problematizes crossover fiction by focusing on the diversity and internal stratification of children's texts, and advocates for a clear demarcation between fiction written for adults and fiction written for pre-teens. In contrast, Lissa Paul embraces the blurring of age-dependent boundaries in her essay and anticipates "a new aesthetic of cultural clashes" (241) which relies less on a reader's age and more on her/his experiential knowledge and when children begin "writing and talking back" (249).

Thus, Beckett's collection lays the foundation for not only legitimizing the existence of crossover fiction, but also reveals a diverse array of issues, contradictions, and dilemmas surrounding its development. The essays highlight the absence of a singular consensus on the

definition and significance of crossover fiction but establish the merit of analysing crossover fiction in its own right.

In her second book, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* published in 2009, Beckett provides a comprehensive study of the history and traditions of crossover fiction found in the Anglo-American and European literary cultures. She defines crossover literature as “fiction that crosses from child to adult or adult to child audiences” (4) and builds an impressive historical context to this movement. She proves that, for most part, the movement happened from adults to children but this was before the advent of the *Harry Potter* books (40). In her chapter *Child to Adult Crossover Fiction*, she explains how, historically, several books were “appropriated” (17) for children by republishing formats considered suitable for children, for example abridged books or books that were specially adapted. Some of them became “the sole property of children” (17) like the most popular title of them all – Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which was never originally written for children. Beckett asserts that this flow from adult literature to child readers was natural simply due to the lack of a dedicated publishing industry for children as there were no “children’s books” available. However, the publication of *Harry Potter* brought visibility to a paradigm shift occurring in the crossing over trend, and as the flow reversed, adults became readers of children’s fiction for their personal pleasure. She also discusses various aspects of crossover fiction, providing discussions on the classics like *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland*, moving onto the *Harry Potter* phenomenon and the respectability of *His Dark Materials*, ending with a discussion of realistic crossover fiction.

This chapter forms the basis of this thesis, as Beckett provides invaluable insights into the beginnings of crossover fiction as well as reasons for its popularity. Beckett also dwells on characteristics that define crossover fiction and the ones that she addresses within the books are genre, plot, characters, the potential of a series, theme and perspective. When it comes to genre, she asserts that fiction, especially fantasy fiction has crossed over most popularly and

that the genre of crossover literature is often hybridized, using a blend of genre characteristics. While adult fiction has retained its strict categorization of genres, children's literature, in contrast, has always been a space for experimentation, and the emergence of crossover fiction is further challenging the traditional generic expectations as well as the age boundaries. She also focuses on plot and states that contemporary children's literature has complex plots, as compared to earlier children's books. She explains, "The clearly delineated plots of conventional children's literature have been replaced by complex plots with multiple, interwoven story lines" (260). When discussing characters in crossover literature, Beckett observes that "...characters in today's children's fiction are not good and bad or black and white, but complex and ambiguous" (260). Beckett stresses on the importance of the series format in crossover fiction as many crossover books are published as trilogies, tetralogies or longer series. She also reads some crossover fiction as political allegories that use the label of children's literature to avoid bans. She believes that the coming-of-age theme popularly found in crossover fiction might engage adults as it is a universal transition. And finally, crossover fiction employs multiple perspectives. In short, Beckett lists the following features of crossover fiction – it is complicated in character and plot; it displays hybridity in genre; it can mostly be found as a series; utilizes both adult and child perspective; and a common theme is coming-of-age. While these features are helpful in understanding crossover fiction as a distinct body of work, Beckett doesn't offer any deeper analysis other than an overview of these characteristics or how texts employ these features, drawing adult readers in.

Another seminal text is Rachael Falconer's *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and its Adult Readership* published in 2003. Rachel Falconer defines the phenomenon of cross-reading as one in which adults choose to read books for children 'not (or not only) for a child's sake, but for her- or himself' (7). She dates the genesis of this practice very precisely to the publication of the first adult edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's*

Stone by Bloomsbury in 1998 (1). She investigates why this turn to children's fiction by adult readers should have coincided with the approach of the millennium. She challenges the negative view promulgated by tabloid press that it should be seen as symptomatic of a culture of dumbing down, in this instance reflected in the emergence of the pejorative term 'kiddult' to refer to irresponsible adults who allegedly refuse to grow up (3). Instead, she interprets cross-reading as a testament to the increasing sophistication of contemporary writing for children due to a scaling up in quality, rather than a dumbing down. Nor does Falconer accept the idea that cross-reading should be dismissed as a mere market-driven ploy by publishers to maximize the sale of books in what is undoubtedly an over-crowded marketplace in which books must compete with an increasingly wide range of multimedia texts. To counter this view, she quotes Philip Pullman's suggestion that adult readers have sought refuge in children's books in order to escape from 'artistic posturing' (5) by writers of postmodern fiction. More positively, Pullman claims that adult readers find in children's fiction the pleasures of 'pure story', combined with the kind of ambitious themes that are rarely explored in contemporary literary fiction for adults due to its tone of sustained irony. Falconer also refutes the idea that 'crossover' fiction heralds the end of children's fiction, instead welcoming it as a bridging device with the potential to foster inter-generational understanding (29). This contrasts with Deborah Thacker's more jaundiced view that it is one more manifestation of the colonization by adults of children's culture (31). In her analysis of the appeal of the *Harry Potter* septology to adult readers, Falconer draws a comparison between the first three books, which she claims are informed by an aesthetics of 'lightness', and the final four books, which are much darker in tone and which are infused by an obsession with mortality, marking a shift in tone from the playful to the pessimistic (71). By contrast, she argues that Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy adopts a dual address from the outset which encourages a postmodern scepticism about theocratic absolutism (73), but does so by inviting its adult readers to share the child's

imaginative capacity to think ‘as if’, thus ‘releas[ing] them from entrenched attitudes and modes of being’ (85-86). Somewhat surprisingly, Falconer downplays the dense intertextuality of the trilogy which seems likely to be a rich source of pleasure for knowing adult readers, but she stresses that the eco-critical theme introduced in the second book, *The Subtle Knife* offers a timely wakeup call to child and adult readers alike (94).

Apart from these foundational texts, more research has been undertaken by Maria Lissa Harju who wrote her important paper titled *Tove Jansson and the Crossover Continuum* in 2009. She proposes the crossover continuum: “a philosophy that recognizes and explores continuity between human experiences in various life stages” (365). She states,

With this notion of continuation, I do not mean to suggest that young people and adults are exactly the same, but rather, that they share relatable joys and ordeals... This philosophy of continuance values the progression of knowledge between distinct phases (infancy, childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, seniority), considering them unique but interdependent, equal parts of the whole (365)

thus, providing an important theoretical lens to view crossover fiction. She also published her thesis *Being Not Alone in the World: Exploring Reader Responses to Crossover Fiction* in 2012 where she uses a reader-response approach to examine crossover books. Through self and case study, she addresses key questions of engagement pertaining to why readers reach beyond socially prescribed reading boundaries in search of story, how they identify with crossover literature, and the significance of their individual and shared experiences of cross-reading. She concludes that cross-readers are attracted to themes of continuance that offer a holistic understanding of life experiences and identity which are not divided by age. She also shows how readers, through crossover fiction, obtain a sense of community and what she terms as

“grand conversation” – “a more open, honest and equal dialogue with readers in other age groups, by sharing their responses to crossover books” (Harju 2).

Another thesis of note is by Theresia Enny Anggraini titled *The Characteristics of Child-to-Adult Crossover Literature* published in 2013. She uses a qualitative research methodology, specifically the content analysis method, to analyse 14 novels that crossover under 9 different criteria - character, plot, genre, perspective, setting, style, theme, symbol, and uniqueness/novelty. She concludes that of the 14 books reviewed, all have at least seven of the nine characteristics discussed in the research. All the books match six of the characteristics which include: character, plot, style, theme, symbol, and uniqueness or novelty. However, there are also exceptions found in each book (Anggraini iii). She uses the criteria given by Beckett and leans more towards numerical data collection rather than close reading of the texts or emphasising on newer criteria.

An additional thesis that deals with crossover fiction is Maria Verena Peters' *Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century: Harry Potter's Kidults and Twilight's Moms*. This thesis examines the phenomenon through a gender and cultural studies lens, focusing on the females who consume the two texts and the impact on cultural definitions and understanding of adulthood. Contrary to the belief that such novels prolong a state of childhood for adults, Peters argues that reading these books effectually reaffirms clear concepts of adulthood and maturation. In the literary analysis, she shows how both the series offer structures and social rituals for the development from child to adult to their readers that compensate for the rising feeling of a disappearance of these clear structures and social rituals in the real world. At the same time, they directly address the felt crisis of childhood, adulthood and coming of age. She criticizes the simplistic view of these texts as mere escapist reading, arguing that this perspective strategically undermines the multifaceted cultural work these books perform. Instead, Peters contends that they confront readers with current anxieties and

paradoxes related to age identity. Peters concludes by noting that, within the fictional worlds of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, childhood and adulthood are constructed as opposites but are also depicted as troubled identity categories. She turns to the adult fans of these series, often portrayed as symbols of an adulthood crisis in media and literary studies. Peters highlights the historical context of crossover fiction, emphasizing that the division of children's and adult markets since the mid-18th century has always been fluid, challenging the notion that child and adult categories are natural or essential. Peters argues that the ideological function of the perceived crisis of adulthood, indicated by the rise in crossover fiction, is to reaffirm the belief that child and adult categories were once clearly delineated. She emphasizes that this discourse of crisis is not a disturbance of the social order but a means of reinforcing it. For Peters, the figure of the "kidult" serves as a "mild kind of folk devil", evoking a moral panic that ultimately legitimizes and cements a conservative ideology concerning power structures based on age, gender, and social class. She cautions against representing the child/adult binary as natural, as it blatantly ignores academic works on the invention of childhood and fictional representations of kidults in mass media.

Apart from such dedicated texts, texts like *Keywords for Children's Literature*; the second edition of *International Companion Encyclopedia for Children's Literature*, and the *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* all mention and acknowledge the rise of crossover fiction in the general history and contexts of children's literature.

The latest papers published on crossover fiction in 2022 offer alternative means to narrative theory. Shi in *Differences, Idiosyncrasies and Shared Humanity: Reconceptualising Crossover Literature* completely rejects the narrative approach, instead offering a Kinship Model or shared family resemblance between texts that characterises crossover fiction. It is a bit vague on what exactly the definitions of this criteria – differences, idiosyncrasies, and shared humanity – are, but provides some departure points to consider like the deficits in the

narrative theory approach. Thaidigsmann in her 2022 article *Memory Studies and the Analysis of Crossover Literature: Methodology and Case Study* provides a model of memory work, focussing on how adults may create meanings from the text based on their own personal levels of experience, distance and associations. She offers three levels of meaning making: way of expression which pertains to the literary characterises of the texts, and way of reflection and level of association which depends on the reader's personal knowledge. Again, the article falls in the realm of reader-response and memory work, which has taken off in the recent years and does not provide any new model with regard to the stylistics and features of the texts themselves.

Works Cited

- Anggraini, Theresia Enny. *The Characteristics of Child-to-Adult Crossover Literature*. 2015. The Ohio State University. PhD Thesis. *etd.ohiolink.edu*, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=osu1440027648. Accessed 27 October 2019.
- Beckett, Sandra L. *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*. Routledge, 1999.
- . *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2010.
- Bingham, Jane and Grayce Shcolt. *Fifteen Centuries of Children's Literature: An Annotated Chronology of British and American Works in Historical Context*. Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Darton, Frederick Joseph Harvey. *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Falconer, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. Routledge, 2008.
- Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

- Hintz, Carrie, and Eric L. Tribunella. *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed, Broadview Press, 2019.
- Lerer, Seth. *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Maija-Liisa Harju. *'Being Not Alone in the World' Exploring Reader Responses to Crossover Books*. 2012. McGill University, PhD thesis.
- . "Tove Jansson and the Crossover Continuum." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2009, pp. 362–75. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.0.0472>.
- McCulloch, Fiona. *Children's Literature in Context*. Continuum, 2011.
- McGillis, Roderick, editor. *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle*. Praeger, 2003.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. 1996. Routledge, 2016.
- Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- O'Sullivan, Emer. *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature*. the Scarecrow press, 2010.
- Peters, Maria Verena. *Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century: Harry Potter's Kidults and the Twilight Moms: Phd Project in Literary and Cultural Studies*. 2018. universi – Universitätsverlag Siegen. PhD Thesis. *Opus Seigen*, <https://dspace.ub.uni-siegen.de/handle/ubsi/1328>. Accessed 16 September 2020.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. *Children's Literature: From the Fin de Siècle to the New Millennium*. Liverpool University Press, 2011.
- Shi, Xiaofei. "Differences, Idiosyncrasies, and Shared Humanity: Reconceptualising Crossover Literature." *International Research in Children's Literature*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 2022, pp. 178–90. *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2022.0449>.

- Stevenson, Deborah. "History of Children's Literature." *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- Thaidigsmann, Karoline. "Memory Studies and the Analysis of Crossover Literature: Methodology and Case Study (Poland)". *Researching Memory and Identity in Russia and Eastern Europe: Interdisciplinary Methodologies* edited by Jade McGlynn and Oliver T. Jones. Springer International Publishing, 2022, pp. 125 – 140. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99914-8>.
- Thacker, Deborah Cogan. "New Voices, New Threats". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 104 – 114. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- . "Playful Subversion". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 139 – 150. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21109-8>. PDF download.

Chapter 3

Why Adults Read Crossover Fiction: A Narrative Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This section will compare and contrast the selected crossover titles to arrive at conclusions on the common narrative features they share and the special significance they might hold for adult readers. Beckett, in her survey of crossover fiction, highlights some of the features she finds often in crossover fiction – that traditional popular genres of fantasy crossover over frequently; the books have complex characters, plots, and darker themes; have both child and adult perspectives. Harju, too, arrives at three attributes that according to her characterize crossover fiction. These are – diverse address, complexity in form and/or theme, and evidence of diverse readership. Thus, there is a delineation of some of the typical expectations from a crossover title however this list is not a prerequisite to cross over. Some titles have all these features, and some have none, as proved by Beckett’s expansive survey. Moreover, these are general criteria without dwelling on specific themes, character types, address and fantasy aesthetics that might particularly appeal to adults. Because of this immense diversity in crossover fiction, Falconer has, as noted in the first chapter of this thesis, asserted there are no common characteristics of crossover fiction apart from the readership and chooses to instead provide individual analysis of texts.

This thesis does not subscribe to Falconer’s assertion and agrees with Beckett and Harju that there are indeed some features that books must share – aspects that might particularly engage the interest of an adult reader. By considering these crossover classics together, the

thesis arrives at conclusions on particulars of theme, character, address and genre that answer the question of what common features within these novels attract adult readers; what lies within these texts that is capable of attracting such a large adult readership. These commonalities will shed light on the specific features with which adult readers engage, identify, and appreciate.

3.2 Thematic Preoccupations

The first place to begin understanding adult interest in children's books is to look at the theme or what the story is about (Prince 74), which becomes a handy tool to arrive at conclusions about the thematic preoccupations of these crossover texts and why adults might be interested in what the story is communicating; how it might provide meaning in the context of an adult life. Although the thematic concerns of children's literature have traditionally been reflective of the adult need to condition, socialize, and instruct children or, alternatively, merely provide entertainment and engagement, however, the selected crossover texts, and for that matter, much of contemporary children's literature, have evolved beyond these binaries and become more complex and nuanced in their portrayals and anxieties. Themes of war, terrorism, sexual assault, mental health, disability, climate change are just some of the various and diverse topics to be found in children's texts of the twenty-first century. However, by tracing the common themes the selected crossover texts have, the thesis will point to specific subject matter that makes children's books accessible and interesting to adult readers.

As elucidated in the Literature Review, established scholarship has traced the existence of western children's literature from Middle Ages onwards and constructed chronological histories of the canon. Although there remain many questions about definitions, literacy in the particular age, and accessibility to texts, these histories do help with understanding the main motivations of why children's books were written and what the thematic preoccupations were, with each new age. Fiona McCulloch's work *Children's Literature in Context* provides a broad and comprehensive understanding of children's literature. In the first two chapters, she uses

socio-cultural and literary frameworks to contextualise children's literature. From the socio-cultural lens, she begins at the cultural impact of the Reformation on the texts that were produced for children and traces the production of texts all the way till the new and radical changes found in children's books brought on by the socio-cultural upheavals of the twentieth century. From a literary view point, she grapples with the change in the meanings, definitions, and functions of children's literature starting at the Puritanical literary tradition and ends at what she views as the "Third Golden Age", in the late twentieth century. Deborah Thacker and Jean Webb also provide the history of children's literature within a literary theory framework, titled *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. Their work begins at the impact of Romanticism as a literary movement and ends at the postmodern forms, themes, and aesthetics that evolved in the late twentieth century children's texts.

Another history titled *A Reader's History: from Aesop to Harry Potter* comes from Seth Lerer, who constructs a quirky, highly subjective yet interesting readers' history, discussing texts and historical moments which he considers momentous in the reading lives of children. He begins even further back, at *Aesop Fables* and the Greek and Byzantine reading materials and habits of children. From there on, he traces an erratic albeit fascinating thread that runs through the subsequent texts and reading eras, focussing on intertextuality and how each time period influenced the next generations of child texts and child readers, concluding that the most recent age is what he terms as an "Ironical age" in children's literature. Other works like M.O. Grenby's *Edinburgh Critical Guide to Children's Literature* (2008) and Emer O'Sullivan's *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature* (2010) provide well curated, informative timelines starting at 11th-15th century and ending in the years 2007-2008. A study of these chronologies reveals the most critical, landmark moments in children's literature and the dominant thematic preoccupations with each era.

Through such constructed histories, there emerge distinct, cultural events that have had a lasting impact on Anglo-American children's literature in many ways, the themes considered appropriate for children being one of them. The Puritan tradition based on the idea of original sin had a big influence on the themes of children's literature, bringing in Evangelical, didactic and moralizing content into children's stories. Seventeenth century philosopher, John Locke's ideas regarding children, childhood, and literacy collated in two important essays, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) impressed upon the western imagination that children's books must exist for the purpose of education and socialization of children and the themes of such books must be instructive yet engaging to the young minds. The purpose of children's books was to pass on the dominant norms and expected behaviours to children, as they were *tabula rasa* – blank slates – in need of instruction. Thus, the contents of children's books became oriented towards rational ideals of learning and literacy with focus on acquiring the alphabet and language, and studying the building blocks of the world like plants, animals, colours and so on. John Newbery's publication of *Pretty Little Pocket Book* in 1744, widely regarded as the first modern children's book, solidified the presence and commercial potential of children's literature, following the tradition of *Docere et delectare*: to teach and to entertain. On the other hand, Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Emile, Or On Education* published at the end of the eighteenth century followed by the Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century established an idea of the natural child, the importance of imagination and constructed childhood as a state of innate innocence. This led to children's books to be filled with themes of fancy, fantasy and whimsy which emphasised on freedom, a pure state of happiness and escape. Thacker provides an apt summary of this evolution, noting:

The Evangelical emphasis on catechism called for a literature that fulfilled a need to address the innate sinfulness of children, and provided a literature based

on instruction and improvement. In a similar way, rationalist doctrines claimed, with reference to John Locke's sense of *tabula rasa*, that children were blank slates on which to write. Although the inculcation of dominant values remains within the discourses which surround children's literature as an educational and moral tool, Romantic adherence to a natural connection between children and higher truths opened the way for a new means of communicating through fiction. Literature, which arose out of this tradition, offered not only content based on fantasy and dream, but also a form based upon the expectation that children as listeners or readers possessed an unspoken understanding of the sublime and hidden meaning at the heart of the imaginative process.

(Romanticism to Postmodernism 16)

Thus, as McCulloch puts it succinctly, "children's literature became a site of struggle between Evangelicals, Romantics and rationalists and it is out of this contention that our present day view of childhood is shaped" (Children's Literature in Context 13). For the longest time, themes of children's books would be inclined to either have strong, moral messages with goals of teaching children the right behaviour, or be silly, fun, and playful fantasy stories that preserved the innocence and imagination of childhood, or they would, most often, be a mix of both. Stevenson agrees and quotes one of the earliest historians of children's literature, pointing out that Darton "describes children's literature as "the scene of a battle between instruction and amusement, between restraint and freedom, between hesitant morality and spontaneous happiness" (p. vii), and that polarization becomes a largely unchallenged tenet of the literature, providing the spectrum that underpins nearly every genre history prior to the 21st century" (History, Handbook of Research 180).

Most importantly, the themes of children's books would be simple, straightforward, and uphold a view of child/childhood that adults considered appropriate – safe, inoffensive,

free of sex, violence, slang and trauma, and would not challenge the dominant norms or morality.

However, as the twentieth century progressed, paradigm shifts began to thoroughly challenge the hegemony of adult constructions of childhood. With the gradual rise of middle-class values, the impact of the World Wars, the increased socio-economic study of childhood and its potential, the psychological interest in the experience and health of children, all culminated into bringing in more complex themes to children's books. Themes of death, trauma, war, religion, power and ideology as well as themes pertaining to the specifics of childhood like identity formation, sexuality, mental health, abuse and oppression began to emerge. Themes of children's book, especially in the late twentieth century, increasingly became authentic, encouraging innovation, complexity, and nuance.

Lerer expounds on his idea of children's literature existing in this "Ironic Age", especially the later years of the twentieth century, where he observes, while traditionally children were far away from adult concerns and weariness and did not have a developed sense of irony, often mostly considered sincere and open-hearted, the contemporary children are unlike these constructions. These modern children "live in communities of false belief and mistrust. They learn that other people lie. They learn, too, that their own beliefs may not be shared by others. Appearance and reality are no longer clearly demarcated..." (Reader's History 307), thus they are not only wiser to the ways of the world, but also active participants who must manage worldly troubles.

Hammerburg, too, sees the thematic evolution of children's literature as a symptom of acknowledging that childhood has always been complex and fraught with tensions, stating "Functioning outside of an 18th century notion that childhood is an innocent time, many contemporary authors acknowledge that childhood is not always happy, children are not always innocent, adults are not always trustworthy. The possible themes, settings, plots, and subject

matters of contemporary children's literature reflect the responsibilities, dilemmas, and survival skills of being a child today" (Reading and Writing Hypertextually 210).

McCulloch notes that late twentieth century texts are characterized by "a tension between the adult world of conservatism, with its pastoral tropes and the child's world of modernity, corruption and danger. The children in these books are the ones attempting to find ways to negotiate with modern society and its rapid changes..." (Children's Literature in Context 41). She sees disrupted patterns of family structure, depictions of fragmentation, increase in intertextuality, open-endedness, and mature approaches to familiar themes. She points out that "There is, however, still a sense of rural nostalgia in them but with a simultaneous feeling of a world ever changing and uncertain (Children's Literature in Context 42) and concludes that "As the twentieth century closed and the new millennium emerged, it is evident that the appetite for children's literature is stronger than ever and adults are increasingly turning to the category known as crossover fiction – that is that which appeals to both child and adult reader" (Children's Literature in Context 42).

Thus, the increase in complexity of themes and what she calls "mature approaches to familiar themes" has indeed contributed to the rise of crossover fiction and the interest of adults in children's books. Thacker too views the darkness and complexity of tone in the postmodern aesthetic that has increasingly been adopted by children's books as an important factor in the popularity of crossover fiction (Playful Subversion 101). She considers children's literature as an "expression of possibility" (Playful Subversion 141) as it offers the opportunity for serious and novel treatment of subject matter. Beckett also observes that crossover fiction owes its popularity to the general trend of children's literature freeing itself from the "rigid moral codes and taboos...[and] explor[ing] more "adult" themes". She quotes an article titled "A Children's Writer with Adult Topics" referring to Philip Pullman but asserts that this could apply to many contemporary children's authors. She states that in the contemporary body of children's

literature, a wide-range of topics like “sexuality, pregnancy, incest, sexual abuse, suicide, cruelty, murder, terrorism, genocide, war, disease, and death” can be prevalently found (Global and Historical Perspectives 262).

Obviously, such serious and relevant themes would absorb and engage adult readers. Falconer, in her reading of *Harry Potter* as a crossover novel, focuses on the spectrum of light and dark depicted in the books, playing on multifarious meanings of light, lightweight, and lightness, finally illuminating how the books turn dark and offer pathways to approach heavier themes like death. For her, the various ways that the first three books are light in theme, content and reading experience is indeed rewarding to adults, and the “buoyant, effervescent narrative reflects, in part, the influences in a postmodern society that...values playfulness, flexibility and spontaneous creativity” (Crossover Novel 46). She sees the intrinsic lightness and buoyancy of the novels as “a state of mind that can be activated, or in adults, reactivated, by narrative circumstances” (Crossover Novel 46). However, as the themes turn darker, especially towards death, “the emphasis of her [Rowling’s] work may be seen to shift from expressing the magic ‘lightness’ of childhood to representing the child master of death” and she sees the same postmodernist “lightness” “stringently” critiqued in the later books, (Crossover Novel, 47-48). The success of the crossover for Falconer comes from the ease with which readers can switch from lightness to darkness, from simplicity to complexity in the *Potter* books (Crossover Novel 50). Coming to the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Falconer focuses on the coming-of-age aspect, and how the lines are blurred between child and adult characters by portraying fluid mental ages and centring the qualities Pullman values, regardless of biological age in his characters. For Falconer, the trilogy represents the Western preoccupation with identity as incomplete and a work in progress, and the books “represent this contemporary state of being both affirmatively and critically. In particular, it dramatizes our anxieties about coming of age... [the] pervasive

uncertainty of who to be, and when and where to be ‘at home’ in oneself” (Crossover Novel 79).

Beckett, while discussing the books in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as crossover fiction points to how the books provide a glimpse of darkness that is pervasive to life. She considers Daniel Handler’s opinions, explaining that as the author of the books he has faced critics who object to the relentless and excessive sorrow, despair, and suffering that the Baudelaire siblings face however he along with other authors believe that it is “essential to give children the truth, even when it is dark and painful” and she adds that the books not only portray the darkness of the world but also the darkness within oneself, within young people (Global and Historical Perspective 261). She also comments on Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* and Gaiman’s *Coraline*, articulating the various stances that the authors themselves have on their works and how they believe in children’s literature being the stage for examining and questioning metaphysical and philosophical dilemmas of life, death, good, evil, sex and body like any other adult novels. She believes that the turn to darker themes is indicative of the darker world that children inhabit today and concludes that, “Today, there are very few, if any, taboo subjects in literature for young readers, and this fact makes it easier for adult fiction to cross over to children” (Global and Historical Perspectives 265). She views this maturation not as something new but as a “return to the situation that existed prior to the creation of a separate literature for children” (Global and Historical Perspectives 265) reminding readers of folktales and fairytales that dealt with serious, violent, gruesome themes. She invokes Harju and agrees that, “The search for meaning has no age limit. Crossover fiction acknowledges that different generations share knowledge, desires, and concerns” (Global and Historical Perspectives 268). Because children’s literature has evolved in this manner to accommodate such large thematic concerns, adult readers are merely engaging with a new source of valuable, literary texts.

In her article, *Children's Literature for Adults: A Meaningful Paradox*, Leona M. English states "...the writers of this [children's] literature are often resolving adult dilemmas when writing, and more specifically, they are seeking to understand and explain their own relationships and interpersonal issues when they write" (14). She goes on to write about the many, often overlooked advantages of using children's literature in adult education and literacy. She says, "Meaningful children's literature concerns itself with life motifs such as fear and pain, love and death, and rebirth. These crucial life themes and motifs engage adults in discourse about the self, engaging their own interests and challenges and facilitating their storying of their own life and issues...Used well, it assists them in solving real life challenges and dilemmas" (18).

As mentioned above, for *Harry Potter* it is the fluidity of lightness and darkness that encourages crossover, in *His Dark Materials*, it is the fluidity of constructed age and identity of the protagonists that make the books popular amongst adults. Falconer's readings of the two works is erudite, rich in intertextual references, and provide answers to why the individual works may crossover, however, if examined even more deeply one can see there are many thematic commonalities between these two texts as well as Gaiman and Handler's works which helps in building an interconnection between these popular and marked crossover novels, thus arriving at an answer to the question of whether there are any themes in particular that chiefly engage and attract adult readers. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the works are diverse as the *Harry Potter* series is essentially a school detective story, *His Dark Materials* trilogy is epic-inspired, the *Series of Unfortunate Events* sequence is absurdist fiction, *Coraline* is gothic horror and *The Graveyard Book* is feral-child fiction, albeit with ghosts. However, they all have roots in speculative fiction, and when analysed together, all four narratives share the themes of naturalizing death as positive, natural, and inevitable; the ambiguity of love; the

reluctant status of the chosen one; and finding your chosen family, which are discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1 Death as Positive, Natural, and Inevitable

One of the first and most visibly common theme amongst the texts is death. All of them, in various ways, work to normalize, accept, and acknowledge death as a cruel, compulsory, and painful experience, yet one that is natural, and joyful or legitimate or both. All the stories begin with death –Lyra’s father is almost poisoned, Harry’s parents are murdered, Bod’s parents are murdered and he takes up residence with the dead in a graveyard, and the Baudelaire children’s parents have been murdered in an arson. Only *Coraline* begins on a more benign note of her moving into an old, mysterious flat. Nevertheless, death is never far away in *Coraline*, as she eventually fights for her life, her parents’ lives and the freedom of ghost children. As the various books progress, the theme of death becomes even more apparent and pervasive.

His Dark Materials not only begins with an attempted assassination scene, but Lyra’s existence is framed by the apparent death of her parents, as she is passed off as an orphan. Death is a presence from the beginning in the tale. However, it is not constructed as a negative phenomenon. Pullman naturalizes death by asserting the right of dead people to remain part of the natural, physical world instead of being relegated to some formless, abstract domain. Lyra and Will have to literally journey into the land of the dead and free the souls so that they might join the physical world as atoms. They discover that there is no heaven or hell, as promised by the Authority - a mythical, god-like figure resembling the idea of the Christian God. Instead, there are only swathes and swathes of endless, gloomy wastelands where the spiritual imprint of the body is sent to stand around for an eternity. They realise that the dead are listless and lost, yearning most for their imprint/soul to merge with the physical universe. Freeing the dead means that their physical atoms will “loosen up, float apart...[and become] part of

everything...gone into the air, the wind and the trees and the earth and...[they'll] be out in the open, part of everything alive again" (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 319-320). The ghosts long to be united with the physical world instead of being relegated to an immaterial existence, saying "...they've forgotten a whole lot. Except the sunshine. No one forgets that. And the wind." (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 313).

The physical body is exalted and as Lyra weaves stories of her life, the ghosts pine for materiality – "As she spoke, playing on their senses, the ghosts crowded closer, feeding on her words, remembering the time they had flesh and skin and nerves and sense" (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 315). This centering of the physical is an empirical, rationalist approach, as Lyra "has to trust her body and the truth of what her senses told her..." (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 321), directly contradicting the emphasis Christianity puts on the spirit, casting the body as sinful. To divide the body (physical) and the soul (abstract) is unnatural for Pullman, and his idea of death is one where the two are combined till the end, not separated from each other. To die is to become one with the universe in a physical, literal sense. If separated, the ghosts are dreary, fearful, and disconsolate but when allowed to return to their most elementary physical selves of atoms, death is freeing and joyous, as expressed by Roger, Lyra's friend, the first ghost to be freed stepping out, he "laughed in surprise as he found himself turning into the night, the starlight, the air... and then he was gone, leaving behind such a vivid little burst of happiness..." (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 365). In the *His Dark Materials* universe, death is as natural as physics and is constructed as an emancipatory conclusion to one's life. Death as a release into the most elementary form is not to be feared and whether it comes early or late, it is rejoiced in as returning to the most natural state of all, as portrayed by Lyra, who after rescuing the dead and freeing them, serenely thinks to herself of how one day she too will join them.

In the *Harry Potter* books, from the outset, discussions around dying and immortality are central. Apart from grappling with his own status as an orphan due to the death of his parents, Harry's initiation into thinking about death and what it means is quite early. He is famous because he is The Boy Who Lived, having defied death as a baby and his murderer/arch nemesis, Voldemort, he is told, might be in an abnormal state between life and death, as his spirit endures. From then on, Harry's entire existence is framed by the idea of death and the ability or inability to escape it. Harry has to start considering what dying means and how he must come to terms with it. At the age of eleven, when Harry saves the philosopher's stone, he is horrified to find that the creator, Nicolas Flamel, will now die. However, Dumbledore assuages his fears by naturalising death for him, saying "To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible...After all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure" (Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone* 215). In the second book, Harry comes close to accepting his own death as inevitable, expected end, as he lays dying in the Chamber of Secrets, before he is saved (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 236). In the third book, he again has to constantly contend with the threat of his own demise as his Divination teacher keeps seeing the Grim, an omen of death, whenever she tries to read Harry's future. However, his best friend, Hermione, rationalizes it is more the fear of death than vague omens that affects people (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 85), once again reminding us that death is natural and if it has to come, will come and there is no point in worrying about it. The fourth book onwards, Harry must not only contend with his own mortality but also losing his loved ones as he faces the death of Cedric, his schoolmate, Sirius, his godfather and even, Dumbledore, his guardian and mentor. By the seventh book, civil war breaks out and many are killed, murdered, or sacrificed in an attempt to protect the Boy Who Lived. However, by the end, it is only Harry's own acceptance of his death that seals his victory against Voldemort. He realises, "...the incontrovertible truth, which was that he must die. *I must die*. It must end" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 556). And it is this

realisation of the inevitability of an end that makes Harry worthy of being alive. This value of acceptance is reiterated in the parable of the Three Brothers narrated within the text, where the two brothers who try to humiliate the character of Death and seek power are immediately conquered, and it is only the third brother, who is humble and wise in the face of Death, is the one who manages to leave unscathed till he has lived a full, happy life and then “he greeted Death like an old friend, and went with him gladly, and as equals, they departed this life” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 332).

Harry’s acceptance of his own mortality is in stark contrast to others. Voldemort seeks to live on through the Horcruxes – fragmented pieces of his soul he can use for resurrection, Dumbledore attempts to become a master of death through uniting the Hallows – omnipotent magical instruments. However, this is a perverted desire – to defy death – and only those who accept death are allowed to triumph in the narrative. The entire point is to construct death as the most natural and more importantly, an absolute part of life. Anything else requires unimaginable, unnatural compromises. Resurrection through Horcruxes requires premeditated murder, the Resurrection Stone (one of the Hallows) is ineffective as it doesn’t truly bring people back – just their shadowy selves, driving the user mad. Similarly, within the narrative world of the books, ghosts are the people who are too afraid to accept death, thus choosing to remain as imprints of their former selves yet forced to endure watching the living enjoy pleasures of the body – like eating and being solid. To die is an absolute eventuality and acceptance is key. Rowling is persistent about emphasising this message as every time Harry tries to find a way the dead can be brought back, he is discouraged. When he sees his parents in the Mirror of Erised, it is revealed they are nothing but projections of his own wishful thinking (Rowling, *Philosopher’s Stone* 157). When he tries to find out if Sirius will be back as a ghost, he is informed that won’t happen as Sirius was brave enough to accept his death and move on (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 759). When he conjures the embodiments of his loved

ones through the Resurrection Stone, they are most likely manifestations of his own psyche as they confirm to Harry, “We are part of you...invisible to anyone else” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 561). When he meets Dumbledore at the moment of his own apparent death, he asks him if its real or it’s happening inside his head and the reply he receives is, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that is not real?” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 579). The encounter, then, can once again be viewed as a fragment of Harry’s own consciousness rather than truly meeting a resurrected Dumbledore. The only true way to live on after death in the text is through the memories and emotions of those left behind. When Harry is dejected after hoping to see his dead father in the third book, Dumbledore reminds him, “You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think you don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry...” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 312). Like in *His Dark Materials*, to die is natural, expected and absolute. Tempered with positive connotations, in both texts, death is constructed as innate to the condition of life, a natural progression and the acceptance of death is essential.

In the thirteen books that makeup *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, like in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, death is omnipresent. This tale, too, begins with death as the Baudelaire siblings become orphans and are shunted from one guardian to the next, as each of them is killed by Count Olaf, their nemesis. Like death, he too is ever-present, murdering any ally or friend like Uncle Monty and Aunt Josephine, who stand in the way of him and his pursuit of the children’s fortune. Halfway through the series, the children themselves become the accidental cause of a group of people’s death and in the book, *The Penultimate Peril*, they start a fire which supposedly kills a number of characters from the previous books. By the last book, drolly titled *The End*, most of the children’s friends like the Quagmires and Widdershins have also seemingly passed away due to unknown causes and every known face whether it is

the kindly Kit, their old nemesis Olaf or the island cult leader Ishmael dies or is insinuated to die. The sheer number of deaths in the books is almost farcical, creating a peculiar effect of nonsense and yet emphasising the pervasiveness of death. In a true postmodern aesthetic, the narrative is severely fragmented, multi-fold, and coupled with Lemony Snicket's unreliable narrator status, diverges at so many places that there is much scope for speculation. But whether people die or not, the idea of death is naturalised as the most expected result in the texts. The point of the books is to remind all readers along with the Baudelaire siblings of *Memento Mori*, which is also referenced in *The Austere Academy* as the school motto. Snicket often comments on how "Everybody will die, but very few people want to be reminded of that fact" (Snicket, *Austere Academy* 14). There is an existential treatment of death as harsh, painful and sometimes, ridiculous but also inevitable. The choice is to either accept it and still live life (as chosen by the Baudelaire siblings when they decide to leave their Eden-esque island refuge and venture forth into the world again, despite all the misery they had faced) or to hide away and lead an unnatural existence (like Ishmael and his group of followers who lived on the island for years, hidden away from the world). Like the previous two series, these books, too, do not provide any comfort of life after death. Apart from the speculation of whether a character is truly gone, there is no promise of resurrection, afterlife or return in any form. However, it is only through the actions of those living that the dead live on, like Snicket dedicating every book to Beatrice, his deceased love or the Baudelaire twins deciphering and imbibing the words and wisdom left to them in the books written by their parents.

A similar existential acceptance of death as inevitable can be seen in *The Graveyard Book*. Although, unlike the texts discussed above, life after death in the book is evidenced by the ghosts in the graveyard that seem to live on in a static, eternal state. Yet, death is nothing to be afraid of and it is only through living with the dead that Bod begins to appreciate and aspire to a life fully lived. For Bod, death is as close as naturalised as can be and he is not afraid

in any way, stating “So? ...it’s only death. I mean, all of my best friends are dead.” (Gaiman 116) to which Silas stresses on the infinite potential a life has to make change and to create. The text deals with death as an inevitable truth but underlines the importance of not staying in the graveyard/sheltered life forever and instead, encouraging “between now and then, there was Life; and Bod walked into it...” (Gaiman 201). In *Coraline* too, we see a similar approach to viewing death as a joyful release as she shares a wonderful dream-state with the ghosts of children she rescues from the Beldam. Their shell-like existence, much like the ghosts Lyra meets, is miserable but after their rescue, they move on and are glad to be able to do so. Coraline, when upset that she must still play a final trick to defeat the Beldam, is reminded by one of the ghost children “take comfort in this...Th’art alive. Thou livest” (Gaiman 173).

These crossover texts are different from other children’s texts in their treatment of death as there is no Neverland of eternal youth, no promise of returning to Narnia after death, or of travelling to the Undying Lands like Frodo. Death is not embellished or presented in euphemisms but accepted in its finality which is used to then affirm the meaningfulness of a life lived. To adult readers, and as a matter of fact, any reader who is aware of and experienced in the reality of death, such an acknowledgement of death as natural, inevitable, and positive provides with them with a more plausible approach to managing their fears and anxieties around such a traditionally dark theme.

Moreover, tapping into the personal reading experience I possess of these books, as a child reader, the deaths of favourite characters in these books indeed deeply affected me, but these were not moments of philosophical rumination on death, rather a chance to exercise my skills of empathy as I was more concerned with the loss of the particular character rather than dwelling on what it meant to die. However, as an adult reader, I appreciate the theme much more as the acknowledgement of the inevitability and the construction of the ultimate end as joyful provides both comfort and catharsis.

3.2.2 The Ambiguity of Love

All the texts dwell heavily on the theme of love, the moral complexities it inspires and the power, privilege, and protection it might afford to those who experience it. *His Dark Materials*, at its essence, is a story of love but love is not always wondrous, innocent, and moral but fraught with contradictions, tensions, and immoral behaviour. In the background is Marisa Coulter and Asriel's tragic love story that began as an extramarital affair, ending in murder of Marisa's husband. Both Asriel and Mrs Coulter are disillusioned with the power of sex and love, and how it created havoc in their lives. Dust – the physical form of free will, knowledge, consciousness and self-awareness – is contentious to them because amongst other things, it also signifies self-awareness of body, flesh, touch, and the physical pleasures. It is the source of romantic love and sexual attraction, and it is these “adult emotions” which the Church abhors, which Asriel wants to vanquish, and which Mrs. Coulter wants to seize from children, in order to protect their innocence. She is guided by her own embittered experiences and thinks children would be better off without learning the meaning of such love. However, those very chaotic forces of love and sex give them Lyra and, although, both Asriel and Mrs Coulter are despicable and heinous in their own right, their last redeeming act of sacrifice is driven by the love they have for Lyra and for each other. Mrs Coulter and Asriel sacrifice themselves in order to give Lyra a chance to grow up, to experience love, and in that love, form the Republic of Heaven. In the forefront is Lyra and Will's love story, the literal driving force of the entire narrative. Lyra is destined to be the second Eve and is thus being hunted by the Church, which is intent on killing her before she gains awareness of her sexuality. Despite all odds, Lyra and Will bond and, in the end, realise the love that has blossomed for each other. The source of Lyra's power as the second Eve is linked to her ability to feel love for Will and as she develops those feelings, Dust, which was slowly being drained, is then brought back into the world and these “children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all” (Pullman,

Amber Spyglass 197). However, the same love which causes the emancipation of the world, becomes a source of personal tragedy for Lyra as she and Will are separated irrevocably and she must carry the pain of the separation with her.

In *Harry Potter*, love is positioned as a protective force “that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than the forces of nature” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 776) and can defeat the darkest of evil, however with it also comes the possibility of immense grief, sadness, and loss. The importance of love is constantly emphasised throughout the books, and it often manifests as physical forms of defence against the effects of evil - Harry’s life is spared due to his mother, Lily’s, sacrifice as it leaves a lasting, physical protection in his blood against Voldemort. Similarly, the Patronus charm against the Dementors is a physical shield that can be conjured only through happy memories of being loved. It is also an innate power that one can possess. It is revealed that Voldemort’s psychopathic tendencies are due to the circumstance of his birth – born under the spell of a love potion which is manufactured, imitation love and not genuine affection between his parents, he cannot feel any genuine emotion or connection, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Whereas Harry, because he has always received and given love in forms of friendships, family, and romance is powerful enough to both withstand as well as defeat Voldemort and the evil he exemplifies. However, it is burdensome as Harry’s love for his friends and family often also leads to feelings of unbearable pain at their deaths and other losses. Harry is completely shattered at Sirius’s death and in sheer agony declares “I’ve had enough, I’ve seen enough, I want out, I want it to end, I don’t care anymore” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 758) but it is Dumbledore’s personal belief that love is even more powerful than magic (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 369) and that the only true weapon Harry has for defeating his nemesis is his capacity to love in spite of facing immense misfortunes and grief, stating “You are protected, in short, by your ability to love...the only protection that can possibly work

against the lure of power like Voldemort's" (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 424). Greed, moral corruption, envy, darkness, all can be overcome by love but it also comes along with the promise of grief and hurt. Snape who spends his life compensating for his wrongdoing is motivated to do so by his everlasting love for Lily. However, he is also deeply embittered and made spiteful by his unspeakable grief at her death, making him a tyrant and bully. Thus, love is a transformative, protective power, capable of overcoming great evil but also demands an acceptance of sorrow, pain, and regret.

In *A Series of Unfortunate Events* too, love is powerful enough to exist despite a terrible world that is chaotic, absurd, and grotesque. However, it does not guarantee that those who display the ability to give or receive love are necessarily good people. The Baudelaire children are well aware of this as they realise that despite being good, loving parents, their mother and father did not always exhibit model behaviour. Snicket explains the ambiguity the Baudelaire siblings face, stating "It is often difficult to admit that someone you love is not perfect or to consider aspects of a person that are less than admirable. To the Baudelaires it felt almost as if they had drawn a line after their parents died. A secret line in their memories separating all the wonderful things about the Baudelaire parents from the things that were perhaps not quite so wonderful" (Snicket, *The Grim Grotto* 148). They see this reflected in their own lives as they use increasingly questionable means to make their escape, ensuring their own survival above all else. The love they feel for each other and their dead parents motivates them to not give up, providing them with the strength to be resilient and despite sacrificing their scruples, it is only because they love each other and their dead parents that they persevere. Similarly, Snicket's motivation to record and research the siblings' lives stems from his love for their dead mother, Beatrice, who is invoked in a dedication at the beginning of every book and is the last word in the concluding chapter of the entire series. Even though this undertaking is perilous and unrewarding, Snicket persists with his mission, often himself crossing the line between good

and bad, in order to record the unfortunate lives of the Baudelaire siblings, spurred on by his lingering regard for their mother. Even the most terrible Count Olaf, the source of all miseries, eventually turns into an ambiguous moral figure when he helps Kit, the woman he once loved, deliver her baby and dies alongside her. Love becomes the force of ambiguity within the texts as people who love are also capable of horrific acts and vice versa.

In *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*, parental love is at the forefront but while in *Coraline*, it is juxtaposed with the Beldam's offering of love, in *The Graveyard Book*, the tension between protective love and love that equips one to develop is revealed. The Beldam constantly emphasises on how much she loves Coraline and regularly repeats it over and over. However, Coraline is not fooled as she understands that the kind of love the Beldam offers – where Coraline is given all that she desires, where she is the centre of unceasing attention and the entire world is curated to her liking – is not authentic as the Beldam also increasingly tries to control Coraline stating “Now, if you will be a good child who loves her mother, be compliant and fair-spoken, you and I shall understand each other perfectly and we shall love each other perfectly as well” (Gaiman, *Coraline* 119). Instead, she must journey through danger and back in order to appreciate the bond she has with her parents. Coraline's real parents are inattentive, busy and generally distracted when dealing with Coraline, but they also care for her needs as well as encourage her be independent. When the Beldam shows Coraline a false image of her parents enjoying without her and discussing how life was better without a child, it seems like a reflection of Coraline's own fear about whether her parents truly loved her since their love was not as visible and tangible as the Beldam's offering. The dangerous journey she undertakes to rescue them is more about Coraline overcoming her own insecurities and understanding the difference between Beldam's perfect love, which is superficial and treacherous and her parents' real love which is more abstract. When journeying towards the Otherworld to rescue her parents, Coraline recalls an episode where her father saves her from

a swarm of wasps, all the while taking the brunt of the stings himself. By the end when the Beldam, having created the perfect world for Coraline, for one of the last times, yet again asserts “You know I love you” Coraline retorts “you have a funny way of showing it” (Gaiman, *Coraline* 140), indicating Coraline’s acceptance of love not as perfect but as something genuine and sincere.

In the *Graveyard Book*, like Harry’s mother, Bod’s mother’s one last protective act at the moment of her death is to ensure the safety of her son by convincing the ghosts of Mr and Mrs Owens to adopt and raise him. As Bod grows, various members of the graveyard apart from his adoptive parents, like Liza, Mrs. Lupescu, and Silas grow to love the boy. However, there is often a tension in their desire to protect him versus allowing Bod to venture forth and experience life. The relationship between Silas and Bod especially is fraught with this tension, as his guardian wishes to keep him within the confines of the graveyard where he can be shielded whereas Bod increasingly becomes curious of what lies beyond. However, at the end, Silas and the rest of the inhabitants of the graveyard enable him to go and “see life” (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 199). What a terrible fate it is to stay protected forever is presented when the Sleer, ancient beings, proclaim the villain Jack as their new master, announcing “We will protect him till the end of time. The Sleer will hold him in its coils forever and never let him endure the dangers of the world” (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 186), as he is absorbed and likely suffocated to death within a rock wall. When Bod finally leaves the graveyard, the ending is tinged with excitement for the future but also a sorrow at leaving everything familiar and well-known behind forever, as Bod bids goodbye to his parents and friends. Love for Bod gave him protection when he needed it, but it also the love for Bod that brought the sorrow of departure and parting.

Thus, in these crossover books, love is ambiguous and inspires not only power but also sinfulness, immorality, grief, bitterness, sadness and feelings of loss; the books do not give an

optimistic, innocent view of love but deal with the complexities that surround it. Whether it is parental love, romantic love, filial love, love between friends – the theme of love is prevalent throughout the books, the texts offering contemplations on, as Dumbledore puts it, the wonderful and terrible nature of love.

As a child reader, I was fascinated by the morally ambiguous nature of love as depicted in the texts as it went against how love was constructed to me in other mainstream media; reading about Asriel and Mrs. Coulter's final leap into the abyss, Snape's history or Olaf's final moments left lasting impressions on me as it directly challenged my world view of the innate goodness and virtuousness associated with love, introducing me to thinking critically about the narratives of love propagated around me. Now, as an experienced adult, this theme resonates with me on a deeper level, having witnessed and undergone comparable encounters and developing the ability to accept gray areas. I enjoy reading these complexities instead of being given cloying, unrealistic depictions of devoted families and children where 'love conquers all'.

3.2.3 The Reluctance of the Chosen One

All the child protagonists in the selected crossover texts are the Chosen Ones - children of prophecies destined to be powerful harbingers of change – however, they are reluctant to assume their status. Lyra is prophesied to be the Second Eve while Will becomes the bearer of the Subtle Knife, Harry is prophesied to be the vanquisher of Voldemort, Bod is prophesied to be the child who walks between the dead and living and causes the downfall of an ancient, five thousand year old criminal organization and though not explicitly mentioned, The Baudelaire siblings are, by narrative intention, chosen to survive, and become inheritors of the VFD legacy, and similarly, Coraline is chosen as the one to defeat the Beldam and set previous victims free. All these children are tasked with impossible missions of saving civilizations, repelling and defeating darkness, carrying on their parents' legacy or rescuing their loved ones

from a terrible fate. However, they are also reluctant to assume the responsibility, finding themselves thrust into such leadership positions unwillingly. At various times, these momentous tasks prove to be too onerous for they are, after all, just children and they can be found vocalizing their distress and struggle.

Lyra in a moment of anguish exclaims "...I can't go on, I'm so frightened – and so tired – all this way, and I'm scared to death! I wish it was someone else instead of me, I do honestly...It's too much for us Pan, we can't..." (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 376). Will is forcefully handed the responsibility of wielding the Subtle Knife and exclaims "I don't want it...I don't want anything to do with it" to which the previous bearer says, "You haven't got a choice...you are the bearer now" (Pullman, *Subtle Knife* 88). This choiceless-ness is characteristic of the children's position and can be seen in other protagonists as well. Harry, when first introduced to his real identity of wizard, feels the pressure of being singled out as special and states he is famous for something he doesn't even know how he achieved – resisting the fatal Avada Kedavra curse as a one year old infant (Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone* 93) – but he has no choice other than to accept his designation as a saviour of the wizarding world. He is never comfortable with the amount of attention he receives and does not enjoy the admiration his status as the "Boy Who Lived" brings him. When his friend, Ron, turns jealous of the continuous attention Harry receives, he exclaims in frustration "tell him from me I'll swap anytime he wants. Tell him from me he's welcome to it..." (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 244). When the prophecy is finally revealed to him, he desperately hopes that he is not the Chosen One, attempting to establish that a mistake might have occurred. However, once his fate is sealed and he realises that he must either hunt Voldemort down or be killed, he feels a "deep well of despair inside him" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 777), as he has no other choice left.

The Baudelaire siblings also constantly grapple with the lack of choice they seem to have in picking their own path. Incompetent Mr. Poe ignores the sensible suggestions the children give him, instead always choosing on their behalf and forcing them to live in perilous places where they are constantly forced to fight for their survival. The siblings aspire to some semblance of a happy childhood they once enjoyed and often try and seek adults who might offer them peace and security, however they are constantly pulled into difficult and dangerous situations, obliging them to expose and defeat evil. Snicket often reminds the readers of their lack of freedom, saying things like “Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant, filled with odd waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don’t always like” (The Slippery Slope 21) indicating the total helplessness of the Baudelaire siblings, as they are constantly embroiled in the conflicts created by adults around them. The children don’t have choice but to face the misfortunes thrust upon them (by others) and move onto fulfilling their destiny as the next generation of VFD volunteers.

When Coraline realizes the enormity of the task ahead of her, she is deathly afraid – to voluntarily walk into the Beldam’s lair and rescue her parents seems to be an insurmountable task to her. At first, she tries to involve adult authority as she tries to inform the police of her parents’ disappearance but is dismissed by a condescending adult officer and realises she has no choice but to rescue the parents herself. Bod, like Harry and the Baudelaire siblings, has his choice taken away from the beginning of the narrative as his parents and siblings are gruesomely murdered, orphaning him, and eventually leading him to claim his destiny as the child of a prophecy. He is not given any other path in life except the one where he ends up in the graveyard. Despite the fact that Silas and others in the Honour Guard fight and eradicate the criminal organisation, Jack of All Trades, Bod, when looking for solace and advice, eventually realises that he must find the truth about himself and his family alone. He confesses that “I am not frightened of dying...it’s just, so many people I care for have spent so much time

keeping me safe, teaching me, protecting me...I have to do this on my own.” (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 163). The same realization comes to Coraline who affirms “...when you’re scared but you still do it anyway, *that’s* brave” (Gaiman, *Coraline* 101) and insists she is rescuing her parents because they would do the same for her.

The other protagonists also eventually understand that they are indeed alone and no one can take their burden of being the special, chosen ones. Lyra’s quest is to find her friend Roger’s spirit and make things right with him as she is inadvertently responsible for his death. She realises that no one else cares for the fate of little children and she and Will are determined to rescue Roger, travelling to the land of the dead in their pursuit. She profoundly understands her duty, saying “...if I don’t say sorry, it’ll all be no good, just a huge waste of time. I got to do that, you see, Will I got to go down into the land of dead and find him, and...and say sorry. I don’t care what happens after that” (Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* 69). Harry, over time, develops what his best friend Hermione calls “A saving people thing” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 676), however it stems from the inability of adults to prove they can adequately protect those who need protection. Harry most often finds himself without adult help or intervention and faces final showdowns with various villains either with his peers or by himself; Harry’s tendency to save people is born out of the fear that no one else is going to do it for him. When training with Dumbledore to defeat Voldemort according to the prophecy, he realises his predicament is the “difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high” (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince* 426), finally accepting his role whole-heartedly.

The Baudelaire siblings, too, understand they cannot stay hidden away on their Edenesque island as comfortable as it is. They have a duty to face life, go out into the world and honour their parent’s wishes and life’s work. Violet expresses the realisation of their responsibility observing “We can’t stay here forever. There’s everything we might need, but

it's not right to be so far away from the world...Our parents left...maybe we should honor their wishes" (Snicket, *The End* 3-4), knowing they might find greater perils, but also accepting that they have a role to play in the larger world as probably VFD volunteers. Snicket humorously remarks, "Perhaps if we saw what was ahead of us, and glimpsed the follies, and misfortunes that would befall us later on, we should all stay in our mother's wombs, and then there would be nobody in the world but a great number of very fat, very irritated women." (*The End* 319), emphasizing on the moral obligation the children have to give up their protected island and contribute to the world.

All the child protagonists are young, amateurs, and underprepared for the tasks they are handed within the stories. Lyra, Harry and Coraline are merely eleven when they realise they are marked; Will is twelve when he begins his unhappy adventures; the Baudelaire siblings, Violet, Klaus and Sunny are fourteen, twelve and a toddler respectively when their misfortunes begin; and Bod is a baby with each chapter showing a different episode from different ages, ending at fifteen. They do not have any formal training, no previous experience or information but are declared the chosen ones and are expected to be great, powerful saviour figures and heroes. The theme of taking up the mantle of responsibility without a choice; without any previous preparation, and eventually accepting it invokes the very condition of adulthood where at a certain age, one must suddenly and compulsorily work, have a career, look after finances, become a contributor to the economy, become a role model, become a parent, provide for the family, show up for friends, and make decisions for oneself and those who might be dependant. This theme would thus resonate with a lot of adults who might find themselves overwhelmed by their lives and status as a grown up.

Examining my own reading experiences, when I read these books as a child, I felt empowered. The agency and freedom these children had over their lives and their ability to participate in important tasks of saving the world and their loved ones was an emancipatory

experience, especially since in real life, I would face a sheltered, ordinary, and monitored childhood. But reading about the power that these protagonists wielded, the special status they held inspired innate confidence and autonomy within me. It was not their moments of weakness but their strength to carry on that left a lasting impression on me as a child reader. As an adult too, the same sense of empowerment arises but there is also an empathic bond I share with these protagonists due to their reluctance, their bewilderment, and their feelings of being overwhelmed. The theme of being the chosen one and fulfilling your duty despite being completely unqualified is close to what being an adult feels like sometimes.

3.2.4 Parent- Child Relationships and Finding a Chosen Family

One of the main themes in all the crossover books is also the parent-child relationship as well as finding your own, chosen family. Gates defines a chosen family as “nonbiological kinship bonds, whether legally recognized or not, deliberately chosen for the purpose of mutual support and love.” He goes on to explain that while the traditional family unit was historically defined as husband, wife and children, a chosen family consists of any configuration of individuals who support one another (Chosen Families 240). Bradford et al state that modern society’s social and moral contract towards children was that they would be legally cared for and it elicited a promise of adult commitment and intergenerational support to young people. This led to a promotion of the family unit “as the most fundamental form of social capital, offering the individual resources, support, and networks for meeting mutual interests and needs.” However, they explain that

When the family becomes fragmented or its members separated or alienated from the collective, the individual must function independently of familial structures and support. In these instances, individuals seek or desire other forms of associations or networks providing a shared and collective level of economic, emotional, and functional security. These substitute families or alternative

homes replace kin-based networks and blood ties with other intimate (or coercive) relations with their own networks, norms, and social practices (New World Orders 131).

These trends observed increasingly in modern society have led to “developing new ways of being and belonging” (New World Orders 132) which can also be found represented in the selected crossover titles. Even if the protagonists are ultimately alone in their status as the chosen ones, they are not by any means alone in the journey. They all have complicated relationships with their parents but also form a community of friends and allies who love and support them in all the ways a family should.

Lyra has a cruel relationship with her parents – Asriel and Mrs. Coulter. Born out of an extramarital affair, Lyra is abandoned by her parents who leave her to be raised at an Oxford college and pursue their own personal ambitions. She has no clue of her parentage or who they are. When she eventually does find out, she seems unaffected and is more enthralled by the fantastical elements of her personal history rather than being troubled by their neglect. As the books go on, she develops a relationship of outright hatred and disgust with her parents as her mother kidnaps her and holds her captive, her father murders her best friend and they both often lie to and manipulate her. Lyra has no emotional delusions about the true nature of her parents and their wrongdoings. Lyra is so distanced from them that when Iorek awards her the name “Lyra Silvertongue” she takes it up proudly, creating an identity that is entirely her own. However, despite not having the ideal parental support and love, Lyra finds those who genuinely care for her. Firstly, are the scholars and servants of Jordan college, who raise her. Lord Faa tells Lyra “...they loved you like their own child. They’d do anything to keep you safe not just because they’d promised to Lord Asriel that they would, but for your own sake” (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 131). Another group of people who care for Lyra like their own child are the Gyptians who hide her, protect her and facilitate her quest to the North to save her

friend Roger and Gyptians like Farder Coram and Ma Costa develop a deep maternal affection for Lyra. Iorek, the warrior bear, is a guardian figure, “Her dear, her brave one, her fearless defender” (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 341). Others like Lee Scoresby and Serafina Pekkala also have deep, personal fondness for Lyra and always find ways to shield her, aid her or comfort her as she journeys on her quest and eventually becomes a target of several antagonists. Lyra herself forms unbreakable bonds with those she calls friends like Roger, the Gyptian children, and Will showing unsurpassed loyalty to them. She doesn’t have access to a traditional, stable family structure but she finds a chosen family in the various adults and children who champion her, adore her and safeguard her interests and life.

Harry’s relationship with his parents – James and Lily – is charged with a deep longing to know, hold, and meet them as they died when he was one. He has never known them personally and whatever information he gleans is through his parents’ friends, teachers and colleagues that once knew them. At first, the discourse around his parents, as told to him, is one where they are noble and heroic, loyal and trusting, funny and loving and Harry completely hero-worships them. However, as he finds sources outside of the friend-circle, he learns of his father’s arrogance and tendencies to bully. When Snape accidentally shares memories of his school days, Harry sees his father picking on Snape who was an oddball and an underdog. He views James as silly, obnoxious, and callous and reflects on his own experience of facing bullies like him. He is troubled as “he had been so sure his parents were wonderful people that he had never had the slightest difficulty in disbelieving the aspersions Snape cast on his father’s character” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 602) and though he used to draw comfort from the idea of his father being kind and noble, “now he felt cold and miserable at the thought of him” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 603). When he seeks an explanation from his father’s best friends, Sirius and Lupin, they don’t really understand the betrayal Harry feels and insist, “...he was a good person. A lot of people are idiots at the age of fifteen. He grew out of it” (Rowling,

Order of the Phoenix 620). Harry comes to realise that his parents and for that matter, adults are not always the role models or the most righteous and noble. This knowledge is amplified when after his infallible, omnipotent guardian and protector – Dumbledore’s – death, it is revealed that not only does he have a morally questionable past but apparently has raised Harry to ultimately sacrifice him in his plan to defeat Voldemort. Harry has to accept these follies of the parents and beloved guardian he looked up to the most without having the closure of ever talking to them directly (until the very end, when he does have an all-divulging conversation with Dumbledore in the climax of the series), creating a complex relation of love tempered with an acknowledgment of their personal failings.

Apart from the emotional struggle of realising his parents are not irreproachable, Harry is also an orphan who spends the first eleven years of his life with his cruel aunt, uncle and cousin, the Dursleys. They starve him for familial love and comfort, keeping him downtrodden by abusing him verbally and emotionally. However, when Harry arrives at Hogwarts, he finds the school castle to be like home and is always happiest there. He finds a carer and friend in Hagrid, who is the first person to reveal his true identity to him. He also finds Ron and Hermione, his two best friends who become as close as family, supporting, nurturing, and protecting him till the very end. Eventually, the Weasleys become his surrogate family as Mr and Mrs Weasley invite him over every summer to live in their home and do parent-like things for him like taking him to watch a world cup match, doing his school shopping for him, and celebrating his coming of age, seventeenth birthday. He also finds Sirius, his godfather, and develops an intimate father/brother like bond with him, until Sirius’s untimely death. His parents’ colleagues from the Order of the Phoenix – Lupin, Moody, Tonks, Mrs. Figg, and Kinglsey – all show up for Harry at various times, watching over him, providing him emotional support, threatening his uncle and aunt to treat him better, and guarding him from Voldemort’s attacks with their lives. Despite not having any living biological family, Harry finds love and

strength in the friends and the adopted family he chooses, ultimately starting his own family with Ginny his wife, as revealed in the epilogue.

Since one of the main themes is subverting adult authority and logic within the texts of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the Baudelaire siblings, too are orphaned as the story begins and for the most part of the series, are completely alone with almost all adults ignoring them; maltreating them; trying to harm them or outright kill them. They do find occasional allies like Judge Strauss, Uncle Monty, Aunt Josephine, Jerome Squalor, Dewey Denouement, the Quagmire Children, Captain Widdershins and Kit Snicket, amongst some others, but almost all are either killed or vanish. Moreover, they seem to know nothing of their parents' history or true identities which leaves them wondering about the authenticity of their family and why their parents left them with no help or security. When in *The End*, they finally get a chance to read a tome written by their parents, which contains all their secrets, wisdom, and the terrible, unfortunate things they had done, witnessed or experienced, Ishmael convinces them that their parents would never want them to read it in order to shield them from the treachery of the world. The siblings initially feel frustrated but realise Ishmael is manipulating them and declare "We are respecting our parents' wishes...They didn't want to shelter us from the world's treacheries. They wanted us to survive them" (Snicket 297) and use the information in the book to save their own lives. It takes them almost thirteen books worth of narrative to finally fully understand the truth about their parents' existence and their hopes for the children. The Baudelaire siblings also, for the most part, do not have the option of a chosen family due to them constantly being on the run or being hunted, but when a pregnant Kit Snicket is dying they promise her "the baby will not be alone...If you die, Kit, we will raise this child as our own" (Snicket, *The End* 309). Having realised that many of the people they know, including Olaf the villain, were orphaned due to VFD conflicts, they choose to create their new family with the conviction of breaking the vicious cycle of children being left orphaned and alone.

Coraline is a lonely child too, as her parents, though loving, are inattentive and busy. She feels abandoned, bored, and insignificant and is unable to reconcile her parents' efforts with her ideal version of her own childhood, which is why she is easily enamoured by the Beldam's world in the beginning. She notices their inattentiveness and is aware of how they struggle to offer her their full time and focus. However, Coraline's entire ordeal with the Beldam also facilitates her realization of the genuineness, sincerity and authenticity of her parents' love as opposed to the Beldam's love, making her understand what she truly wants – her imperfect but genuinely loving parents. Although she is the only one out of all the protagonists who is not orphaned, and happily reunites with her parents at the end, she also understands the value of nourishing and nurturing relations outside the family unit, especially with Cat and her neighbours Miss Spink, Miss Forcible and Mr Bobo. Initially when they move in, Coraline is frustrated and grumpy with having such eccentric neighbours. She finds the two ladies absolutely odd and because Mr Bobo never pronounces her name correctly, she is (rightly) offended and puts no effort in getting to know even his name. However, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible give Coraline the very instrument which she later uses to defeat the Beldam and Mr Bobo gives her a forewarning about impending danger as well. When Coraline returns from her horrific adventure, she understands that despite their weirdness, they were looking out for her, as she thanks all the neighbours.

One of the main themes of the *The Graveyard Book*, on account of it being a feral child narrative, is the significance of the chosen family. As an orphan who is adopted, Bod's entire life revolves around adapting to and appreciating the family that chose him. At his dying mother's behest, the Owenses accept Bod as their own son and he is given the "Freedom of the Graveyard" – magical abilities of the dead that allow him to assimilate with them. Silas, the undead, also pledges to become his guardian and Bod comes to admire him tremendously, almost hero-worshipping him. Bod's relation with Silas is one that is truly nurturing, sweet, and

thoughtful. Bod also learns the value of allies like Mrs Lupescu and Liza, who save him from fatal harm and impart life-skills and knowledge. The chosen family raises him, protects him, teaches him and empowers him to ultimately leave the domestic shelter of the Graveyard and go out into the world by himself. Like in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the tensions between the parental instincts of keeping the child protected from treachery/harm/sin versus letting the child experience life in its full complexity is played out in *The Graveyard Book* as well. At various moments in the text, Silas and Bod have to negotiate as Bod wants independence and Silas wants him to stay within the protective boundaries of the Graveyard. When Bod befriends another living girl, Scarlet, Silas warns him to stay away; when he sneaks out to try and get a tombstone for Liza's grave, Liza has to save Bod from a kidnapping and Silas has to remind Bod that the outside world is dangerous; when Bod insists he wants to go to a normal school, Silas is very hesitant to send him, eventually ending up right to fear for Bod. However, once it is time, Silas himself ensures that Bod leaves the graveyard to find his future, despite the boy feeling nostalgic and nervous.

Thus, all books are concerned with the conflicts and contradictions inherent in parent-child relationships and deconstruct the myth of ideal, perfect parents who know best. These child protagonists have to face the reality that parents are not always right, or morally superior, or what one would like them to be. Instead, they have flaws and make errors, and they may not always provide the protective buffer expected of them. Instead, these child protagonists find their chosen families, their allies and create a kinship outside of the traditional family sphere. The texts do not centre biological connections as the most natural and desirable, instead exposing the possibility that one can look beyond to find true love and support.

For adults, this theme resonates deeply as relations with parents are often complicated and rife with tensions of authority, control, and boundaries. Moreover, the traditional family structure, for many, might not be their primary support system. Social factors like divorce,

estrangement due to differing philosophies, and abandonment due to personal choices, often leads to adults seeking support elsewhere. The idea of finding a chosen family has become very important and provides hope and comfort. Popularised by LGBTQ+ discourses, the chosen family replaces the biological family that might have let the adult down and gives power to the adult to search for more nurturing and supportive alternatives. It might also provide consolation to those adults who have to leave their biological families, for example like those who move for work or migrate to a new country and might need to create a new support system in their new environment. Reading about Lyra's relationships with Iorek, Lee and the Gyptians, or Harry finding a community of loyal friends and allies after being alone for so long is hopeful to those seeking similar connections. This theme empowers adults to find meaningful bonds instead of purporting a narrative of self-reliance and independence, seen as a marker of traditional adulthood but also a cause for isolation and loneliness.

Examining my own reading experience, as a child, I was thrilled by the diversity of people who came as aid to the protagonist. It was always exciting to anticipate where help might come from. As a child, seeing parents constructed as flawed but loving, helped me feel less guilty when I acknowledged the same about my own parents. It was also comforting to see a portrayal of positive relations with adults other than parents. Guardian figures like Sirius and Silas provided delight and the friendships between Ron, Harry and Hermione, between Lyra and Will, and the bond between the Baudelaire siblings strengthened my own personal approach to relationships – I was encouraged to find meaning and support beyond the family unit, leading to friendships and associations lasting well into adulthood. As an adult living away from family and reading these stories, it is aspirational to find people like these characters, to create a surrogate family that offers the same love and support. Reading these books provides a sense of belongingness that might be elusive in the condition of adulthood.

3.3 Examining Endings

Inspired by Queer Theory and the Bakhtinian idea of The Carnival, Maria Nikolajeva coined the word “aetonormativity” to explain the inherent age-related power structures in children’s literature and how the adult normative world order, even if briefly challenged in children’s books, is ultimately restored and upheld (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 8). She illustrates how in children’s texts there can be situations where, established power structures are interrogated without necessarily being overthrown and for a brief time, the norm of adult authority is subverted where they are no longer the smartest, the richest and the most powerful in the adult/child relationship (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 9). However, most texts end up revealing the failure of a utopian child normativity and revert back to the adult world. According to her children are allowed to become “strong, brave, rich, powerful, and independent – *on certain conditions and for a limited time*” (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 10). She outlines the conditions which allow such a momentary subversion to take place, the most important of them being physical dislocation and the removal of the protective parental presence leaving the child free to face extraordinary situations and extreme danger. She concludes “All these conditions empower the fictional child, and even though the protagonist is most frequently brought back to the security of home and parental supervision, the narratives have a subversive effect, showing that the rules imposed on the child by the adults are in fact arbitrary” (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 10).

The protagonists in the crossover titles fulfil all the conditions outlined by Nikolajeva. There is physical dislocation either in terms of epic journeys or alternate worlds/multiverses, removal of protective parental presence portrayed either as dead parents, evil parents or absent parents and of course, extreme danger and life-threatening situations. The world order is subverted where the children become wiser, more powerful and more important than adults as children of prophecy who are destined to overthrow great evil. However, the crossover books do not exactly restore aetonormativity by ‘bringing back [the child] to the security of home and

parental supervision'. This was the model for earlier children's literature, like Alice, the Darling children and the Pevensie Siblings. However, in the crossover titles under study, aetonnormativity is restored in more complex and ambiguous ways.

In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra is brought back to her Oxford, forever separated from Will. She also loses her ability to read the aletheiometer intuitively and is left with the option of joining an ordinary boarding school, after all the extraordinary things she had seen and done. All that marked her as special is stripped away from as she returns and the adult world is restored to normal where it is not a child that is the most powerful. She is brought back to her life in Oxford, where despite all that has transpired, she still has the Master of Jordan College waiting to provide some form of parental love and resources – he secretly takes up the financial and future educational responsibility for Lyra. With Dame Hannah's offer of the boarding school also comes the chance to learn how to read the aletheiometer again. She is excited to formally train in the field and when talking to Pan, she affirms she will spend her life building the Republic of Heaven (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 218). However, it is not exactly a happy ending that Lyra gets, especially considering her permanent and irrevocable separation from Will, her true love and partner, and there is no return to a state of innocence. There is a question left lingering about her future, her life and what happens to her eventually. Also, there is a possibility left open of her acquiring the same powers again, with learning to read the aletheiometer. Hence, aetonnormativity is indeed restored in the sense of what Lyra must do as a social expectation – get back from the temporary state of freedom and uncontrolled power, enrol in school and work towards a positive goal. But she is not innocent and far from protected, facing an uncertainty about her future and coming to terms with the grief about her lost love as she wonders whether she'll ever forget her time with Will (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 217). There is a lingering open-endedness to Lyra's ending and readers are left pondering if she'll ever truly be happy and heal from the cruel truths she has come to realise about her parents,

the war and destruction caused by unbridled power and ambitions, and the deaths of her friends and allies.

Similarly, in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and *The Graveyard Book*, both narratives end with the protagonists venturing forth into the great unknown without any answers to what their future will look like. The Baudelaire siblings are, throughout the series, the only ones with any sense, intelligence and powers of observation while most adults are incapable or unwilling to provide them with any stability or protection. It is their own resilience and will to survive that keeps them alive. For them, there is no return to a parental, loving home, from whence they began as they are in a constant state of disenfranchisement. Rather, they become castaways on an island, away from the hierarchy of the world where they don't have to ascribe to any structure. They are truly free and empowered yet, aetonnormativity is restored when they decide to return back to civilization. The child utopia of reigning free on a distant island cannot exist and as they choose to return to the world, the social expectation of moving on and ahead in life, and being a larger part of society is seemingly fulfilled. However, there is an open-endedness about their conclusion as well, as Snicket says there is no way of knowing if they ever did get back, and there are many rumours about their lives and deaths (The End 351). There is no closure of a happy ending, no promise of the children finally getting a stable home, a return to some version of a family unit.

In *The Graveyard Book* too, Bod cannot stay forever in the Graveyard, and once he has defeated the Jack of All Trades and avenged his family, he gradually loses his magical abilities that were granted to him by the inhabitants of the graveyard, stripping him of his special status as a child of prophecy. The aetonnormativity is restored as Bod cannot uphold the child utopia of staying in the land of the dead forever with his supernatural abilities. Instead, he is delivered back to the world of the living with the promise of experiencing all that life offers an ordinary adult. However, when he does depart from the graveyard, no clues are given as to what he does

next, where he goes or what he becomes, leaving readers with an open end. Readers are not assured of his safety, success, or survival in any manner.

In *Harry Potter* and *Coraline*, there is a more traditional return to heteronormativity where Harry, after defeating Lord Voldemort and saving the wizarding world, is shown nineteen years later, as an adult father surrounded by his heteronormative family unit, sending his children off to school. It is the perfect happy ending, and a complete return to the adult normative world. Nikolajeva, too, reads *Harry Potter* as a total return to heteronormativity. However, I would argue that he never leaves the wizarding world, isn't exiled to the Muggle world stripped of his magical powers and his celebrity as the "Boy Who Lived" is very much alive as faces turn to see him at the train station (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 620). Instead, he achieves what children (and adults) would want the most – to remain magical, grow up famous within the fantastical world and still have the happy ending of a family. His time in the fantasy, where he was an empowered child, is not limited but remains forever, extending into adulthood. In *Coraline* too, there is a firm return to heteronormativity as she enters the Beldam's world, uses her wit and courage to defeat her, rescues her parents, return back to her world and home, unharmed. Order is restored, with her parents once again gaining authority and Coraline reverting from rescuer back to daughter who will soon start the new term at school. However, there is tension in the end, when despite returning, she is not completely safe as the Beldam manages to follow her. It is not a happy ending just yet and Coraline must prove she is brave and empowered in both worlds, the real and the Otherworld. She is frustrated and laments "it's not fair" (Gaiman, *Coraline* 151) when she realises she still has to plan one last showdown. In the end, when she uses a trick to defeat the Beldam, the heteronormativity is challenged as even in the real world it is she who has to conquer evil, despite her parents being present. Upon her return, Mr. Bobo, her neighbour announces to her "The mice tell me it's all good...that you are our saviour Caroline" (Gaiman, *Coraline* 159). Mr. Bobo, who would never call her by her

correct name, and never seemed to listen to her when she corrected him finally pays attention when she corrects her name one last time and calls her by her right name Coraline, ‘repeating her name to himself with wonderment and respect’ (Gaiman, *Coraline* 159). Coraline then, doesn’t return to state of disempowerment but gains the respect of elders, proving herself powerful, intelligent, and independent in the normative adult world as well.

Nikolajeva expounds on her criteria, saying “reversing the existing order, elevates the fictional child to a position superior to adults...In most fantasy novels for young readers, there is a prophecy about a child who will overthrow the established order of an evil ruler. Yet, the inevitable reestablishment of order in the end of a carnivalesque children’s story brings the characters down to levels at which they are only slightly more powerful than their environment, equal to—or inferior to it” (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 42). In the crossover texts, the child protagonists are brought down to levels of more slightly powerful and equal but they are not inferior, still capable of challenging and critiquing adult norms and power structures.

For Nikolajeva, “the child hero can be as brave, clever and strong as he pleases, but in the end, an adult will take over thus both empowering the child and at the same time protecting him from the dangers of adulthood and preserving childhood innocence” (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 20). Perry Nodelman too sees the same issues, calling the status of children’s books ambivalent as he considers the happy endings and depictions of a utopian, pastoral, idyllic world in children’s books in his book, *The Hidden Adult*. He states that, “Many texts for children express exactly this kind of nostalgia for a better world that never actually existed; they describe a childhood more sweet and innocent than most if not all children ever experience, far from the bitter complexities of adulthood and the menial bread of multinational corporations” (220). For him, children’s books offer visions of “utopian fantasy or idyll for adults”, assuming that children, on the other hand, will take that fantasy for truth (221).

But in these crossover books, rather than this adult imposition and power struggle to empower yet maintain innocence, there is a more egalitarian approach where children are allowed to mature, either psychologically or chronologically or both, have access to knowledge and experience, and are not shielded the troubles of adulthood rather equipped to face them. Lyra is given a chance to build her future, Harry, after years of war and loss, is shown to achieve the ideal (almost unbelievable) future, Baudelaire siblings are sent out with the conviction of re-joining the world as knowing, experienced children and so are Coraline and Bod. As Fiona McCulloch succinctly puts it:

By the late twentieth century, then, children's literature shows an array of unstable families and adults...Instead, it is the child who must navigate its own way through the dangers that unfold, including good versus evil, and the anxieties of growing up. This is not a world where children can remain forever young... instead, they must cope with the hostilities of life and are often left with unresolved endings... While these novels often carry the weight of the world on their young protagonist's shoulders, nevertheless there is still a desire for the maintaining of childhood innocence so strongly instilled from the Romantics. That goes hand in hand with attempts to continue to offer reassuring endings, even if they are not completely resolved. (Children's Literature in Context 42)

Though aetnonormative, such reassuring endings are welcomed and required. The endings of all these books are desirable outcomes from an ideological perspective, to instil hope, positive attitudes, and optimism; these endings are life-affirming. McCallum and Stevens, when discussing ideologies in the children's books remind that no texts are without ideologies and transgressions within the text define a conflict "between co-existing formations or ideologies, and privileges one over the other. Almost invariably, the privileged ideology is marked as more humane, more socially responsible, more intersubjective, offering a

perspective which not only embraces difference but enfolds it within a larger, more comprehensive sphere” (Ideology 367). Extrapolating the idea, it can be applied to aetonnormativity as well which is an ideology however, in these books it doesn’t function as an oppressive source of adult control, rather leads to outcomes that are culturally and psychologically desirable. McCallum and Steven too read the ending of *The Graveyard Book* as a social ideology that is “commonsensically [sic] natural and desirable” (Ideology 262).

Nodelman reflects on the divided child who is innocent but also experienced; teachable but also wild; who adventure away from home, and yet they always return, who long to grow up, but also yearn to stay young. And while they can confront problems, they require a happily ever-after ending. (qtd in Enciso et al 257). Nodelman of course was critiquing the prerequisite of providing happy endings in children’s books to protect the innocence of the child reader. However this divided-ness and the need for a happy ending is not restricted to children and can also be found in adults who struggle with the same dichotomy of yearning to stay sheltered but have the burden of experience, who want to be wild but must be responsible, who seek adventures but also the security of home, who long to stay young and who also need hope, cheer, and assurance of happiness in their lives. Bradford et al, in their examination of the function of utopia’s in children’s literature propose the existence of “transformative utopianism” which “...explore a character’s human aspirations to gain the agency which might make it possible to attain his or her desires and seek to define some notion of optimal practice in terms of social formations, gender relations, and economic and ecological sustainability” (New World Orders 17) and that such attainability in children’s literature “might take the form of simple optimism, or it might fall back on some sense of a humanistic propensity towards goodness and other-regardingness even within in a permanently flawed world” (New World Orders 17). For them, such transformative utopias function to remind readers of the potential for initiating change and brining in positive visions of the world we live in. Katherine Patterson,

another children's writers whose works have popularly crossed over said that "I cannot, will not, withhold from my young readers the harsh realities of human hunger and suffering and loss, but neither will I neglect to plant the stubborn seed of hope" (qtd. in Beckett, *Global and Historical Perspectives* 261). However, such "simple optimism" and "seeds of hope" are not only useful as ideologies to young readers but also mature ones who live in an increasingly fragmented and hostile reality. Being an adult does not divorce one from the need of comfort and positivity. The average adult reader is not necessarily a stunted individual who wants to be coddled but is an adult who is cognizant of war, poverty, global disasters, genocide, political oppression and while may appreciate "adult literature" that captures all that, might also find value in a children's book that reminds them of hope and goodness. If literature and the endings of literary stories are meant to reveal the cracks and flaws in society, to hold up a mirror to our cultural and intellectual shortcomings, to interrogate power structures, they can also function to heal, offer support and inspire visions of optimism in an ailing and decaying culture. Philip Pullman in his Carnegie medal acceptance speech famously criticized adult literature and offered an analysis that has now become a touchstone in crossover and children's literature criticism. He called out books written for adults as being so preoccupied with aesthetic, technique and style that they had forgotten the value a good, solid story can bring to a reader. Children's literature, as he points out, provides that story to the adult reader, fulfilling a basic human desire.

Despite the warnings of Nikolajeva and others about heteronormativity being a colonizing, oppressive ending, as a child I didn't see it that way. I loved these characters so deeply that I wanted to know for certain that they had happy endings. Reading Harry's epilogue was the most satisfying day of my reading life. Starting at nine years old, after investing half a decade of my time in him, when I finally read the end at fourteen, I couldn't imagine anything better. It was a relief to find him alive, surrounded by best friends and loves ones, and still be

special. In fact, the other endings like Lyra's separation from Will and the Baudelaire siblings and Bod's open-ended futures left me with several questions. Nevertheless, I wasn't depressed or discouraged, even imbibing their confidence and applying it to my own future plans. As an adult, when I read these endings, I am well aware of the happy ending trope, but when I read these books, it is not because my expectations are that every ending is going to look like this rather these books give me the hope that, after all, some might. This is particularly useful in the contemporary society I inhabit which is replete with alienation, uncertainty, and a general sense of the impending doom of our planet.

3.4 Considering Character

When excavating crossover texts for narrative specifics that appeal to adults, characterization of the protagonists presents a truly unique dilemma. The protagonists in these stories are all very young, their stories beginning in peak childhood. Lyra is eleven and Will is twelve when they are catapulted into an epic, dangerous adventure. Harry, too, is eleven when he first sets foot into Hogwarts, as is Coraline when she outwits the Other Mother. *The Graveyard Book* begins with Bod as a baby and the Baudelaire siblings are comprised of baby Sunny, twelve year old Klaus and fourteen year old Violet. They are all children, yet their stories, experiences and worldviews sustain an adult reader's interest which raises questions about the importance of identifying with a character and why adults would find any connection with these fictional children.

Of course, they are not ordinary children. When examining all the child protagonists comparatively, it is revealed that all of them are children of prophecies or meant to save the world/humankind, giving them the status of heroes. Lyra is the "Second Eve" who will help end the tyranny of the Magisterium and bring down the monarchy of Heaven. Harry is the "Chosen One" who has been marked as the vanquisher of Lord Voldemort. Bod is prophesised to be a child who can walk between the worlds of the living and dead and his existence will

end an ancient criminal order, and though not explicitly mentioned, both Coraline and the Baudelaire children become chosen, marked children in their own right who are tasked with surviving, rescuing and ultimately triumphing in a new world where the antagonists/villains have perished. Mieke Bal, in her categorization of heroes, offers criteria to be fulfilled in order to be considered heroes which are : qualification – there must be comprehensive information about the appearance, psychology, motivation, and their past; distribution – must occur often and presence must feel important to the story; independence – can appear alone; function – must carry out certain actions alone like making agreements, vanquishing opponent, unmasking traitors; and relations – are shown to maintain relations with the largest number of characters (Narratology 133). According to these criteria, all of the child protagonists are indeed heroes. Apart from defeating antagonists and villains, readers are also deeply acquainted with these characters' past, their inner worlds, are given repetitive descriptions of their appearance, are knowledgeable of their relationships with other characters as who they love/hate/respect are also detailed in the books. They are indeed hero protagonists central to the story and plot.

They also seem to fall into Frye's category of Romantic Heroes and/or High Mimetic characters. Interpreting Frye's work in the context of children's literature, Nikolajeva in her book *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* provides a definition of the romantic hero which she states as one who is superior to ordinary human beings (almost demi-god like), commonly found in fantasy or fairy tales and is represented by a child who is empowered to travel through space and time or has magical objects or magical helpers for assistance (Rhetoric of Character 30). Considering this definition, the child protagonists in the crossover titles fall under this category. While Nikolajeva views Harry as the quintessential Romantic hero, the same can be observed for Lyra and Will from *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Lyra and Will both have magical objects, Lyra operates the alethiometer, a truth telling device and Will wields

the Subtle Knife, one that can cut through the fabric of space and time and create portals to parallel worlds. They both have the ability to travel across multiple worlds and are aided by various magic and non-magic beings like witches, angels, and bear kings. They are superior to others as, and despite being caught in the political and religious power struggle, they maintain their goodness and determination to set things right. As the fate of numerous worlds depends on their personal destinies and actions, they are treated as both threats and saviours by adults.

Coraline, too, is the brave saviour of her parents as well as the trapped souls of the Beldam's other victims whom she meets and decides to rescue as well. She is the one who can travel between the real world and the Otherworld, is helped by Cat, her magical guide and is empowered by the magic stone given to her by her neighbours, that protects and enables her to defeat the Beldam. Similarly, Bod has access to the world of the dead as he is granted the "Freedom of the Graveyard" and while he lives within it, he is empowered by magical abilities like manipulating people's fear, becoming invisible, and dream walking. He is kind, noble, morally superior, and often stands up for what he believes is right. When he realises his friend, the ghost Liza, is an accused witch buried in unconsecrated land and is bitter of not even being given a headstone as a marker, Bod puts himself in mortal peril in an attempt to acquire one for her. A few years later, when he goes to a proper living school for the first time, he feels compelled to use his powers to thwart the bullies terrorizing other children, even though he himself is not directly affected. He also fearlessly defeats the criminals belonging to the organization Jack of All Trades with his wit and ingenuity in using his knowledge of the graveyard's secrets, proving his romantic hero status.

The Baudelaire siblings are not romantic heroes since they are not exactly dealing with magical worlds or objects but are high mimetic characters as they are the only ones who have any sort of moral compass in the entire series. Nikolajeva defines the high mimetic characters as those who are "superior to other humans in terms of, for instance, bravery, wisdom,

patriotism, and so on” (Rhetoric of Character 33) and their function is to be didactic role models that readers can emulate. In that sense, the Baudelaire siblings are the only ones who are sensible, rational, kind, resilient, and good in an absurdist, chaotic, irrational world.

As romantic heroes and high mimetic characters, these child protagonists are warriors, saviours, protectors and models of virtue. Nikolajeva traces some of the basic patterns of Campbell’s monomyth in typical children’s literature, asserting that the “mythic hero is a major source of inspiration for all children’s writers” (Rhetoric of Character 30) and as heroes, these child protagonists thus offer portrayals of exemplary behaviours that inspire readers to stand for all that is good, in the face of evil.

However, despite their elevated status, these child protagonists are not the ancestors of the one-dimensional Goody-Two Shoes, a famous character in children’s literature that was so overwhelmingly good, moral and upright that her name has transformed into a cliché that describes an ostentatiously well-behaved person. Children’s literature has always had tensions when it comes to didacticism and traditionally, protagonists in children’s stories functioned as ideological vehicles that would transmit dominant norms. This led to the famous critique of children’s literature being an adult construct by theorists like Jacqueline Rose and Perry Nodelman who were some of the first to argue that adults wrote child characters that did not reflect the experience of true childhood rather what adults wanted children to be – innocent, docile, good, and normative. It is easy to see this tendency in many twentieth century characters like Francis Hodgson-Burnett’s orphan girls Sara from *A Little Princess* who is cloyingly sweet and tolerating of all injustices till she is rescued or Mary from *The Secret Garden* who converts into a selfless, affable, maternal child; in Enid Blyton’s children in *The Magic Faraway Tree*, where Jo, Bessie and Fanny go to fantastical lands but are the sweetest, kindest, most innocent children who help the inhabitants of these lands; or in Roald Dahl’s deserving children like *Charlie in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* where Charlie is awarded the factory only

because out of all the children, he is the one who, according to adults, exhibited no undesirable traits. Such child protagonists often lacked any psychological depth, had no inner worlds, and were given the status of protagonist because they adhered to adult values, norms and ideas of “good behaviour”.

Though, by the late twentieth century, characters in children’s books began showing more complexity, depth, and ambiguity where they didn’t just remain one-dimensional and flat, but would be dynamic in their growth, independent from the expectation of only being didactic role models. This can also be observed in the heroes of crossover titles, who, to borrow Nikolajeva’s phrase shift from “hero to character” – these child protagonists are not just noble, virtuous heroes but they traverse from high to low as they lie, cheat, play tricks, kill, get angry, get jealous, rebel and in many ways are ordinary and flawed individuals.

Although of aristocratic birth and the hero of the story, Lyra is often described as a street urchin, a “half-wild, half-civilized girl” (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 24), and a barbarian who spits and curses and who spent most of her time with the servant children of Oxford, playing in the streets and on the roofs, rebellious against the rigidity and formality of the Scholars under whose care she was. However, since she is the hero and a high born, she is a natural leader, the king of children and the best, bravest amongst them. This dichotomy is often brought out by Pullman as he writes “She was a coarse and greedy little savage, for the most part. But she always had a dim sense that it wasn’t her whole world; that part of her also belonged in the grandeur and ritual of Jordan College; and that somewhere in her life there was a connection with the high world of politics...” (*Northern Lights* 41 – 42). When her parents finally acknowledge her existence and discuss her, their conversation emphasizes on Lyra’s ambiguity and who she is. Asriel starts by saying:

“An ordinary English girl, not very clever –“

“She is!” said Mrs Coulter.

“All right; bright but not intellectual; impulsive, dishonest, greedy – “

“Brave, generous, loving.”

“A perfectly ordinary child, distinguished by nothing – “

“Perfectly ordinary? Lyra? She’s unique. Think of what she’s done already.

Dislike her if you will, Asriel, but don’t you dare patronize your daughter....”

(Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 200)

These traits paint a picture of a child who is complex and whose identity is not easily discernible.

Indeed, Lyra does exhibit many admirable qualities – determination, loyalty, deep affection and love – but she is not a role model in the traditional sense. It is no coincidence that her name “Lyra” sounds so close to “liar” for that is her greatest gift – the ability to concoct complex, believable lies. Lyra is an accomplished, practiced liar and very often uses her skill not only to weave amusing tales but also to save herself and her friends or trick antagonists into defeat. Her skills of lying are so legendary that they are compared to a sort of artistry within the books and Iorek, the bear king of Svalbard, is compelled to award her with the name Lyra Silvertongue, acknowledging her mastery.

Lyra also commits fatal mistakes like trusting her father which directly leads to her friend, Roger’s death. But as the hero with a strong conscience, she does everything in her power to apologise to him, including travelling to the forbidden Land of the Dead, and in this journey breaks all laws, refusing to bow to any authority – not her parents, not the church, and not God. She is uncontrollable yet it is her very rebellion that saves humankind. Will, too, shows the same sense of autonomy and freedom, beginning his journey by committing manslaughter. At twelve, he has already killed an enemy, and knows how to trick and camouflage, negotiate and blackmail, stemming from his adultification as a carer to his mentally ill mother. When Lyra asks the alethiometer if Will is a friend or enemy, it replies

that he is a murderer. Lyra instantly relaxes as that to her equates to being brave, thinking “A murderer was a worthy companion. She felt as safe with him as she’d felt with Iorek Byrnison, the armoured bear” (Pullman, *Subtle Knife* 15). It is a slightly humorous moment and yet deeply profound, revealing something of the status of these children who could be both heroes and murderers, who are not apologetic about breaking rules, who commit mistakes but set them right, who rebel against unfair authority, and show respect to those who treat them with equal respect. Iorek, Lee, Serafina, Farder Coram – all treat Lyra with love and respect and it is with them she forms the strongest bonds.

As a hero, Lyra is not unshakeable, infallible. She not only commits fatal mistakes, but also shows weakness and terror as she feels overwhelmed, too insignificant, and too weak, as discussed in above in the theme section. But she also realises her own power as she confesses to Pan - “We can’t rely on anyone else now, can we... It’s just us. But we en’t old enough yet. We’re only young... We’re too young... If poor Mr Scoresby’s dead and Iorek is old... It’s all coming onto us, what’s got to be done” (Pullman, *Amber Spyglass* 197). Although she is the hero, Lyra is also really just an ordinary English girl, a wild savage, a child.

Harry, too, traverses the high and the low. Although he is a god-like figure in the wizarding world, a child of prophecy and the quintessential romantic hero – always on the side of goodness and light, always the saviour – yet he is quite ordinary. He is surprisingly self-aware of his shortcomings, understanding he is not as smart as Hermione or as seasoned in the wizarding ways as Ron. When asked what his strengths are, all he can come up with is his athletic prowess in Quidditch (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 291); when his friends recount all the times Harry had managed to escape or defeat Voldemort and his followers, he gets agitated as he desperately tries to explain that it’s not because he’s particularly clever or brilliant but it was also luck and timing that helped, saying “I didn’t know what I was doing half the time, I didn’t plan any of it, I just did whatever I could think of, and I nearly always had help”

(Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 303). In fact, despite being the hero, he is the quintessential outsider and always gravitates towards underdogs and those who are marginalized within the social order like Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom, as he feels a kinship with them, instead of trying to get along with confident, extroverted, and ambitious children like Draco Malfoy. When alongside him Cedric is chosen as the Hogwarts champion in the interschool competition, Harry is acutely aware of the differences between the both of them, of how Cedric – handsome, popular, and charming – fitted the part of “champion” much better than him. Harry has no charm and is awkward and obtuse when it comes to mingling with the opposite gender and when he finally does find popularity with the girls at sixteen, he is pleasantly surprised by it. Even his name Harry, as McCulloch in her analysis has also noted, functions to emphasise his ordinariness, surrounded with names like Dumbledore, Voldemort, Sirius, Severus, Harry is just Harry. All his supernatural powers – the scar which functions as a warning system against danger, the protective charm placed within his blood, his ability to read Voldemort’s mind and talk to snakes – come because of external interventions like his mother’s sacrifice, Dumbledore’s magic, and Voldemort’s horcrux (a piece of soul) that lives within Harry. Take all that away, and Harry is a regular school boy, mischievous, not particularly scrupulous about homework, irreverent of school rules, trying to navigate the social circles of school rivalries, friendship, and romance. Like ordinary children, he gets jealous, he has fights with his friends, he has teenage temper tantrums, he feels misunderstood, he has awkward and embarrassing encounters with girls, and he loves sports and pranks, and yearns for acceptance and validation by his mates in Gryffindor house. It is truly a funny juxtaposition when he has to worry both about defeating the most evil wizard of all time as well as submitting his homework on time and doing well in exams.

Along with being the saviour figure, Harry is also a celebrity and keeps falling in and out of favour with the wizarding population throughout the series, sometimes being asked for

autographs and other times receiving hate mail. His fluidity is further accentuated when every summer he is brought down to the ironic level as he must shed his hero/celebrity status and return to the muggle world where he is a taboo, a burden, and a victim of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of his aunt, uncle, and cousin. It is this particular blend of high and low, of hero and ordinary that makes Harry popular amongst his peers as he is one of them, despite being the Chosen One.

The Baudelaire children – Violet, Klaus, and Sunny – are characters who are constantly in flux. They have no fixed identity as they go from children with parents to orphans to victims to perpetrators to saviours. They constantly mutate due to their ever-changing circumstances and this fluidity is often emphasised in the books. When the hook-handed man, a constant antagonist holds the chance of saving Sunny from death, he reminds Violet and Klaus of all the similarities between them and him, saying “People aren’t either wicked or noble. They’re like chef’s salads, with good things and bad things chopped and mixed together in a vinaigrette of confusion and conflict” (Snicket, *Grim Grotto* 223). However, despite circumstances, one can choose to be good, a hero, a noble person is also conveyed as Klaus reminds him that there is indeed a difference between the children and the hook-handed man due to the sides they choose to be on. The Baudelaire siblings are raised to high mimetic levels at crucial moments when they pick being kind, noble, resilient over giving in to revenge, doubt, and evil, however, as high mimetic characters they are not innately better, or it is not natural for them to be good. It is a choice they make. This dilemma of who can be considered noble and who is wicked is played out most explicitly in the second last book of the series, the *Penultimate Peril*, where the siblings and Count Olaf go head-to-head in a court trying to determine which of them is innocent and who is guilty. The children, after their long, harrowing journey seem to have lost sight of whether they are heroes, victims, or villains and when Dewey calls them noble Klaus responds, “I am not sure we *are* noble...we caused those accidents at the lumbermill. We’re

responsible for the destruction of the hospital. We helped start the fire that destroyed Madame Lulu's archival library..." (Snicket, *Penultimate Peril* 188) but Dewey reminds them "You're noble enough Baudelaires. That's all we can ask for in this world" (Snicket, *Penultimate Peril* 188). The children grapple with the question of whether the end justifies the means constantly through the series and finally conclude that "It is very difficult to make one's way in this world without being wicked at one point or another, when the world's way is so wicked to begin with" (Snicket, *Penultimate Peril* 316). Thus, they declare themselves "comparatively innocent" (Snicket, *Penultimate Peril* 279) when considering true villains like Count Olaf, aware of their own moral ineptitudes and their strength in choosing the right path, when they can.

Coraline, too, like Harry, is mostly an ordinary child. Her status of hero is awarded to her due to the considerable bravery she displays in deciding to venture forth and take on the Beldam alone. This is further accentuated when she decides to try and save the souls of the dead children trapped in the Otherworld, despite seemingly facing defeat herself. She tricks the Beldam into defeat and displays immense grit in dealing with the increasingly horrific, ghastly creatures that are sent her way, never losing sight of her goal to rescue her parents, the dead children and escaping alive. At various junctures she has to remind herself that she is indeed brave enough to handle the challenge. However, other than her courage and cleverness in coming up with traps and tricks, she is simply a girl who is bored and a victim of "careful what you wish for" as she brings this terrible adventure upon herself by entering the Otherworld despite warnings from her neighbours. She is lonely, judgemental about her eccentric neighbours and adults in general, disobedient, refusing to eat her father's "recipes" and exploring dangerous places she's been warned to keep away from. She is not a single dimensional didactic hero, innately brave and sensible from the beginning, but a child who must own up to her follies and make the best of the situation by choosing to be brave

exemplified by her assertion to herself “*I will be brave...No, I am brave*” (Gaiman, *Coraline* 102). It is significant that Coraline gives the magic, protective stone back to Ms. Spink and Ms. Foible, signalling no desire to continue having adventures, raising questions about her own choice in maintaining or dismantling her hero status.

Bod, like the rest of the characters discussed above, sits in the hero category as he has supernatural powers, he is a child of prophecy, and he vanquishes the criminals of the organization Jack of All Trades, also avenging his family’s brutal murder. As he grows up, in various episodes, he does selfless, noble things as discussed above and is always kind, grateful to his family and guardians, loving and mostly innocent. He also displays the valour often associate with heroism. Upon learning that the reason Silas is concerned about letting Bod attend a human school is because the murderer of his family is still at large and poses a threat to Bod, he confidently tells Silas:

“If I go outside in the world, the question isn’t, “Who will keep me safe from him?”

‘No?’

‘No. It’s “Who will keep him safe from me?”’ (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 147)

However, as the narrator reminds us, “he is not an idiot!” As he grows up, he also understands the wicked ways of the world, as shown when he defends himself and counter-blackmails the policeman who tries to apprehend him at his niece (and school bully), Maureen’s, request. Bod is not above playing tricks and deception which is once again proved in the final battle. At the end, when the Man Jack invades the Graveyard to hunt Bod down, Bod uses ingenuity in defeating them, one of the tricks being trapping the last Jack amongst the Sleur. He achieves his victory not only by wielding his supernatural powers but also depending on allies, one of them being Scarlet, his human friend. However, when Scarlet finds out Bod might have used her as bait, she is affronted and scared of him. She says, “You aren’t

a person. People don't behave like you. You're as bad as he was. You're a monster" (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 188). Bod is greatly disturbed at hearing this and though Silas, his guardian, comments that Scarlett was doing Bod an injustice, Bod is genuinely disconcerted. His hero status is immediately left as an open-ended question, following this interaction. Scarlett's memories are erased, and she goes back to her normal life with no recollection of the whole incident or of Bod, but whether Bod is morally right or wrong in his actions is never resolved. That is left for the readers to decide.

In his study titled *The Return of the Hero*, Christopher Wrigley comments that "Tolkien, Rowling and Pullman have not written novels, either good or bad. Instead, they have revived the supposedly defunct tradition of heroic romance, behind which lies the ancient heritage of myth" (2). However, they haven't just revived the romantic hero but also given it a newer, more sophisticated form. Margery Hourihan, in her seminal text *Deconstructing the Hero*, provides a compelling analysis and critique of the "hero" trope in western culture that upholds detrimental definitions of masculinity and the validity of patriarchy. However, she says that that it is indeed possible to "...retain the linear pattern of the hero tale with its succession of exciting incidents without reaffirming traditional dualisms..."(235) by not creating characters that are superheroes, who are not "...fanatical men of action, noted for their outstanding prowess and courage, guided by single-minded devotion...determinedly asserting their mastery" (Hourihan 235); who are not "...constrained by an arid rationalism and they do not deny or distrust their emotions. They are not invulnerable to doubt, disappointment and defeat" (Hourihan 235). Instead, she suggests creating heroes who are "like the rest of us, and they include females, non-Europeans and other outsiders" (Hourihan 235). Children of course form part of the 'other outsiders', traditionally disenfranchised and regulated by adult norms and ideologies. The crossover fiction writers seem to model their child heroes after Hourihan's recommendation that even if heroes are stripped from their certain victories and moral codes,

they can still remain exciting for readers as the heroes are instead “impelled by the urge to survive, by love, and by curiosity – the desire to learn and to understand themselves and the world about them better. Because their sensitivities are not shut off by prior certainties they do observe and learn, and this process is at least interesting and exciting for the reader as the traditional tales’ accounts...” (Hourihan 235). In other words, Hourihan too is proposing that heroes that flow between the grand and the ordinary, between the infallible and the erroneous, between confidence and doubt are the ones that can not only challenge patriarchal dualisms but are also interesting and appealing to contemporary readers. McCulloch also seems to think these aspects are important as for her Lyra is interesting because she is unconventional as she transgresses traditional demarcations, subverts gender binaries and disrupts the boundaries between male/female, privileged/poor and adult/child (*Children’s Literature in Context* 120).

Nikolajeva also apparently agrees with Hourihan and attributes Harry Potter’s popularity to the fact that he is not “a hero of the Superman calibre, but an ordinary clumsy and bespectacled boy...at once human and nonhuman, with the same emotions we all know: Longing for mom and dad, loneliness, insecurity, curiosity about his identity and origin” (*Rhetoric of Character* 32-33). She aptly summarizes the condition of characters in contemporary children’s literature, explaining that “In the vast majority of traditional children’s literature, child characters are used as models for young readers. They are virtuous beyond measure, good and kind, pious, obedient, and humble” (*Rhetoric of Character* 36). However, in today’s children’s text, “Contemporary characters are not meant as examples for young readers to admire, but as equal subjectivities” (*Rhetoric of Character* 47). This means that the child characters in the crossover works reflect what children are like instead of what authoritarian adults would like it to be. These fictional children have human sensibilities, they cry and grieve, rebel and fight, stand up for what’s right but also fail, have bad habits and traits and are well-rounded in their personalities. Of course then, adults find it easy to connect to

these characters, finding their own experiences reflected in the lives of these fictional children. However, because these children are romantic heroes as well, they also give adults hope. Nikolajeva notes that, “On the other hand, the romantic mode [creates] an illusion for the character and the reader that such empowerment is indeed possible” (*Rhetoric of Character* 48).

Lewis Lowry, whose works have also been enjoyed by adults, explains that as a reader she was never attracted to the pious, righteous little orphans that the popular children’s stories of her time introduced to her. Instead, her favourite was a character named Lulu who was “pragmatic, devious, and capable of outwitting boys. She was a hell of a storyteller; she often used that skill to make her way out of scrapes. She was not pretty, not pious, not good. But she had a great dignity. And she was very, very funny...” (*Point of Departure* 194). Lulu’s description is very similar to the child protagonists discussed here and it is not surprise that both as child and adult, Lowry loves Lulu over upright, didactic, heroic protagonists. Dawnene Hamnerburg asserts such child characters have gained immense popularity and observes that “The minds and concerns of the complex characters in today’s children’s literature can hardly be described as “blank slates”...many contemporary authors are dealing with “goodness” and “badness”, character and resolution, choices and options, in ways that do not romanticize ideas of childhood, but instead produce textual contexts in which children are neither wild things nor angels...” (*Reading and Writing ‘Hypertextually’* 210).

Thus, these child characters in the selected crossover works traverse the high and low, are elevated to heroes and saviours but also depicted as flawed, rebellious, and ordinary. It is such complexity and fluidity which makes it easier for adults to identify with these young protagonists, despite the age difference, for they symbolize much of the existential dilemmas, identity questions, and ethical conundrums that are important in both childhood as well as adulthood. Cedric Cullingford is also aware of the ambiguity of hero characters, stating how

often the actions of heroes and their enemies are not so different and it is the reader's acceptance that give the character a hero status but the joy of seeing the hero win is universal as he rightly observes, "There are, after all, some values which are shared by all. The sense of happy ending; the closure that comes about with the victory of the hero – the good – over the many dark forces which he (or she) confronts..." (Children's Literature and its Effects 5). Because the child protagonists have been emancipated from their role as didactic mouthpieces of the author's (adult's) ideology and allowed to be characters instead of heroic models of behaviour, they are indeed interesting and alluring to adult readers.

These complex and ambiguous child protagonists are part of a larger trend that began taking place by the last decades of the twentieth century where child characters displayed high amounts of intelligence, autonomy, had personalities, worldviews, and their own inner worlds, motivations, and desires that were not compliant with adult authority. The adult characters, on the other hand, are either dead, absent or disempowered, making it possible for the child protagonist to exercise such autonomy without any restrictions but also leaving the child protagonist alone, without any promise of support or protection. The children in these books, much like real life adults, have to become self-reliant and self-sufficient, despite not being ready for it. Margot Hillel in her examination of the child figure as the redeemer at the fin de siècle proposes that the idea that the child is the least sinful, easily redeemed and thus the figure that will lead humankind has roots in the evangelical influence and the neo-romantic definitions of childhood in the nineteenth century. According to her, many books at the end of the twentieth century held the stance that adults should learn from children and though they are owed a better society, the children themselves must create the better society on behalf of the adults. She observes that the trope of the absent parent, once popular, has returned in children's fiction and that that are many contemporary books where "...children are asked to act as *de facto* adults" (A Little Child Shall Lead Them 63). Clementine Beauvais in her authoritative book *The*

Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature tackles the issues of child and adult power relations from an existential lens but her idea that adults are aware of the lack of their power and thus rest hopes on the potential of the child is very well reflected in the child and adult characters of crossover fiction. She says that such books inherently reveal the deficits in adult power and "that such children's books compel us to look at the hidden adult in children's literature as aware of its time and experience-related authority, but ineluctably dissatisfied with it: and therefore, reliant on, and hoping for, the potential might of the child" (4). Thus, it is not only the moral complexity of the child protagonists that helps adults identify with these characters but also that they are posing as or replacing adults in many situations, taking on more serious and mature roles and responsibilities. Although it has been argued that this role reversal is temporary and does not last, as illustrated in 3.2 *Examining the Endings*, these children continue to wield their power and authority in some capacity, even after the adult normative order is restored. The condition of these child protagonists is akin to the experience of real-life adulthood in the way that they cannot depend wholly on parental supervision/interventions or the promise of any direct help from more powerful adults and must find methods to become self-reliant, independent, and self-sufficient, as illustrated in the following analysis.

Firstly, all the protagonists are orphan or orphan-like. Harry, the Baudelaire siblings, and Bod are all literal orphans as their parents die at the beginning of their stories. Lyra, although not an orphan to begin with, is raised without any knowledge of her parents or interactions with them. Even when she does realise who her parents are, there is enough emotional distance and hostility between Lyra and her parents that her experience is akin to that of an orphan child. Will, Lyra's counterpart is also raised by a mentally ill, single mother as his father is seemingly lost on an expedition, and to find him, Will entrusts his disoriented, befuddled mother to their neighbour and sets out alone to bring his father back, without any

parental supervision or support. In *Coraline* too, although her parents love her, they are quite absent and unfocused, which makes Coraline feel alone and bored, and gives her an inordinate amount of freedom from parental supervision.

Due to the lack of adult interventions, these child protagonists are liberated from conventional parental protectiveness and sheltering. These children have greater freedom and agency to break rules, face danger, and go on adventures but must also take up responsibility as chosen ones (see 3.2 Themes) and are in-charge of their self-preservation and survival. Lyra enjoys a great deal of freedom as a ward of Jordan College. She is the king of the streets, a little savage running around and indulging in endless play without much interference from the scholars, who occasionally remember they must impart education onto her. She stirs up trouble, climbs roofs, uses coarse language, and displays rebellion openly as she has no supervision or parental admonishes to be afraid of. However, when it comes to more serious situations like the fatal dangers she faces on her epic journey, she has no hope of any parental protectiveness and must depend on her own intelligence, skilful lying, and her fiery compassion to escape threats and villains. When her parents do help, it is only incidentally, from a distance and mostly out of vested interests, rather than filial love. Even when they do actively take part in her life, they often cause more harm than good, like her father sparing her but murdering her best friend for his own gain in *Northern Lights* or her mother drugging her against her will and keeping Lyra in a continuous sleep in, rather than allowing her to face the world in *The Amber Spyglass*. At the end of the series, when her parents sacrifice themselves in order to give Lyra a chance, it is the only willing, selfless act of parental love. But the trials they've put Lyra through have severed her connection to them, and in the narrative she is given no knowledge of their sacrifice. Similarly, Will is adultified beyond his years as, at twelve, he is the sole caretaker of a mentally ill mother and has devised ways to not only care for her and ensure their survival but also camouflage as a functioning family so that agencies like social services don't

take him away. When he sets out to find his father, he is already considered a “man” and he must play various roles simultaneously like Lyra’s protector; wielder of the Subtle Knife; a son on a rescue mission; and negotiator with allies like Chevalier Tialys, Balthamos and Baruch. Both Lyra and Will have no parents to rely on and it is no surprise that they only trust each other for survival.

Harry, like Lyra, is also a rebel and mischief-maker who constantly breaks rules at Hogwarts and never has to worry about the consequences, unlike his friend Ron who receives constant rebukes like the Howler from his mother chiding him for his misdemeanours in *Chamber of Secrets*. However, except for the threat of expulsion and being disciplined by his teachers, Harry truly has no adult figure to answer to or even rely on in times of personal emotional distress. In *Goblet of Fire* there is a moment when he needs solace and advice and as he considers all the adult figures in his life – Dumbledore, Hagrid, Mr. Weasley, The Dursleys – he realises there is no one he can confess his worries to and is ashamed to long for a parent figure. Even when he does discover a surrogate-parent in his godfather, Sirius, he finds him to be encouraging and even enabling rebellion and rule-breaking rather than a protective, strict adult. Even so, Sirius is indeed a father figure to Harry but eventually dies within just two years of knowing each other, once again leaving Harry without fatherly support. His guardians, the Dursleys, are averse to their role and apart from providing basic food and accommodation, show no interest in providing any sort of parental affection or guidance to Harry. When he does receive any parental aid or guidance, it is mostly abstract like the protection of Lily’s sacrifice or the talent in Quidditch Harry seems to have inherited from his father. Beyond that, it is mostly a sentimentalised memory of his parents that he can expect support from as is revealed when he realises it is the memory of his father that allows him to cast the patronus charm and save all his friends from dementors in *Prisoner of Azkaban* and not his father’s corporeal spirit, like he imagined and hoped it to be.

In *Coraline*, the parents are kidnapped by the Beldam and are completely powerless to do anything except wait to be rescued by Coraline. They offer no help, support, or advice as Coraline single-handedly faces and defeats the demoness. However, even before they are captured, Coraline's parents aren't really involved and often shun her, direct her away, or provide her with distractions when she makes bids for their attention. They seem to care for her and provide for her but do not spend much time with her, mostly leaving her to her own devices. Coraline's independence from her parents is emphasised when, after they are trapped by the Beldam, it is only on the second night of their absence that she cries and calls the police for help. However, before that, even with them gone for twenty-four hours, she doesn't feel like something is amiss and is self-sufficient, feeding herself, napping and playing, watching television and visiting her neighbours for tea, even sleeping alone for one whole night.

In *The Graveyard Book*, after their death, Bod's biological parents have absolutely no connection to him and do not make any further appearances in the narrative. His adoptive parents, Mr and Mrs Owens are emotionally available for him but cannot look after his bodily needs like normal human parents as indicated by their inability to provide him edible food. They also give him plenty of freedom as he spends his days hanging around the graveyard and getting up to all sorts of shenanigans like almost getting entombed by the Sleer or going to a pawn shop and almost getting kidnapped. His adoptive parents in fact seem to defer to Silas, Bod's guardian and it is from Silas that Bod receives the most emotional, physical, tangible support as he not only looks after Bod's material needs but also takes care of his education, rescuing him from sticky situations, answering his questions and putting his life on the line to fight against the Jack of All Trades, a supernatural criminal organisation that wants to kill Bod. However, Silas is very often away for long stretches of time and though there is love between the two, they share a very formal relation with each other as all their interactions are marked by respectful distance and composure, unlike modern parenthood which is much more relaxed

and informal. Bod never truly experiences the intimacy of family leading him to be slightly detached from other relationships in his life as demonstrated when he has no qualms about using Scarlet, his friend, as a bait; never realising Liza's affection for him; and finding it quite natural to leave the graveyard behind without much show of sorrow.

As for the Baudelaire siblings, their life's tragedy and all their ordeals stem from their status as orphans and that they have no parental aid or security available to them which leaves them open to recurring abuse and exploitation. One of the main themes of *The Series of Unfortunate Events* is children learning to be self-reliant and self-sufficient in the face of loss as Violet, Klaus and Sunny keep reminding each other throughout the books.

However, it is not like these fictional children are completely abandoned by adults. They do receive some amount of help, guidance and advice from powerful mentors, allies, friends, and extended family, often forming a community of chosen family around themselves (see 3.2 *Themes*). But these powerful adults are eventually disempowered as at crucial moments, the child protagonists find themselves alone, once again having to depend on their own wits, skills, courage, and moral compass.

Though forsaken by her parents, Lyra's magnetism, frankness, and moral courage draw many adults to her and she is not without allies and friends on her epic journey. Some of the most powerful creatures in the world of *His Dark Materials* trilogy are her supporters. The Gyptian peoples, the witches, the bear king Iorek Byrnison, the aeronaut Lee Scoresby, the shaman John Parry, the scientist Mary Malone and to an extent, even the old Master of Jordan College are all immensely powerful adults with resources at their command, possess either magical or physical skills, and are able to provide protection, shelter, and assistance. However, at the end of *Northern Lights*, Lyra realises she must continue alone in her journey and that none of her defenders can undertake the perilous task of saving Dust, the elementary particles that bestow consciousness upon humans. Although they continue to provide help when they

can, the adults are relegated to a secondary status and are not dependable or guaranteed protectors. They do what they can, when they can but ultimately Lyra and Will must face dangers on their own, and journey by themselves. The disempowerment of adults is epitomised by the presence of the Spectres, entities that feed on souls of adults, leaving them immobile and lifeless. Spectres only attack adults as children are immune to them due to not having achieved physical and sexual maturity, leaving adults vulnerable and children fearless as in the city of Cittagazze, a parallel world in the trilogy's multiverse where adults have fled and the whole place is populated by groups of wild, independent children.

Similarly in the *Harry Potter* series, Dumbledore is claimed as the most powerful wizard of all time, the only one who Voldemort ever feared. Yet, he is merely the trainer/mentor of the child Harry, readying him to vanquish Voldemort rather than taking on the challenge himself. Harry must do what even the most powerful wizard of all ages can (will) not. It is not only this enormous task of defeating evil altogether that is entrusted to Harry but even otherwise, Harry and friends often depend on themselves to protect, fight, rebel and stand up against tyranny instead of waiting for adults to take charge. Harry is surrounded by learned, responsible teachers in Hogwarts however it is him and his friends who play the detective and solve the over-arching mystery presented in every book, often gathering clues and evidence by indulging in many an illegal and unscrupulous activities in the process. At the climax of every book, the adults become redundant due to either being unavailable, disbelieving of the children, or incompetent and it is Harry who must save them all be it saving the Philosopher's Stone in book one, rescuing Ginny from the Chamber of Secrets in book two, helping Sirius escape in book three, and fighting Voldemort in book four.

When book five onwards, the dangers along with the stakes increase, the adults do step in. They either provide physical protection like the members of the Order of Phoenix willing to sacrifice themselves to keep Harry safe; emotional support like the kind Harry receives from

the Weasleys, Lupin, and Sirius; or equip him with skills like Dumbledore educating Harry about horcruxes. Nevertheless, by book seven, Harry is once again without adult protection, on the run, trying to achieve the impossible – defeating Voldemort singlehandedly. There’s a tense scene in *Deathly Hallows* where Aberforth, trying to convince Harry to save himself instead of following Dumbledore’s orders, sarcastically asks him if he had been given an easy job, “Sort of thing you’d expect an unqualified wizard kid to be able to do without overstretching themselves?” (Rowling 453). It’s a reflective moment as though the text is apologising for what Harry has been put through and asking the readers to consider the ethicality of asking the child to be, borrowing Hillel’s term, the *de facto* adult. It is noteworthy that the culminating epic battle in the series occurs at Hogwarts, a school, a dominion of childhood instead of a traditionally adult space proving that adults in that world are truly feeble in their status as authority.

The authority and effectiveness of adults is deeply questioned in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as well. The thirteen books serve as a treatise on the absurdity of adult authority and logic, subverting it and exposing it to be random, harmful, insensitive, and irrational. The Baudelaire siblings meet a host of adult characters through the series, and it is most frustrating to see how ineffectual any of the adults are in protecting the Baudelaire siblings, causing them to face unbelievable horrors, tragedies, and dangers alone. The adults are either totally incompetent like their parent’s will executor Mr. Poe who is a stickler to rules and refuses to free the Baudelaires from the will’s obligation of staying with guardians, despite knowing how each one is inadequate and unable to keep the murderous Olaf at bay; or they are morally good but inept in providing timely help and assistance like Jerome Squalor and Justice Strauss, who at one point, also apologise to the siblings for their failures; or they are like Kit and Lemony Snicket, and Uncle Monty who are able to bring temporary respite to the children but eventually are unable to continue or are murdered by Olaf. Rest of the adult characters like

Olaf, Ishmael, Principal Nero, and Esme Squalor are just plain evil and villainous. In fact, the adults are quite like caricatures, incompetent but unwilling to admit so; unresponsive to the Baudelaire's intelligence, appeals, and revelations; and misunderstanding many situations that the siblings face. They are wholly undependable which is the true tragedy of the children and Violet, Klaus, and Sunny constantly remind themselves that they have each other at least and must be "self-sufficient" in order to survive.

This lack of attention and wilful misunderstanding can also be seen in the adult characters in *Coraline*. Ms. Spink, Ms. Foible and Mr. Bobo are Coraline's neighbours and the only other adults she interacts with apart from her parents. They are her allies in the sense that they help her prepare for her journey into the Other World. While Ms. Spink and Ms. Foible give her the protective stone that eventually aids her in defeating the Beldam, Mr. Bobo forewarns her about the door, and later confirms to her the success of her quest as she beats the Beldam. However, that is the extent of their capability as adults and they are not able to support Coraline beyond that. The only assistance she does receive in the Other World is by Cat, the animal who acts like her guide. Even when the Beldam crosses over to the real world, it is Coraline who must find a way to quash the demoness rather than the adults finally helping out or taking over. She cannot ask them for help for there is a wide communication gap between them and her. Most of the comic moments in the narrative come from the neighbours completely misunderstanding, disregarding, or outright ignoring what Coraline says, leading her to often wonder about the eccentricities and arrogance of adults and making them redundant in her eyes.

Bod's graveyard is populated with several dead adults who form a community around him, giving him advice, tutoring him, and generally keeping an eye on him as he grows. He makes some very personal connections with adults other than his parents and guardian. For example, he comes to regard Mrs. Lupescu, the werewolf, with great respect and shares a sweet

friendship with Liza the witch. They even rescue him in different episodes from fatal situations. However, when it comes to the climax of the book where Bod is finally cornered by the Man Jack, he must defend himself and his graveyard. He finds himself quite alone yet up to the task. Silas is away, the rest of the ghosts are unaware of the danger, and Bod has no time to wait for Silas or explain that they are under attack. Instead, he leverages his own intimate knowledge of the graveyard and uses it to defeat the last of the Jacks. Though the Honour Guard, a group of powerful, supernatural spirits fighting against the evil organization have been working through the book to eradicate the criminal syndicate, it is Bod in the end who singlehandedly finishes the task.

Jean Webb, in her article that traces English heroism in children's books examines Pullman's works and notes that Lyra is "equipped with some truths, but the given certainties of education, religious belief and moral behaviour exemplified by adults, are uncertain and untrustworthy. Lyra has to find her own truths" (*Walking into the Sky* 54). This stands true for all the child protagonists who find themselves without parental aid and support from other adults. When the Master of Jordan is reluctantly sending Lyra off to begin her journey, he reminds her "...the powers of this world are very strong. Men and women are moved by tides much fiercer than you can imagine, and they sweep us all up into the current. Go well, Lyra; bless you child, bless you. Keep your own counsel" (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 79). It is odd to be telling an eleven-year child to trust no one but herself, however that is what all these child protagonists must do in order to survive, since they realise that the adults around them are either dead, absent, or disempowered. This experience of being thrust into the role of saviour, of being self-sufficient and independent is of course the same condition of adulthood where adults must learn to navigate life and its complications on their own, without anybody rescuing them. It is no wonder, then, that adults might find it easy to identify with such characters as the child protagonists of the crossover titles, even if they are eleven.

The protagonists are indeed children, but because they are not severed from the larger world but given space and autonomy as valid individuals, it becomes easy to identify with them, even as an adult. Their lives are not influenced by Romantic ideals of protecting innocence, and they are allowed to participate in the larger happenings in their narrative world, as it is conceded that social, economic, and cultural changes affect children as much as adults. However, they do belong to the Romantic in terms of their heroism which makes these child characters aspirational and life-affirming.

Alternatively, the contemporary adult authors do not make an example of these child protagonists for actual child readers as beacons of adult-approved, normative behaviour. Instead the narrative explores their subjectivities, creating multi-dimensional protagonists who have their unique ambiguities and world-views, which creates interest in the readers to know more of these characters and identify with both the good and the bad in them.

When I read these characters as a child-reader, I felt empowered. These children showed me that just because I was a kid did not mean I couldn't question authority, couldn't influence my life course. Their status as chosen ones gave me confidence in my own abilities, yet their flaws and mistakes made me identify with them much more than other protagonists who, in the end, always did the right thing. Lyra's guilt at leading her friend to his death, Harry and Coraline's ordinariness, the Baudelaire sibling's crimes, and Bod's questionable methods – all made me think about gray areas of morality and pushed my understanding of good and bad, light and dark, binaries that were found in plenty in the other children's books I was reading. These child characters also made me empathetic to the isolation, responsibilities, sorrows they faced, without parental support, and though I was not in the same position, being surrounded by family and community, these child protagonists introduced ideas of self-reliance, independence, and autonomy to my childhood. As an adult, my identification with these saviour kids increased manifold as very often, they resemble closely my own experience

of adulthood, where there is no option but to take on responsibility, shoulder independence, and be your own saviour.

3.5 Languages of Childhood and Adulthood

Apart from the treatment of theme, the nature of endings and the characterization, another factor that contributes to the ease of crossing over to an adult readership is the heteroglot nature of the languages within the text. Traditionally, children's literature was viewed as a tool for literacy, education, imparting the correct social behaviours and 'morals' that were integral to "good children's stories". As discussed in 3.2, McCulloch, Lerer, and Bingham and Scholt, through their constructed histories and contextualization of children's books, provide an expansive study of the inherent didacticism which became a vital part of children's books beginning with religious didacticism of the Puritans and their need to cleanse children of their innate sinfulness; educational didacticism based in Lockean philosophy of *tabula rasa*; and moral didacticism cultivated by Victorian conservatism of social roles and expectations. Since then, one of the main functions of children's literature has been to socialize its audience by presenting desirable models of human personality, human behaviour, interpersonal relationships, social organization and ways of being (McCallum and Stephen 361).

Reynolds, too offers a discussion on the ethical debates within children's literature and how it has been (mis)used as a tool of propaganda. She observes, "Throughout its history, children's literature has been used by adults to encourage readers to think in particular ways, to value certain kinds of behaviours and activities and to refrain from others" (Children's Literature 118). Foundational arguments like Jacqueline Rose's thesis on the "impossibility of children's literature" and Perry Nodelman's examination of the "hidden adult" in children's books and the industry around it established the status of children's books as ambivalent texts and highlighted how these texts functioned to fulfil adult desires about what an ideal childhood

should look like and appease adult views about morality and goodness in children. Because the function of these books was so rigid – to pass on dominant, normative cultural and social values – the language reflected this preoccupation and was mostly straightforward, didactic and simple.

Beauvais, while discussing didacticism in children's literature, encapsulates the quality of didacticism as texts that "carry a single message in a way that makes the addressee unable to respond with critical distance...cluster forms of literature that are monological, excluding, intentionally instructional or threatening to reduce plural viewpoints to a single perspective" (Didactic 58) and most traditional children's literature was apparently instructional and did not invite readers to question the authority of the text. Nodelman, in his book, *Pleasures of Children's Literature* also lists the quality of being "simple, not simplistic" (190) as one of the typical characteristics of children's literature, referring to the general language in the books.

However, that began to change with the rise of the polyphonic children's novel. Borrowing Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, Nikolajeva applies them to children's literature. She summarises the polyphonic novel as one where "manifold voices present their own different ideas and viewpoints... the novel becomes an endless discussion of various issues, a battlefield of ideas and existential questions" (Children's Literature Comes of Age 99) and maps trends in children's literature, where the last couple of decades in the twentieth century began seeing the rise of the polyphonic novel. She states that,

The most typical feature in the polyphonic novel is that the writer's voice disappears behind the voices of the characters. There is no self-evident mouthpiece for the writer's views, so that a great deal remains implicit and unuttered—and this is the most prominent trait of polyphony. In modern children's books we very seldom find adult narrators expressing their own

opinions, comments, or judgments of the characters' behaviour. The didactic narrator constantly intent on conveying the correct message to the reader belongs to the earlier stages in children's literature" (Children's Literature Comes of Age 101)

The qualities of a polyphonic children's novel listed above would certainly engage adult readers, but upon examination, apart from the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the other crossover texts do not emerge to be fully, truly polyphonic novels.

In *His Dark Materials*, it is possible to see some of what Bakhtin calls "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices...not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 6). All the characters in the texts have their own valid personal philosophies, reasons and motivations to challenge or uphold the tyranny of the Magisterium and God's representatives. Asriel wants to not only destroy the Church, all its boards and institutions but also "Kill the Authority" (Pullman, *Subtle Knife* 24) because of his own personal ambition as well as his hatred for oppression and instead wants to establish the "Republic of Heaven". Mrs Coulter approaches the world from her gendered position and everything she does, beginning with marrying her first husband, becoming part of the Oblation Board with the church and a fanatic believer in their campaigns, including hunting her own daughter are all to secure her position and gain agency and power in a world where women are afforded very little. Iorek has his own stance and provides a voice to a culture and social group that doesn't centre human values and aims and is proud of the bears' un-humanness. He only helps Lyra, first as a deal to win back his own battle armour and kingdom (and return it to a state of the bear's native culture) and later, because of his own personal friendship with the

girl. Serrafina Pekkala and the other witches are involved due to the witches' prophecy about Lyra and how she was going to "bring about the end of destiny" (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 300) but also because their worldview is in direct opposition to the church – they are a matriarchal society where desires of the body and sex are not sinful, nor is monogamy a compulsion; they are pagans, unfettered by material possessions and who live in conjunction with the natural world. Will Parry joins the war, first to find his father and then because of his deep bond with Lyra and Mary Malone enters the fray because of both, her scientific curiosity as a physicist and her faith as an erstwhile nun. Lyra herself has no interest in power, ambition or fate - but she wants to help the children that are being killed by the adults around her, her close friend, Roger, being one of them. Her ultimate aim is to find Roger, searching for him even in the land of the dead, and also preserve the source of Dust (particles of consciousness) because if adults "say it is bad, it must be good." (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 384), so that children could be free once and for all.

In this manner, the trilogy offers a diversity of positions and it is difficult to pinpoint to one group as the dominant voice. Various existential questions emerge – is Dust good? Does the Authority need to be killed? Is the Republic of Heaven truly free? Is there free will? Who must participate in war? – and each voice offers different answers, especially considering that the narrative is set in multiple, parallel worlds which widens the scope for polyphony even more. The function of the polyphonic novel is to collect "a multiplicity of distinct, often conflicting voices around a single place, family, object, or idea. Polyphony widens the novel's geographic, psychological, chronological, and stylistic range, while simultaneously focusing its gaze" (Lukas). This can be seen within the *His Dark Materials* trilogy as the texts subscribe to the overall ideological position that children must be given agency - to gain self-awareness of their bodies and desires, to gain control of their choices – but the third person narrator doesn't offer opinions, suggestions, or moralizing. Instead we glean this through the various

philosophical discussions that take place amongst characters, who are fully valid voices that offer their own understanding and opinions. Take for example, an exchange between Serafina Pekkala and Lee Scorsby as they discuss their reasons to join or not join the war (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 298-302). The narrator then, “does not place his [sic] own narrative voice between the character and the reader, but rather...The text appears as an interaction of distinct perspectives or ideologies, borne by the different characters” (Lukas).

In *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the author/narrator Lemony Snicket is also a character within the story and thus, his voice is vastly present and accessible to the reader. However, due to the typical postmodern, absurdist, fragmented style of writing, polyphony becomes inherent to the series, despite the author/narrator’s marked presence. Snicket is a journalist who is supposed to be researching the Baudelaire children, chronicling their misfortunes by following a paper trail of documents, witness accounts, diaries and other evidence. However, he is an unreliable narrator as he often withholds information from readers or speculates without proof to fill in gaps. There are multiple, contradictory character accounts within the text and even by the end, it is hard to assemble the truth about not only the fate of the children, but also their parents, their guardians, and the clandestine organization, V.F.D. The central ideological position of the text is that one can either be on the side of starting metaphorical (and often literal) fires in the world or fighting them as a VFD volunteer but that is challenged as the Baudelaire children themselves slowly get into morally ambiguous positions, even becoming accused arsonists on the run, midway through the series. Questions about autonomy, intent, truth, and trust are all brought to the forefront as the children as well as the readers continuously grapple with characters and situations that constantly mutate. There is no discernible main or dominant consciousness to be found within the narrative, in fact there are none at all. Reality is presented in anachronistic fragments, truth is elusive and the

Baudelaire children, along with the reader must make meaning for themselves and find some sense in the increasingly absurd, weird, grotesque world they encounter.

However, the other crossover texts under consideration do not seem to fall in the category of a polyphonic novel. Not only is the authorial intent or narrator a marked presence, but the polyphony is muted or absent. In the *Harry Potter* series, as discussed under the section of *Character*, readers are introduced to several grey, morally ambiguous characters like Snape, Sirius, and Dumbledore however when it comes to the voices within the texts, there are no ambivalent or opposing thought systems to be found. Within the constructed world, binaries of good/bad, kindness/cruelty, love/hate, and light/dark are strictly rigid and there are no polyphonic debates upon the nature of such binaries. The third person, omniscient narrator is very blatant in their like or dislike of characters, and through this didactic narrator, the readers know exactly who is worthy of admiration and who is to be derided, what values are good and what values are bad. There are no characters within the narrative that offer any resistance to the world constructed by the narrator and author.

For example, those that inhabit undesirable behaviours or bad moral values are constructed as terrible without any polyphonic struggle. In the most Dahl-like fashion, children like Dudley, Crabbe, Goyle, Millicent Bulstrode, and Pansy Parkinson, are one-dimensional bullies who are described as fat, big, large, ugly, selfish, or rude by the didactic narrator who is communicating that readers must not emulate or identify with these children. The readers are very clearly directed to hate these children, without any more information about them or any competing narratives about their identity. Slytherin house, too and those who belong to it, is described in the most negative terms – thuggish, evil, selfish, ambitious – and readers are constantly warned that to be in Slytherin is the worst fate. Harry, a newcomer, is so scared by the discourse around Slytherin and the general reputation it has that he literally asks the Sorting Hat not to be sent there (Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone* 130), thus also indicating to the readers

that they must not identify with anyone from the house. On the other hand, Gryffindor is presented as the most admirable of all the houses and every positive, heroic, likeable character belongs to it. There is no space for any voice within the narrative to espouse the better qualities of Slytherin house or openly declare its merits, or on the other hand offer a critique of Gryffindor. The only alternative resistance towards the Gryffindor/Goodness and Slytherin/Evil binary is from the one anomaly each house has – Peter Pettigrew, a cowardly, murderer is originally from Gryffindor and Snape, the brave and self-sacrificing double agent is originally from Slytherin. The existence of these characters gives a reason to pause and question the constructed narrative around each house and the qualities associated with it, thus creating a small polyphonic moment however it is not something that is brought out within the story through various characters and consciousnesses debating or offering their explanations, challenging the narrator who tells the readers that Gryffindor is good and Slytherin is evil. Rather, it is left for readers to realise on their own. In the closing epilogue of the series, Harry's son is shown to be worried about being sorted into Slytherin house (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 619), insinuating that despite Snape's contributions, Slytherin still remains undesirable according to the authorial worldview.

Alternatively, characters who are morally ambiguous but are symbols for goodness, kindness, and nobility of character, are defended in the authorial world since the readers must be taught to admire these characters and by extension, the values they symbolize. For example, the narrative discourages any active questioning of Dumbledore's motives or methods by ostracizing characters that raise any opinions that do not match the grandiose narrative of nobility of character, trustworthiness, and goodness that surrounds him. Percy, the only Weasley to express doubts about Dumbledore, is immediately detached from the family unit, until he amends his ways and is allowed back in. His own family chooses to denounce him and openly criticize him, proud of their loyalty to Dumbledore. Moreover, the reader doesn't even

get to know Percy's reasons for his distrust. Readers are just told that an argument ensued, and he left, leaving no place for any other consciousness except the ones that build Dumbledore as supreme. In the authorial world, one must both explicitly trust Dumbledore and encourage everyone to do the same or be condemned as faithless and misguided. Any information that the reader receives about Dumbledore's personal flaws is through an unreliable voice - Rita Skeeter, an unethical journalist who embellishes the truth regularly, and even when it is revealed there might be some authenticity to the information, Harry, the protagonist, decides "simply to trust" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 458) Dumbledore, putting his personal qualms aside. To be loyal to Dumbledore is to be loyal to Hogwarts, to kindness, to love, to friendship as proved by Fawkes showing up to help Harry in the Chamber of Secrets and the didactic narrator ensures that all the voices within the narrative uphold these values by championing Dumbledore's infallibility.

Indeed, the authorial presence is so compelling that despite the story functioning in a heterogeneous society in terms of human and non-human creatures who live together side by side, readers only engage with the constructed world through the collective culture and consciousness of the human witches and wizards. There are no multitudinous voices that represent dissimilar, more diverse ideologies that exist within that society. Apart from interactions with token characters belonging to each group - Firenze for centaurs, Griphook for goblins, Dobby for elves and Grawp for giants, there is no further representation of their native cultures, value systems, moral outlooks and any more information about these groups is gleaned through another human witch or wizard's voice, unlike the social groups in *His Dark Materials*, where there is significant contact with each group and there are multiple voices within the group that counter or support the more dominant human-centric narrative.

In *Coraline*, the world building is relatively simple and there isn't a host of characters for polyphonic interactions to emerge. The third person, omniscient narrator often describes to

the readers Coraline's inner thoughts and feelings, reflecting her rich inner world, and through her, frequently defamiliarizes the adult world like commenting on adult inattention to children or poking fun at adult logic. However, beyond that, the narrator's voice is mostly focused on telling the story and moving the plot ahead. Similarly, in *The Graveyard Book* as well, apart from offering moments of wry wisdom or philosophical commentary on the world built within the text, the narrator's voice is quite simple. Both books are complex in other ways, for example Coraline's characterization and personal growth is empowering not only to children but also adults, as discussed in the previous section and Gaiman subverts child's play, creating the Other World and the Other Mother that parody Coraline's real life in grotesque, horrific ways that lead to true moments of both physical and psychological horror for the readers. *The Graveyard Book* too engages adults with its themes of coming of age and finding a own chosen family, but both books are typically to what Nodelman has referred to as, "simple not simplistic" children's literature, and so there is an absence of polyphony within the texts, in the way the other crossover texts demonstrate it.

The question then arises is that if polyphony is not a common denominator in the texts crossing over, then is there any other narrative criteria that can be seen as typical? Certainly, it plays a part in sustaining adult attention but it doesn't seem to be a fundamental characteristic of crossover fiction. Ursula Le Guin and J.R.R Tolkien's works also enjoyed immense popularity with adults long before crossover fiction was termed so. But while Le Guin's works are deeply polyphonic, Tolkien's world is monologic with strict, one-dimensional binaries of good and evil. Thacker, while contextualizing *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* discusses the appeal both novels hold for adults. She suggests that the *Harry Potter* books "offer a narrative voice that is comforting and controlling at the same time" (Playful Subversion 147) and adults reading these books shows a desire to return to a more controlling, less active relationship with the narrative with a confident authorial voice which provides meaning instead

of adults having to create it for themselves. For Thacker, the popularity of the Harry Potter books posits a reader, “who requires consolation in a difficult world, rather than a reader willing to make his or her own meaning” (Playful Subversion 147). Alternatively, when discussing *His Dark Materials*, Thacker acknowledges the use of “religion, quantum physics and the disruption of moral certainties” (Playful Subversion 148) within the texts that attribute to Pullman’s refusal to talk down to children, who instead prefers to construct an “implied reader capable of engaging both with the force of the plot and the indeterminacy of meaning” (Playful Subversion 148).

Thus, it seems to be more of a personal choice, whether adults read polyphonic or monologic novels and what that particular reader in that particular moment expects to get out of the reading experience - comfort or a challenge. However, what Pullman refers to as his refusal to talk down to children compels one to think about the language used in the texts; the heteroglossia within the text. I propose that these crossover texts do not simplify the language uttered by characters but different social actors belonging to different social groups within the text use languages of bureaucracy, politics, media, religion, philosophy as well as languages of play, school, peer relationships, and slang which makes them more authentic to the representation of children-adult interactions in a believable, reflective world that adults are familiar with.

Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as “The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic language, **languages of generations and age groups**, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day” (Discourse 262, emphasis added). Within the novel, this heteroglossia is expressed by a diversity of speech types which he terms “raznorecie” and each type expresses its own world view and totality of ideas. For him, the function of heteroglossia

or a diversity of social speeches is a method to create a language that encourages “decentralization and disunification” of the ideologies present within the text. Bakhtin asserts that “...language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, **between different socio-ideological groups in the present**, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth” (Discourse 291, emphasis added). Furthermore, he asks to consider “all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words... **As such they all may be juxtaposed to another, mutually supplement one other contradict one other and be interrelated dialogically**” (Discourse 291, emphasis added).

Considering this exhaustive definition, it helps to focus on the concept of different languages that are spoken by different age groups and generations, which are also socio-ideological groups co-existing in the present and their interactions at times are supplementary or contradictory – this offers newer ways to understand how children’s texts might engage adult interest. In crossover texts, there is a more inclusive representation of the world children and adults co-habit. The erstwhile children’s literature divorced children from the adult world thus relying on simplified dialogue and the languages of childhood – of play, riddles, and literary nonsense. However, Lyra’s Oxford, Harry’s Hogwarts, The Baudelaire Children’s fictional gothic cities and villages are representational of different social groups who are speaking different social languages. Adults speak like adults, children speak like children and various professional groups use their jargon and technical language to express themselves.

Park-Fuller, in her exploration of the concepts, refers to polyphony as “multi-voicedness” and heteroglossia as “other-languagedness” (Voices), and while in some of the crossover texts, characters might not be multi-voiced (symbolizing contradictory, independent world views), they are definitely users of “other-languagedness”, using discourse that contains

truths inherent to their social groups and experiences. For example, all adults and children in *Harry Potter* seem to be under the hierarchy of the narrator's moral ideology as discussed above - it is very clear who is good, who is bad, who the readers are supposed to like, who they are supposed to reject. Thus, *Harry Potter* is didactic, and not entirely polyphonic. However, the social groups of adults, children, politicians, educators, parents, non-human species are all present, use language that is particular and unique to their lived experience and professions, and all are interacting in the constructed, unified world. The narrative world has adults and children interacting and affecting each other's lives, and merely for the sake of it being a "children's story", the languages are not simplified, manipulated, or used only in a way that panders to the construction of children as innocent readers who know nothing of the adult world. Enid Blyton popularized both the genres of detective stories as well as the school stories in children's literature, which *Harry Potter* is a blend of. However, in Blyton's works, the adults were either mostly absent or those who are present speak simple, straightforward language; professionals like policemen do not use the jargon of their work but are comedic caricatures who utter sentences like "Clear orf then, I've got work to do here – serious work" (*The Burnt Cottage* 25). Similarly, when a new teacher in the *St. Clare's* series, being bullied by her class and is struggling to gain control, decides to resign, the students offer her an apology and her entire dilemma is solved in one simple, unambiguous internal thought - "I shan't give in my resignation to Miss Theobald after all...if I did, I would have to say why, and I shouldn't like to give the girls away after they had said sorry in such a nice way" (*The Twins at St. Clare's*). The adults here don't speak in the "other-languagedness" that Fuller refers to, rather they too speak like children.

However, in the crossover texts, the internal stratification of language is evident as adults and children speak like their particular age group and those belonging to certain distinct social groups and professions use the language characteristic to them. In *His Dark Materials*

trilogy, wild and free Lyra who is brought up by both scholars of Oxford and the servants working at Jordan College speaks in both stirring speeches but also uses wrong grammar, street slang and even swears when things get too frustrating. She often picks up phrases and words from the adults around her, and though she might not understand it all, she often repeats the same adult language, either manipulating it to sound more informed as she does with Lord Boreal or to pass on crucial information to more trustworthy custodians, as she does with Lord Faa and Asriel. Lyra's language is a miscellany of her own experiences of being a child as well as the adult languages of politics, academia, war, and theology she hears around her. She is awarded the name "Lyra Silvertongue" because of her ability to lie smoothly but it is her mutability of language that allows her to create such elaborate, tricky, and persuasive webs of facts and fiction. It is no wonder then that Lyra can read the alethiometer, the knowledge-giving device which uses a symbol language based on intuition and interpretation rather than grammar and logic, since the meaning is flexible and so is the language of her childhood.

On the other hand, the adults do not talk in simplified language that is easy to understand, even when directly addressing Lyra. Instead, they treat her as an equal, giving her the truth, even if she is not able to grasp it. For example, when Lyra asks Serafina Pekkala questions about the witches, about their relations with men, their clan politics, she answers all her queries as truthfully and directly as possible commenting that "You are so young, Lyra, too young to understand this, but I shall tell you anyway and you'll understand it later" (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 304). When Lyra meets Asriel after her long, arduous, and dangerous journey to find him, she demands she deserves to know the truth about Dust because she has a right to know it. Asriel considers her, "...trying to guess whether she would understand what he was about to say. He had never looked at her seriously before, she thought; until now he had always been like an adult indulging a child in a pretty trick. But he seemed to think she was ready" (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 358). This approach of acknowledging children's intelligence,

experience, and value is what makes the adult characters speak to them in clear, truthful ways, which in turn provides adult readers a more authentic reading experience closer to the world they live in. When Lyra meets Mary Malone for the first time, the exchange between the two is layered and complex as both discuss dark matter/Shadows/Rusakov particles/Dust using both quotidian language as well as scientific jargon and abstractions, however, both are equal in exchanging information though Lyra explains it all in direct, uncomplicated words and Malone refers to physics, archaeology, Keats and Plato (Pullman, *Subtle Knife* 42 – 48).

Other adults within the narrative world can be found speaking the language of their professions like the group of scholars in Oxford who use typical academic language; the church clergy who speak using religious and symbolic language; the Gyptians who frequently use seafaring terms; angels who use elevated, formal language and Asriel's war council who use vocabulary relating to planning, strategizing, and warfare. The other-languedness of these adult characters is often emphasised by Lyra and Will often not fully comprehending what is being said, yet the children always find their own ways to create knowledge and meaning in the various social languages they encounter, whether it is through the alethiometer, through gradually gaining experience or through developing their own worldviews and opinions.

In *Harry Potter* too, the internal stratification of languages is evident, especially when it comes to the language of politics, bureaucracy, news and propaganda, and law. Harry and his friends are surrounded by and speak in the languages of school and education. Discourse around exams, revisions, tests, homework, timetables sports teams, house rivalries, teachers and professors, puns, and jokes – all form the speech of students at Hogwarts which is majorly where most of the narrative time is spent. However, Harry and his friends also have to contend with understanding languages that extend beyond the school setting.

Harry, from the first introduction to the magical world at the age of eleven, is surrounded by legal language and the language of governance. To begin with, he must learn of

the laws that regulate this world like “The Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery” and the “International Confederation of Warlocks’ Statute of Secrecy”. Throughout his school years, at various times, Harry encounters several departments of the Ministry of Magic, each of which are then subdivided into numerous offices that are in-charge of specific areas of governance. Departments like the Magical Law Enforcement, Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, Department of International Magical Co-operation, Department of Magical Transportation, Department of Magical Games and Sports, and the Department of Mysteries – all affect Harry’s childhood experience directly. In *Chamber of Secrets*, at the age of twelve, Harry receives a full-fledged official warning from the Office of Improper Use of Magic as well as learns about the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office where Arthur Weasley works; in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, at the age of thirteen, Harry, Ron and Hermione help Hagrid prepare as a defendant in a legal case against his animal, Buckbeak to try and save it from an unfair execution by the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures; at the age of fourteen, in *Goblet of Fire*, he is introduced to the Portkey Office as well as Department of International Magical Cooperation; at fifteen in *Order of Phoenix*, Harry faces a trial in front of the Wizengamot, the judiciary of the Wizarding world as well as battles the draconian Educational Decrees Umbridge introduces to Hogwarts. Legal speech and jargon permeates every encounter as readers are given access to written laws, orders, memos, documents and verbal interactions between members of the ministry.

Readers are also presented with full length featured newspaper articles bringing in the language of reporting and publicity. Due to his celebrity status, Harry is often victim of tabloid speculation as well as government propaganda disseminated through the Daily Prophet, the main newspaper. Often, the narrative is interspersed with articles which camouflage, distort, or outright destroy the truth, as in the case with Rita Skeeter reporting misleading information in

her coverage of the Triwizard Tournament or the smear campaigns run by the Ministry of Magic to defame both Harry and Dumbledore. The language of propaganda and public (mis)information can also be found in pamphlets, brochures and posters issued by the Ministry throughout the books. The children in *Harry Potter* are not in a bubble of school-life but the adult social languages juxtapose, expose, and impose constantly. There is a moment in *Order of the Phoenix*, where Dolores Umbridge from the ministry has been newly appointed as teacher at Hogwarts. She gives a long winded speech, outlining her policies and aims for her classes in a politician's rhetoric that is purposely ambiguous and abstract using phrases like "progress for progress's sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions require no tinkering" or "Let us move forward, then, into an era of openness, effectiveness and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 197). Harry tunes out for the larger part of it but Dumbledore calls it most illuminating and when he is baffled, Hermione distils the meaning of the speech as "the Ministry is interfering with Hogwarts" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 198). The school is no longer the stronghold of childhood and as the outside impinges on the inside, the childhood languages contradict and complement the adult languages of law, politics, propaganda and media.

Umbridge is symptomatic of a larger debate within the text about what content children must be exposed to and what is deemed fit for younger ones. Arthur Weasley believes in telling Harry the truth using the phrase "murderer" to warn him about impending danger whereas the Ministry wants to keep it secret, Molly and Sirius have heated arguments over how much Harry can know about Voldemort's future plans as Molly wants to keep it from the young ones, and Umbridge uses ridiculous, infantilised language in her classes as she believes anything more

will empower students to revolt, yet keeps bringing in political and legal language when it suits her, as she introduces a number of education decrees under her regime.

Dumbledore himself, at various moments, finds himself unable to tell Harry the whole truth and struggles to find the right language that will tell him the truth without traumatizing him, often resorting to abstractions about death, love and life when answering Harry's direct questions. Mostly, the adults who share a relationship with the children either directly address the children as equals with truth like Sirius and Alastor Moody, or in abstractions like Dumbledore, or speak in similar child-like slang like Hagrid. But they never talk down to children, manipulating them with euphemisms or outright lies.

In *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book* too, this attitude of not talking down endures. While the overall language of the text is easy to understand, with short sentences, exposition and the use of "and then" to propel the story forward, however one can find the characters and narrator speaking languages of childhood and adulthood. Both the texts aim to problematize the issue of talking down to children by clashing the two languages together. When "Coraline wondered why so few of the adults she had met made any sense. She sometimes wondered who they thought they were talking to" (Gaiman, *Coraline* 78), she is referring to the adult languages that she encounters on the daily. Often adults say things and use vocabulary that make no sense to her, but she finds her own meanings. Whenever she meets her neighbours Ms Spink and and Ms Forcible, they always allude to their time on the stage and use theatre jargon with her. When she draws an illustration, she mother comments "very Modern dear", referring to the art movement, when he dad cooks, he makes "recipes" which to Coraline means weird tasting food. Often there are cheeky jokes to defamiliarize the adult world - Coraline finds no logic in having a room full of grandma's precious furniture but not being able to use it, or in a still life painting as she wonders who would ever want to paint a bowl of fruit. When she meets the Beldam, the differences between their languages is a jarring effect and works to emphasize

the Beldam's artificiality and also escalate the horror within the text by making her feel more alien. She uses stiff, formal language when trying to convince Coraline about her intentions of being her new mother but lacks any genuine warmth or affection with no terms of endearment or colloquial verbiage. She also uses dated phrases like "Sharper than a serpent's Tooth is a daughter's ingratitude. Still, the proudest spirit can be broken, with love" (Gaiman, *Coraline* 111) and phrases like "Manners maykth Man" (Gaiman, *Coraline* 113). Coraline on the other hand is direct and calls her "sick and evil and weird" to her face. Despite Coraline's occasional confusion at adult languages, she asserts her own independence often creating her own meanings, opinions, and worldviews.

In *The Graveyard Book* too there is no talking down to children and adult languages can be found in explanations and philosophical musings. Silas, Bod's guardian, is often his go-to person for explanations about things Bod might not understand. For example, consider this exchange when Bod asks about suicide and Silas at first attempts to give him an abstract answer:

"And there are always people who find their lives have become so unsupportable they believe the best thing they could do would be to hasten their transition to another plane of existence"

"They kill themselves, you mean?" said Bod. He was about eight years old, wide-eyed and inquisitive, and he was not stupid.

"Indeed."

"Does it work? Are they happier dead?"

"Sometimes. Mostly, no. It's like the people who believe they'll be happy if they go and live somewhere else, but who learn it doesn't work that way. Wherever you go, you take yourself with you. If you see what I mean."

"Sort of," said Bod (Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book* 67).

In this exchange, while Silas tries to refrain from trying to tell Bod about suicide directly using adult language of abstractions and complex vocabulary, Bod, hilariously forces him to upfront. This tension of adult language and children's more direct language sparks debates about telling children the truth and trusting in their intelligence. At the end, when Bod says "sort of" to the statement, "If you see what I mean", it is also a general proclamation of children making their own meaning, maybe not in the way adults would want them to, but that is a better outcome than creating misinformation by talking down to them or manipulating them.

The contradictions and juxtapositions of various social languages can also be found in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. There is a cacophony of puns, alliterations, definitions, jargon, intertextuality and subversion of language rules. The texts are saturated with the narrator Snicket's dark humour, constant interruptions in explaining vocabulary and providing extra-textual and meta-textual details beyond the story presented within the books, as well as references to classic literary works to be found in the names of characters and places. The texts are also constantly poking fun at adult grammar, vocabulary, rules of language as the "The Baudelaires thought of grammar—all those rules about how to write and speak the English language—the way they thought of banana bread: fine, but nothing to make a fuss about" (Snicket, *The Wide Window* 28) and often when an adult does use complex words the narrator makes fun of them for using a superfluous word, like when Olaf uses personage instead of person. Yet, it is jarring when in fact it is the children who speak in erudite, well-informed, and rational ways, for example Klaus, the most literary of the siblings often explains the meanings of words that other two kids don't know whereas the adults speak in nonsensical, grammatically wrong, or vague language like that of Principle Nero, Olaf and Aunt Josephine. The languages within the texts emulate what Wall has called the "dual address". Barbara Wall's definition of 'dual address' is a process by which texts address 'both children and adults simultaneously' (Narrator's Voice 22), taking the two audiences equally seriously while trying to allow 'adult

narrator and child narrated a conjunction of interests ' (Narrator's Voice 35). This also sounds close the model put forward by Pullman of the author as a storyteller sitting in a village square, with a mixed audience of people who get different things from the story.

O'Sullivan, too, proposes a similar approach to modern children's literature, and especially crossover fiction. She refutes the idea that these texts employ a double-address that is, consciously addressing children and adult simultaneously, "rather, they typically contain elements that may appeal to a variety of readers at different ages and developmental stages. The positions of addressees of these texts should **be imagined on a sliding scale rather than at one of two poles that denote the constructs "adult" or "child,"** and it would be more appropriate to speak of literature with multiple rather than double address. (emphasis added, Historical Dictionary 6)

As Park-Fuller, in her paper, elucidates "heteroglossia refers to the ideologies inherent in the various languages to which we all lay claim as social beings and by which we are constituted as individuals: the language and the inherent ideologies of our profession, the language and inherent ideologies of our age group, of the decade, of our social class, geographical region, family, circle of friends, etc" (Voices) make up heteroglossia and these ideological languages within the text reveal something of each character or group and their social cultures. Like Tjupa says, the direct speech of a character often serves to express that character's linguistic view of the world, which can differ to a greater or lesser extent from the view of the world on which the narration is based. In such cases, the lexical, grammatical, and intonation-related syntactic features of the character's text contrast with the narrator's text and combine to form a certain voice belonging to a different subject (Heteroglossia 126).

Thus, adults reading children's books have plenty to mine from the books. In Harju's study of the Crossover Continuum, adults when reading children books from their own

childhoods often don't remember it as the same, finding the current reading experience more poignant or philosophical. This stands true for my own experience as well. When I read these books as a child, the various languages created a more believable reading experience for me as I was indeed surrounded by such languages. I didn't find it weird that religion was discussed in his *Dark Materials* or advertisements were present in Harry Potter, or even Silas' direct, blunt statements like "your parents are murdered and someone is out there to kill you" because in my real childhood, I wasn't just interacting with other children, but constantly picking up words and concepts from the adults, media, and the internet around me. Alternatively, as an adult, my interest is sustained by not only the adult languages that I find, making these texts more accessible to my adulthood, but I enjoy having the option to engage with and remember the languages of childhood as they often hold up a mirror to the dryness and pretentiousness of adult languages and seem to distil the most difficult, abstract things in life in the easiest of manner.

3.6 The Appeal of Fantasy Genre

Fantasy has historically held a special status in children's literature and many of the classic titles in the children's literature tradition belong to the genre, for example, the fantasy works of Lewis Carol, J.M Barrie, Diana Wynne Jones, JRR Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Roald Dahl are all considered classics in their own right. Nikolajeva offers that the reason for this popularity is the socialization aspect where "The characters are supposed to learn something, to mature and in some cases come of age" (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 42). Another reason, she believes, are the advantages of dealing with "important psychological, ethical, and existential questions in a slightly detached manner, which frequently proves more effective with young readers than straightforward realism" (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 42). She explains that "For instance, the battle of good and evil may be less disturbing, yet more

persuasive when described within an imaginary world than in the reader's immediate surroundings. The spiritual growth of the protagonist can be presented more tangibly when depicted in terms of struggle with external magic forces than in terms of inner tension" (Power, Voice, and Subjectivity 42). Finally, she views fantasy as the perfect subversive mode to interrogate existing power relationships, including those between adults and children, momentarily allowing the child to be empowered, without challenging the real world order, as discussed in 3.3 – *Examining the Endings*.

According to Beckett's survey, fantasy has also traditionally been the most popular when it comes to crossing borders. She observes that the "Popular genre fiction, such as horror, detective, romance, fantasy, and science fiction, has always crossed between adult and child audiences" (Global and Historical Perspectives 20). Falconer also agrees that most crossover fiction can be found in the genres of magic fantasy, epic fantasy, science fiction, gothic, history and historical legend, contemporary picture books, comics and graphic novels (Crossover Novel 560). For adult readers, this substantial crossing over is indicative of the joy of re-discovering children's fantasy titles. Beckett states that "While child-to-adult crossovers can be found in most genres, the super crossovers that have garnered most of the public and critical attention have been fantasy titles" (Global and Historical Perspectives 133). Nikolajeva also takes notice of this prevalent movement, going even further, observing that "paradoxically, the best examples of children's fantasy have always been questioned as books for children, such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Winnie-the-Pooh*. This trend has culminated in the contemporary phenomenon of crossover, best illustrated by Philip Pullman and J. K. Rowling" (Voice, Power and Subjectivity 42).

However, I believe that adult's reading children's fantasy book is a natural extension of pre-existing adult interest in the fantasy genre. If fantasy has enjoyed a high status amongst children, it has also always enjoyed immense approval amongst adults as well, albeit relegated

to the category of popular culture. Contemporary adult fantasy titles like *A Game of Thrones*, the *Wheel of Time* series and the *Dune* series have seen massive commercial success, both in print and screen adaptations. Even in other media formats like movies, video games, graphic novels and comics, and shows, adults have been consuming fantasy en masse. Classics like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, long standing shows like *Dr Who*, multi-million-dollar empires spawned by video games like *World of Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy* and more contemporarily, the worldwide popularity of the *Marvel* movies and shows *Supernatural*, *Stranger Things* and *The Witcher* – all reveal an established acceptance of fantasy in adult cultures. With the crossover phenomenon, adults have access to a new source of fantasy namely children's literature.

Some of the reasons of why adults might be turning to fantasy in children's literature now are encapsulated by Thacker who explains that at the beginning of the new century the children's books turned to darker themes post-war alongside modernist aesthetics like

...a new complexity of tone to the form with a number of children's fantasy texts which, below the surface, delivered a darker message. The struggle to find identity, the uneasy relationship between the imagined and the real, and the changing perception of time...the narrative relationship embodied in many of these texts suggests a disruption of adult confidence in providing a sense of the world for children which at times approaches a postmodern sense of fracture and decentring (New Voices, New Threats 101).

Tolkien, one of the most celebrated fantasy writers, whose works have also crossed over, offers his theory of fantasy and lists reasons of why fantasy is read. For him, it leads to "Recovery" which allows readers to redevelop a fresh, clear vision that challenges the ordinariness of everyday routine, it allows "Escape" from the disgust and despair of grim realities of modern life and an escape to more ancient, primal desires that cannot be fulfilled by mundane,

contemporary culture. And finally, it provides “Consolation” by providing a turn of events within the story that leads to a hopeful, happy ending and giving readers a true, fleeting glimpse of Joy (On Fairy Stories). Another crossover writer, Gaarder, echoes similar views where he says that fantasy helps us “to wipe the dust from reality so that we may again experience the world as clearly as when we were children.” That is why, in Gaarder’s mind, “adults also need children’s books” (qtd in Global and Historical Perspectives 110). Terry Pratchett also views fantasy as “uni-age” commenting “You can start it in the crèche, and it follows you to death” and for him readers of fantasy are “serendipists – pickers up of interesting stuff you hadn’t expected to see” (qtd in Moss).

Thus, children’s fantasy has always been a space of emancipation and subversion. It provides a room for questioning dominant power structures and authority figures. It is also a creative imagined space that allows for experimentations and alternative worldviews to manifest and can provide varying degrees of entertainment, hope, escape, and defamiliarization that adults might gain out of the reading experience. Apart from these reasons, Beckett also observes the trend of series that fantasy offers which seems to encourage crossing over. She says that “for many people, the crossover phenomenon seems to be synonymous with fantasy trilogies. Although this is an extremely limited view of crossover fiction, it is certainly true that the publishing of series of varying lengths – not only trilogies- for the crossover market has been the hottest ticket in the book world in recent years. In 2002, the journalist Damian Kelleher wrote in *The Times Educational Supplement*: “One of the unwritten rules for crossover novels is that one book isn’t enough” (Global and Historical Perspectives 151). In children’s literature especially, a series was considered formulaic and of inferior quality. Very often, mass produced series are viewed with suspicion because of the perceived financial motives of large publishing houses as well as the formulaic plots and characters that make up such series. However, today, the fantasy series are successfully crossing over by breaking assumptions and suspicions of

easy profits, and triviality. According to Gallo, "...fantasy lovers seem to expect their favourite writers to continue through several books – trilogies, quartets and beyond...And fantasy writers seem to prefer to write multiple books with the same character and setting. After all they have spent so much time creating intricate alternate worlds, and their original creation provides more opportunities to explore than can be done in just one book" (Bold Books 127). Indeed, three out of the five crossover titles under consideration are series formats as well.

For the child reader, an interest in fantasy series is quite understandable. The anticipation of the next installment, the commitment to finishing a series, and the thrill of fantasy itself are important parts of the reading experience and encourage them to become habitual readers. Also, most of the contemporary series that are popular can be categorized as progressive series – which is characterized by a continuous story that develops in installments, with each book narrating a part of the sequence, and where characters, with each book, grow older and more mature. This would augment the identification of child readers with the characters, as they grow up alongside them. For adults too, there is an appeal as such progressive series help them understand and appreciate their own maturation process, like trying to read a history of the self, as their own childhood dilemmas, apprehensions, and anxieties are portrayed and resolved. Also, as the books progress and the protagonists mature, so does the complexity of theme, character and plot, providing a more rewarding reading experience for adults. The fantasy series also allows for the narrative space to indulge in expansive world building. The length of the series format is perfect for accommodating highly detailed and descriptive rules, social structures, and "their extended length enables the author to accumulate incrementally the geographical, historical and cultural complexity of vast secondary worlds" (Watson 534).

However, I propose that it is not only the defamiliarization and escapist attributes of fantasy or the series format that are causing adult admiration of these children's books. Both

of Gaiman's works are individual works and yet have crossed over. They do not contain the expansive world building of the other three and are contained within the length of two hundred to three hundred pages. Instead, I propose that there has been a change in the very imaginations that build these fantastic worlds and fantasy in children's books has changed from "wild imaginations" to "literary imaginations".

Colin Manlove in his book *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England* traces the history of children's fantasy from the 18th century onwards. According to his study, in the 18th century, due to the influence of Enlightenment and John Locke's pedagogy, imagination was seen as irresponsible and dangerous, and children's literature existed only for pedagogic or moral reasons. However, by the 19th century, the direct impact of Romanticism could be felt as the Child and the Imagination were at the forefront of all discourse. Manlove states that "the 'child state' was seen not as something to be educated away, but as a happy condition of natural innocence which the world too often crushes. The child becomes seen as a being in its own right rather than as part of a process" (13). The fantasy books written during this time stem from an idea of childhood as innately innocent and full of magic and whimsy. The Victorian veneration and obsession with the figure of child and a pastoral longing in the face of the Industrial Revolution, all became characteristics of nineteenth and early twentieth century fantasy written for children. Manlove called the period from 1850s onwards to the first couple of decades in the twentieth period the 'golden age of children's fantasy' and most notable classics come from this period. Works of writers like Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, E. Nesbit, J.M. Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, Edward Lear, and Enid Blyton created a kind of fantasy that was whimsical, fanciful or outright zany. The worlds constructed by these writers did not follow any internal logic or rules; mostly the world building remained basic and very often these were temporary worlds from which children would return to their real homestead. Moreover, adult characters within the fantasy world would be minimal or absent.

Manlove uses the term ‘wild imaginations’ to describe the children in Nesbit’s work but I would think the term characterized much of the fantasy writing of this time. Consider worlds like Neverland, Wonderland, the land of Oz where anything could happen at any given time without needing any rationale or foreshadowing. In most such worlds, the adventures remained comical with no grave consequences for the children and followed the home-away-home patterns where the real, protective, rational world awaited, unchanged. These fantasy worlds were created by unchained, explosive, vibrant, wild imaginations where fantasy had no rules and no obligation of logic.

However, in the latter half of the twentieth century, realism began to affect and infiltrate fantasy writing for children and the decades of the 70s, 80, and 90s saw an increase in books that blended the two, to great effect. Childhood was no longer an innocent state but one thronged by dangers, threats and difficulties which was reflected in their literature. The world-building was more focused and intentional where institutions, cultures, social structures existed. Moreover, there would be a full-fledged cast of characters, both children and adults interacting with each other, and the lives of these characters followed an internal logic of the world. Various situations would have higher stakes, and there were consequences and results of actions. Manlove rightly observes, “Children’s Fantasy has an obvious function to giving the pleasures of wish-fulfillment and the free imagination, while reminding us of the broad patterns of behaviour that have guided humanity to its best achievements. But since 1950, in becoming steadily more involved with ‘the actual lives of children,’ their fantasy has not only achieved a psychological and moral complexity, it did not previously possess, but it has also lost certainty” (Alice to Harry Potter 201).

Although *Alice* and *Peter Pan* have also crossed over to the adult population, I would argue it is the symbols of “lost girl in Wonderland” Alice and the “eternal child” Peter Pan that have remained in the larger cultural memory and have been appropriated by adults, and not the

fantasy books themselves, which have fallen out of fashion and are not actively read by adults today. However, the titles under consideration are books that are being actively and continuously read by adults and the reason I believe is that they offer a blend of realism and fantasy that appeal to adult sensibilities and logic much more, persuading them to carry on and read these books for their own pleasure and edification. The worlds of Lyra, Harry, the Baudelaire siblings, Coraline and Bod are created by ‘Literary Imaginations’. By this, I mean there is a self-consciousness in these texts of not talking down to children by creating mad, fun, impossible worlds instead they strive to create sophisticated world-building that has logic, rules, and explanations, much like adult fantasy titles.

Because of their series status, *His Dark Materials*, *Harry Potter* and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* have in-depth worlds described with institutions, governments, schools, laws and regulations and social groups of various kinds with their own cultures and professions. These worlds are populated with several other children and adults who interact with each other in various capacities. And there are rules which govern the internal logic of the fantasy, for example in *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Will cannot go on cutting into new worlds as there is a deadly consequence of creating Specters that suck the souls of adults. They have no choice in the end but to close all the windows, sealing their separation forever. Similarly, in *Harry Potter*, magic cannot solve everything in the world. There is an interaction between the Minister of Magic and the Muggle Prime Minister who, after hearing Voldemort is back, desperately asks “But for Heaven’s sake – You’re *wizards*! You can do magic! Surely you can sort out-well-*anything*!” (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 16) to which Fudge replies, reminding him that even the other side can do magic. There are limits to what can be achieved through spells and enchantments within the world, with explanations provided, for example magic cannot create food due to five Principal Exceptions to Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* in many ways is closer to the wild imaginative

texts as it takes place in a world where everything is truly bizarre, unnatural and absurdist with seemingly no logic, but even then, the text does strive to offer explanations and maintain some veneer of rationality. For example, the children cannot do whatever they wish. They are governed by the legal will that says they must be handed over to a guardian in case of their parents' death, with Mr. Poe, the executor, insisting on finding them new guardians even though the children are self-sufficient and highly intelligent. The texts provide satirical commentary on the very social fabric of human society by convoluting, subverting, and misinterpreting legal systems and government institutions, yet the children must adhere to them however ridiculous and insane they are. For example, Olaf almost tricks Violet into marrying him by tricking her into signing a marriage contract. When his deceit is exposed, the adults Mr. Poe and Justice Strauss are dismayed as they must uphold the law, however Violet uses their own adherence to law against them and proves that it required for her to 'sign in her own hand' but she signed with her left thus invalidating the marriage. Even as the children find themselves in increasingly dangerous and weird situations, they can outwit the narrative world because they are the only ones who adhere to sense, logic, and rational thinking which sets them apart from the other characters. Even when the world is topsy-turvy and totally fragmented, it is retaining logic that allows the children their triumphs.

In Gaiman's works, the world building is not at the scale of those that are a series. Nevertheless, there are organizations, social groups, and internal logic. The horror in *Coraline* comes because of the doppelganger trope where something warm, comforting, and familiar is made alien and demonic. However, the doppelganger Other Mother is bound by laws. Even though Coraline enters the Otherworld, she soon realizes that there are limits and constraints. Otherworld is confined to copying just the house and is not an un-ending labyrinth of horror. The logic given is that the Beldam only needs the house as bait and nothing else, so she didn't create more. Within the Otherworld, the Beldam's powers seem to be limited as she can't really

do much other than create caricatures of the real world and feed on children who she tricks into staying with her. Time seems to follow normal patterns as there are days and nights, and when Coraline decides to challenge her, the Beldam tries to cheat but is ultimately defeated. Similarly, Bod's Graveyard is magical, yet the dead are not omnipotent. They give him the Freedom of the Graveyard which allows Bod supernatural powers of Fading, Haunting, Dream-Walking but he must learn and practice these with a tutor. Eventually, as he comes of age, these powers fade and he must enter the human world without them. Even while he lives out his childhood in the graveyard, other logical considerations like his food needs as the only human, his general educational needs, concerns for his safety and well-being are also addressed and resolved. Bod realizes that both reality and fantasy are full of dangers as he not only faces ghouls, mystical creatures, and a supernatural criminal syndicate but also school bullies, unethical police men, pawnbrokers, and kidnappers. The fantastic and real weave in and out of each other as Bod learns to traverse both worlds.

Hence, it can be observed that the fantasy being written currently has a very conscious grounding in "Realism". Philip Pullman dislikes the *Lord of the Rings* brand of fantasy, finding that it lacks psychological interest and instead calls for 'gritty realism' in fantasy worlds. This sort of realism is definitely an aspect of the literary imaginations that put in effort to provide readers with explanations and logic about not just the world they are creating (which of course Tolkien mastered) but also the histories and motivations of characters, the subversion of power structures and a social commentary on the cracks and flaws in those worlds. Even one as absurd and anachronistic as the world constructed by Lemony Snicket gives excellent satires of real institutions like child social services, law and wills, and secret societies.

However, Pullman's concept of "realist" fantasy should not be confused with magical realism. While magical realism imposes certain supernatural elements on an otherwise,

ordinary, mundane world, realist fantasy seeks to bring in a few realist elements into a largely fantastical world.

In other words, if magical realism is the unrecognizable in a recognizable world, realist fantasy is the recognizable in a supernatural, unrecognizable world. The worlds in the select crossover fiction texts decidedly remain alien and extraordinary, and thus captivating. Grenby analysing the contemporary fantasy books asserts that children's books have always combined fanciful and realistic elements and that "the supernatural and the normal exist together in fantasy texts, in various proportions and combinations, but that there is no ratio which governs their relationship. To increase one is not to diminish the other" (Children's Literature 150). He utilizes the example of the *Harry Potter* books to illustrate that even if contemporary fantasy does allow a certain escape, those worlds are never anarchic and are "disciplined, rule-bound, and hierarchically ordered" (Children's Literature 157). Christopher Routledge in his examination of the *Potter* books as detective novels also believes the success of the books lies in the fact that, "There is much that is real then, in the Harry Potter novels, despite the veneer of wizardry and fantasy, and the combination of normality and adventure is perhaps what makes the novels so appealing" (Harry Potter and the mystery of Ordinary Life 204). A children's literature review published in 2010 collated trends in the field and observed that when it came to contemporary fantasy, it remained an utterly popular genre but was marked by changes where "contemporary inheritors of the genre have evolved beyond the reliably symbolic origins of traditional early fantasies that were largely vague and magical – an aesthetic borrowed in part from fiction's oral tradition – to a contemporized canon which is characterized by credible settings in which characters are allowed to evolve and grow" (Children's Literature Review 23).

This is exactly what the literary imaginations of contemporary children's fantasy has managed to achieve. As perceptions of childhood have changed, so has the fantasy written for

children – not crazy, whimsical, or stereotypical anymore but grounded, sophisticated, and intentional in their meaning and purpose. These titles have perfected the balance between consistency and creativity; between providing amusement and awe of seeing reality subverted and expanded into something exciting and dangerous but also not overtly challenging the willing suspension of disbelief in an adult. These books are not fantasy for the sake of fantasy, to appropriate the famous phrase, but aim to provide more to the reader in terms of setting, character development, and the internal and external logic of narratives.

Considering my personal reading experience, as a child I was able to enjoy the texts which required both wild and literary imaginations. I loved Blyton's senseless lands and creatures or Dahl's caricatures and ridiculousness. But they did not have the same hold over me as the crossover books did. I was absolutely enraptured by the worlds of Harry, Lyra and the Baudelaire siblings. In fact, my child-self thought these books to be of the highest quality compared to other fantasy fiction titles available to me and I felt proud to be reading books like *His Dark Materials* and *Coraline* in middle school. As an adult, I am well aware of the critiques and criticisms that the reading of crossover books elicits however, I retain that same sense of enjoyment and rapture but also delight in the sense/logic/rationale even more, finding parallels with the social, economic and political realities of life which makes the reading experience much more rewarding.

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- . "Discourse in the Novel". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 2010, pp. 259-422.
- Bal, Mieke, and Christine van Boheemen. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 3rd ed, University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Blyton, Enid. *The Burnt Cottage*. 1943. HarperCollins, 1996.

- . *The Twins at St. Clare*. 1941. Hodder Children's Books, 2016.
- Beauvais, Clémentine. *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015.
- . "Didactic". *Keywords for Children's Literature*, edited by Philip Nel, Lissa Paul, and Nina Christensen, Second ed, New York University Press, 2021, pp. 57-60.
- Beckett, Sandra L. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2009.
- Bradford, Clare, et al. *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582583>. PDF Download.
- Cullingford, Cedric. *Children's Literature and Its Effects: The Formative Years*. Cassell, 1998.
- Routledge, Christopher. "Children's Detective Fiction and the "Perfect Crime" of Adulthood". *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural* edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Christopher Routledge, pp. 64 – 81. Palgrave, 2002,
- English, Leona M. "Children's Literature for Adults: A Meaningful Paradox". *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, Vol 9, 2000, pp. 13-23, https://www.iup.edu/pse/files/programs/graduate_programs_r/instructional_design_and_technology_ma/paace_journal_of_lifelong_learning/volume_9_2000/english2000.pdf. Accessed 27 June 2017.
- Falconer, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. Routledge, 2009.
- Ferguson, Dana. "Children's Fantasy: Introduction" *Children's Literature Review: Excerpts from Reviews, Criticism, and Commentary on Books for Children and Young People*. Edited by Dana Ferguson, pp. 21-23. Gale Cengage Learning, 2010.

- Gallo, Don. "Bold Books for Teenagers: The Promise and Seduction of Sequels." *English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 4, Mar. 2005, p. 124-128. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/30046474>.
- Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. Bloomsbury, 2002.
- . *The Graveyard Book*. Bloomsbury, 2008.
- Gates, Trevor G. "Chosen Families". *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Marriage, Family, and Couples Counseling*, edited by Jon Carlson and Shannon B. Dermer, SAGE Publications Inc, 2017, pp. 240-242. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483369532.n74>.
- Hammerberg, Dawnene D. "Reading and Writing 'Hypertextually': Children's Literature, Technology, and Early Writing Instruction." *Language Arts*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2001, pp. 207–16. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483140>. Accessed 20 July 2019.
- Hillel, Margot. "A Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Child as Redeemer". *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Roderick McGillis, pp. 57 - 70. Praeger, 2003.
- Hourihan, Margery. *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005. *Taylor and Francis Group*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203974100>. PDF.
- Lerer, Seth. *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Lowry, Lois. "Point of Departure" *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010, pp. 193 - 195. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- Lukas, Michael David. "A Multiplicity of Voices: On the Polyphonic Novel." *The Millions*, 15 Feb. 2013, <https://themillions.com/2013/02/a-multiplicity-of-voices-on-the-polyphonic-novel.html>. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Manlove, Colin. *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England*. Cybereditions, 2003.

McCallum, Robyn and John Stephens. "Ideology and Children's Books" *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010, pp. 359-372. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.

McCulloch, Fiona. *Children's Literature in Context*. Continuum, 2011.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. 1996. Routledge, 2016.

---. *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. Routledge, 2010.

---. *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2002.

Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

---. *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Longman, 1996.

Park-Fuller, Linda M. *Voices: Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and Polyphony, and the Performance of Literature*. *Literature in Performance*, vol. 7, 1986, pp. 1-12.

<https://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/604/voices-lpf.html>. Accessed 17 January 2020.

Moss, Stephen. "Terry Pratchett: 'Fantasy Is Uni-Age.'" *The Guardian*, 22 Apr. 2013. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/22/terry-pratchett-raising-steam>.

Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. De Gruyter, 1982. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110838626>.

Pullman, Philip. *Northern Lights*. Scholastic Press, 1995.

---. *The Subtle Knife*. Scholastic Press, 1997.

---. *The Amber Spyglass*. Scholastic Press, 2000.

---. *Carnegie Medal Winner's Speech: Philip Pullman for Northern Lights*. Carnegies Working Party. Email.

Reynolds, Kimberley. *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

---. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Bloomsbury, 1998.

---. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Bloomsbury, 1999.

---. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

---. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Bloomsbury, 2003.

---. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Bloomsbury, 2005.

---. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Bloomsbury, 2007.

Snicket, Lemony. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning*. HarperCollins, 1999.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Reptile Room*. HarperCollins, 1999.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Wide Window*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Miserable Mill*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Austere Academy*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Ersatz Elevator*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Vile Village*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Hostile Hospital*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Carnivorous Carnival*. HarperCollins, 2002.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Slippery Slope*. HarperCollins, 2003.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Grim Grotto*. HarperCollins, 2004.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Penultimate Peril*. HarperCollins, 2005.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End*. HarperCollins, 2006.

- Stevenson, Deborah. "History of Children's and Young Adult Literature". *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2011, pp. 179 – 193.
- Thacker, Deborah Cogan. "New Voices, New Threats". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 104 – 114. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- . "Playful Subversion". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 139 – 150. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- Tijupa, Valerij. "Heteroglossia". *Handbook of Narratology* edited by Peter Hühn et al. Walter de Gruyter Berlin, 2009, pp. 124-131.
- Tolkien, JRR. *On Fairy-Stories*. ILAS 2350 - University of Houston. https://uh.edu/fdis/_taylor-dev/readings/tolkien.html. Accessed 24 July 2017.
- Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991. Springer Link, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21109-8>. PDF.
- Webb, Jean. "Walking Into the Sky: Englishness, Heroism, and Cultural Identity: A Nineteenth – and – Twentieth Century Perspective". *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Roderick McGillis, pp. 51 - 56. Praeger, 2003.
- Wrigley, Christopher. *Return of the Hero*. Book Guild Publishing, 2005.

Chapter 4

The Adult Reader of Crossover Fiction

4.1 Introduction

When the discourse around crossover fiction first came into focus, there was already a school of critics and cultural commentators who were criticizing the phenomenon, their main concern being the infantilization of adulthood and modern culture. One can find a barrage of articles, editorials and commentaries from the early 2000s that attack the adult figure reading children's books, giving out prophecies of cultural doom and decay. Famous names like A.S. Byatt and Harold Bloom also joined the conversation, showing their utter disdain and condescension towards children's fiction and those who read it.

The term "kidult" became popular, a portmanteau of kid and adult to describe these wretched, dumb creatures who read simple children's stories. Rachel Falconer, in her chapter *Kidults at Large* elegantly encompasses all these various arguments and objections, providing instead a much more optimistic and nuanced view of these 'kidults'. She analyses many such articles and comes to the conclusion that although crossover fiction has been surrounded by "a cacophonous mixture of outrage, disgust, defensiveness, and conspiratorial solidarity" (Crossover Novel 2), this extreme defensiveness is symptomatic of a "a broader anxiety about the blurring of boundaries between child or youth culture and adult culture in the millennial years" and a "discomfort over the way child and adult cultures are clashing, intersecting and hybridising in our own time" (Crossover Novel 3). She also vindicates the rights of adults choosing to read children's texts, stating "Adults who declared themselves 'kidults' were aware

of transgressing the bounds of social respectability. They were often defiantly asserting a right to find delight in childish things” (Crossover Novel 3).

Her optimism stems from her deep dive into constructing the figure of kidult, where she reveals other factors that lead to adults reading children’s books rather than the alleged dumbing down of culture. She takes various approaches looking at the boom of youth culture, the politics of capitalism and consumption, the shifting definitions of childhood and adulthood, the advancement of form, content and genre of children’s books, and the status of children’s literature as mainstream. She however concludes on a somber note that while there are many factors that influence an adult’s decision, what remains certain is that “Contemporary children’s fiction is of particular consequence to adult readers because in many cases, it is discovering ways to give consecution, consequence, and depth to the unreality of a suspended adolescence which troubles adults, no less than children, at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Crossover Novel 41).

4.2 Making A Case for the Adult Reader of Crossover Fiction

Falconer wasn’t alone in her observation of modern adults remaining in “suspended adolescence”. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw much fear and anxiety not only around adults reading children’s books but also the general state of adulthood and how it was increasingly becoming infantilized. In 2014, Jacopo Bernadini, collating all the dominant arguments during the time, wrote his seminal essay titled *The Infantilization of the Postmodern Adult and Figure of Kidult* where he claimed that the postmodern adult follows a “thoughtful immaturity, a conscious escape from the responsibilities of an anachronistic model of life” (39). In his essay, he lists characteristics of kidults where he sees that kidults are influenced by

impulsive actions rather than rational decisions; they exhibit psychological and physical dependencies, hindering autonomy; they question societal norms and conventions and are marked by doubt and uncertainty; they prioritize instant gratification, reflecting a trend of living in the present rather than long term planning; there is a behavioural liberalism and rejection of authoritarian models; they believe in rights not obligations, looking for personal fulfillment; they exhibit narcissism; they deal with instability through temporary solutions; they experience constant uncertainty and lack of confidence in future stability; they emphasize individual personal identity over community; and finally, they conform to a mass produced universal youth culture (49-52). He proves that the classic indicators of maturity have been “gradually delayed, rescaled in the social and individual value attributed to them, and increasingly relegated to an ideal and abstract level” (46). The kidult then has emerged from “the process of social changes related to the phenomena of individualism, presentism, globalization, multiculturalism and expansion of the dimensions of uncertainty and speed” (46).

Dvornyk, in 2016, also summarizes the various studies on modern adulthood and sees the figure of Kidult as a postmodern issue and states that the once traditional markers of rationality and maturity are no longer the norm; instead there is a nonlinearity to life, age swapping, delaying of adulthood and prolonging the sense of youthfulness (Postmodern Rejuvenation). She concedes that abstract ideas of adulthood have been ideologically purported as synonymous to success however, considering contemporary conditions of job, real estate, diversity in sexuality and gender, breakdown of the family unit – all make it an impractical obligation (Postmodern Rejuvenation).

Maria Verena Peters, in her thesis that studies Crossover Fiction from a perspective of gender, has also traced the rise of the kidult and demonstrates how, long before the term kidult became popular, it was common for cultural commentators to satirize and poke at fun youth

and childish behaviors. She analyses the ways in which the very idea of child/childish comes with negative connotations in language and culture, often used to describe negative traits in adults. She cites historical sources to illustrate how in the eighteenth century, there existed prints that poked fun at women who did not act their age, but tried to appear younger, instilling ideas about “irreversible stages of life” within cultural discourses (Crossover Literature and Age In Crisis 31). She also references Carl Jung’s concept of the ‘puer aeternus’, translated as the ‘eternal child’ which provided positive connotations to the idea of being childish or childlike, as Jung associated the state with the source of creativity within an adult, however, she rightly notes that “the discourse of the kidult offers no such positive perspective on a prolonged childhood” (Crossover Literature and Age In Crisis 31).

In more recent discourse, however, there has been a vindication of the right of adults to choose their own version of adulthood, beyond the traditional socio-economic markers. As observed by Bernadini and Dyvornyk, twenty-first century adulthood is impacted by factors like the shifting economic landscape, the rise of the gig economy, automation and AI, and outsourcing of jobs in a globalized market has had direct implications on what were the traditional markers of successful adulthood such as homeownership, financial independence and stability, creation of a family unit, amongst others. There has been a significant ideological shift in what defines adulthood as more and more adults are reclaiming their autonomy from capitalist, patriarchal, and heteronormative cultures and are comfortable delaying milestones like marriage, parenthood, and career stability, opting for diverse and non-linear paths in life, challenging the timeline of adulthood. However, unlike Bernadini who propagates the infantilization argument, there are other scholars who don’t consider kidults as practicing “thoughtful immaturity”.

Although published in 2004, Arnett’s term “Emerging Adulthood” introduced in his book *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* has

gained much more significance in the last few years. His main thesis is that the ages of 18 to 29 form a distinct phase of life that is characterized by identity exploration; instability in terms of frequent changes in residence, jobs, and relationships; self-focus outside the constraints of school and family; feelings of in-betweenness, and feelings of optimism and possibilities (9). He provides a historical overview of the paradigm shifts that have enabled a delay in adulthood, which are - the Technology Revolution, the Sexual Revolution, the Women's Movement, and the Youth Movement (4). But what makes Arnett's new term particularly useful is that it does not criticize or invoke a moral panic around emerging adulthood but offers a more nuanced approach where challenging the traditional definitions of adulthood is not something that signals the breakdown of society into an infantilized population rather indicates a more emancipatory state. Through his empirical research of over 300 participants, he notes that, although historically not much time was offered to individuals to transition from childhood to adulthood, in contemporary times, people are allowed much more time to explore various potential life paths between finishing school and starting a family. Due to various limitations imposed by gender roles or economic restrictions, they were not able to utilize their twenties for such explorations. However, these emerging adults have unprecedented freedom and though it might not be a universal experience, and some might not be allowed to undergo emergent adulthood, but "as a group they have more freedom for exploration than young people in times past. Their society grants them a long moratorium in their late teens and twenties without expecting them to take on adult responsibilities as soon as they are able. Instead, they are allowed to move into adult responsibilities gradually, at their own pace" (7). He also observes that most people who are in the period of emerging adulthood do have the traditional wants of adulthood like marriage, children, homes, and most do achieve it by their thirties (7).

Around the same time, the term "delayed adulthood" was also being used to discuss the delayed entrance into social adulthood. It created a liminal state where "People in their twenties

who have not yet finished school or married may not have achieved full adulthood, but once they have left their teen years, and especially if they have taken on at least one adult role, they no longer fit the traditional conception of adolescent” (Hayford and Furstenberg Jr).

In her paper, titled *Adult Responsibility in Insecure Times*, published in 2009, Kate Crawford also questions the dominant criticism that was circulating in the academic circles of the time and offers a more thoughtfully curated set of arguments that urge thinking about kidult culture as a responsive change rather than a symptom of cultural decay. She analyses the works of some of the most outspoken scholars condemning kidults and the infantilization of adulthood like Frank Furedi, Hugh McKay, and James Côté and instead, urges a redefinition of adulthood based on the specific needs of the century instead of outdated paradigms. She states that:

In the West, our received ideas of adulthood were powerfully shaped by the post-war years, when jobs were plentiful, marriage was the norm, and home values moved inexorably upward...In this worldview, only conventional commitments - the most normative forms of social and cultural practice - can be truly adult. This reifies a particular historical experience of adulthood as the model of maturity – an idealised vision of what adulthood could offer the privileged few during the mid twentieth century. To bemoan the loss of these kinds of adult commitments is to idealise at once too much and too little in an environment where few of the old sureties can be relied on. (47-48)

Instead, she highlights the fallacy of basing adult identity on the most unstable of social structures – the labour market, the financial system, property values, life-long marital bliss (53), and also critiques the individualism of the West that ignores the impact of contemporary economic, ecological, and social structures on selfhood and identity (52). Crawford draws attention to the kidult debates, viewing them not as deterioration of adulthood but as response

to stultification and illusionary happy endings capitalism and political agenda has promised in housing, jobs, financial stability, and the nuclear family unit. Instead, she views the kidult culture as inspiring adults to integrate subversive and transformative aspects of childhood into their lives. She concludes, “For adults to draw on the revolutionary force of childhood as an experience of learning would require a process of questioning: of repeatedly asking how things work (or do not) and then making the world anew” (54).

The work of these scholars proves that far from succumbing or regressing to infantilization, the kidults are, in fact, displaying remarkable adaptability in response to the complex and multifaceted socio-economic and cultural forces that are shaping their lives. Leveraging the creativity, resilience, playfulness, and resourcefulness associated with childhood is not to be feared but embraced in order to create personal meaning and joy is a statement made loud and clear by kidult culture.

Arnett, in updated research in 2010, gives reasons to why there might be a discourse of moral panic against emerging adulthood and distils it down to four reasons - (a) the later entrance into adult roles by today’s emerging adults is misinterpreted by older adults as selfishness, (b) the identity explorations of emerging adulthood are misinterpreted as widespread suffering, (c) the search by emerging adults for identity based work leads older adults to see them as slackers uninterested in “real” work, and (d) their high hopes for their lives are misinterpreted by others as grandiosity (Oh Grow up! 90). He then systematically goes on to disprove each of these reasons instead describing how these new adults are self-focused but, eventually by 30, enter committed relations and jobs, they are into identity explorations which leads to lasting effects of increase in self-esteem and life satisfaction, having the support of parents and other structures, they look for identity based work which contributes to personal happiness as well as financial stability and the youthful optimism is eventually adjusted to more realistic goals and expectations (Oh Grow up! 91). The following

decade sees a shift as the academia leans towards a more empathetic comprehension of adulthood in the complex landscape of the twenty first century. New definitions of adulthood are reckoned with and better understood, challenging Bernadini's assertions about the juvenile, postmodern kidult.

In their study, Speder et al acknowledge that "Adulthood" and early adult years are a complex and "demographically dense" phase of the life course that involve many role transitions and intersect with many social institutions. Whatever label one applies to this period of life - "young adulthood" (Klein), "youth- hood" (Côté), "emerging adulthood" (Arnett), or something else – the passages to adulthood in many societies, particularly in North America and Western Europe, have become more gradual, variable, and uncertain, and the recent global economic recession has only exacerbated these complexities (Conceptions of Adulthood 873-74). However, they call for a change in the markers of adulthood rather than upholding contemporary adulthood in accordance with outdated markers. They encourage a perspective where adult identity depends more on one's ability (or belief in their ability) to make independent decisions and accept responsibility for their actions. In other words, adulthood is perceived as the attainment of psychological maturity, which may be a state of mind as much as (or even instead of) a behavioral reality rather than the erstwhile economic markers driven by capitalistic consumerism (Conceptions of Adulthood 875).

Mazoni too echoes this view and agrees that in direct contrast to consumer-based markers, psychological approaches suggest that individualistic criteria have largely replaced traditional event-based markers of adulthood. She elucidates this stance saying there has been a revaluation of classic theories of independence, and the fixed end points in the journey of adulthood, the traditional markers like financial independence and living away from parents are becoming harder to identify with for youth. Instead, young people are developing new, non-material understandings of adulthood (Conceptualizing Youth Independence 363).

Thus, it's promising that the recognition that adulthood is not a fixed endpoint has grown. Furthermore, the extension of transitions and changes in the typical sequence of events have transformed the types of adulthood available, leading to the emergence of new priorities and subjectivities. Manzoni concludes "In the face of changing conditions, young people re-write the rules defining success, with implications for the establishment of identity and for processes of individualization and risk as social and economic changes challenge traditional ways of interpreting subjectivities" (Conceptualizing Youth Independence 365). She finally offers terms like "contestable adulthood" where, as a result of economic and social marginality, high risk and uncertainty, and the lack of clear frames of reference, "youths may have difficulties in establishing adult identities, leading to a decoupling of subjectivity from its traditional grounding in economic life, *instead individuals construct adulthood, as a complement to a role-based perspective including individualistic indicators* as markers of whether one is an adult" (emphasis added, Conceptualizing Youth Independence 365).

In fact, psychologist Beatriz Luna has called Kidults an evolutionary force. In 2015, a year after Bernardi's essay, Beatriz Luna, a professor of Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, came out with a study that said "when kidults have a much more extended, protected period where they don't have to immediately assume responsibilities, the brain is taking advantage of this period to continue to specialize" (Luna). She is much more objective in her approach as she asserts there is no point in judging this phenomena as it isn't particularly a good or bad thing, but a way the brain seems to be adapting to the environmental changes. She also highlights how this elongated period of transition is characteristic of highly developed societies and that "It just so happens in these richer, more developed societies, things have evolved to a point where they can support and sustain a longer developmental trajectory" (Luna).

Thus, through this examination of the discourse vindicating kidults, it can be concluded that the moral and cultural panic was a knee-jerk reaction to label and stigmatize individuals as ‘kidults’ laden with negative connotations, without really considering more complex layers and multifaceted realities of adulthood in the twenty first century. To dismiss or demean kidults is the failure to acknowledge the profound shifts occurring in various spheres of an individual adult’s cultural, economic, and technological life and to overlook the rich tapestry of experiences and aspirations that define adulthood in contemporary landscape. Essentially, kidult culture is rebelling against the authority and oppression of previously normative markers of adulthood. Such postmodern nonlinearity of life path, age swapping, further delaying of ageing can be considered as a direct reaction to the strict, rigid, and imposing rules for being an adult. The failure of people to become adults in the traditional sense, frequently changing the place of work, delaying marriage, and parenting, and choosing to read children’s books doesn’t necessarily indicate immaturity, egotism, or infantilism. Adult autonomy, independence, or authority is not guaranteed by chronological age or by consumption patterns. Consider adults facing challenges due to disabilities, or unempowered, marginalised, racialized persons like women or members of the LGBTQ community who might have not have the same experience of adulthood as an able-bodied, heterosexual, white, man. Alternatively, consider economic constraints where young children might be forced earlier into roles of adulthood than those who come from economically privileged homes. Adulthood is not a homogenous experience, and kidults are one aspect of the diversity within adulthood.

Kidults are reclaiming their right to shed the expectation of conforming, instead creating their own meaningful ways, definitions, and experiences of adulthood. The notion of being a ‘trapped’ adult and following the clockwork machinery of the world, without any meaning is being challenged by the postmodern kidult who is youthful, relishing life, and creating spaces for novelty and exploration. The idea that a life must stabilize the minute one

turns an into an adult also signals the end of potential and a setting in of inertia. The pervasive nostalgia for ‘the glory days of youth’ and perpetually yearning for a past that seems more vibrant than the present finds a counterpoint in the figure of the kidult. By integrating elements of playfulness, curiosity, and creativity into the fabric of adult lives, the kidult invites a reconsideration of preconceptions about maturity and cultural consumption. And central to the ethos of kidult culture is finding diverse sources of inspiration, personal fulfilment, and possibility, one of which happens to be children’s literature.

Crossover fiction is characterised by fluidity, blurring of lines and Lyra’s questioning of a theocratic dictatorship, Harry’s sacrifice for the greater good, the constant survival of Buadelaire in an unforgiving world, Coraline dealing with the duality of adults and her own desires, Nobody Owens looking for his identity in the worlds of the living and the dead – all resonate with the Kidult, who is looking for unusual and novel answers to the condition of existence. As Hourihan puts it:

A story which begins with ‘once upon a time’ and ends with ‘and they lived happily ever after’ implies things about time and change, about cause and effect, and human relationships, regardless of where it is set or who the characters are, and it asserts an essential optimism: problems can be solved, things will turn out well, happiness is achievable. That many, perhaps most, people in our society cling stubbornly to a belief in the shape of this tale, despite the disappointments and uncertainties of life as it is lived, attests to the power of stories. (Deconstructing the Hero 1)

In fact, in current discourse, consumption of products, media, and experiences that were traditionally associated with childhood is now being associated with mental health and sources of personal joy in adults. In a post-pandemic world, ‘kidulting’ is now a trendy way to

overcome stress, depressive thoughts, and existential pessimism. Articles with titles like *Some Millennials and Older Generations are 'Kidulting', Maybe You Should Too* published in HuffPost in 2022, *What is 'kidulting', the trend becoming popular among millennials?* published in Firstpost in 2023, *How Playful Nostalgia of 'Kidulting' Can Boost Your Mental Health, According to Psychologists* published in Well+Good in 2023, and *Kidults – do you have one in your life? This culture is on the rise, so we spoke to a psychotherapist and toy expert (and it all makes much more sense now)* published in Goodtoknow in 2024 are just some examples of the shift in the narrative around kidults. These articles draw upon insights from psychology experts, industry players, and academic studies to advocate for the therapeutic benefits of incorporating media and materials from childhood into adult lifestyles. They suggest that engaging with toys, books, movies, and other hobbies loved in childhood can effectively reduce stress, ease anxieties, and inspire creativity in adult individuals. And surely, when it comes down to it, a working professional in their 30s or 40s, who plays a video game after a long day of work or uses a colouring book to relieve some pressure cannot possibly indicate the end of adulthood.

Although this trend of viewing kidult culture as an opportunity to unwind and connect with the joys of childhood is not just a pandemic boom. Brenda Weiderhold, in her study, traces the development of kidult culture and through statistical evidence, demonstrates that kidult culture was alive and thriving way before the pandemic came. She explains that a Bloomberg study showed that during the pandemic, toy sales surged by 37%, which was attributed to parents buying toys to keep children engaged during lockdowns, however the consumer profile released by the U.S. Toy Association revealed that 58% adults of the total shoppers bought toys for themselves (qtd. in Weiderhold). She concludes that “But it wasn't only COVID-19 that fanned the kidult flames. Video games were already becoming increasingly popular when the world undertook COVID-19 social distancing measures. In 2019, there were more than 2.5

billion gamers worldwide, who combined spent \$152.1 billion on games that year—an increase of nearly 10% from 2018” (Weiderhold). Her study is useful in viewing kidult culture not as some passing trend but encourages the continuation of its study as a gradual, profound change that has been taking place in the twenty first century.

Of course, when it comes to reading crossover fiction, it cannot be considered the most relaxing of activities, given that the books deal with some very serious themes of death, religion, and politics as discussed in Chapter 3. However, nostalgia has also been suggested as feature of kidult culture and consumption and for Fiona McCulloch, it can be attributed to the rise of crossover fiction as she states, “...adults are becoming increasingly child-like in their nostalgic desire to preserve their own youth. Examples include the rise in crossover fiction, such as *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials* or the growing adult interest in Playstation or Wii or Nintendo. This group has even been given its own label, known as ‘kidults’ and are regarded as the most nostalgic generation ever, with constant revivals of music and fashion from the 1980s” (Children’s Literature in Context 25). However, as this thesis argues, it is not mere nostalgia that can sustain continued interest and engagement with a body of work. Adults returning to these books has a lot more to do with the quality of storytelling, the subject matter, the treatment of characters as examined in chapter 3, than it does with simple nostalgia. Moreover, even if nostalgia plays a role in the larger kidult consumption patterns, beyond crossover fiction, of movies, games, and other media, in contemporary scholarship it is positive behaviour. Jacob Juhl’s work on the positive impacts of nostalgia is some of the most recent research in the field and along with colleagues, he has published two studies in 2020-2022 that establish nostalgia as a positive social force which fosters interconnectedness, reduces individual reluctance to reach out for help, and has direct impact on psychological happiness, empathy, and sense of self and meaning (Nostalgia: an impactful social emotion) (Nostalgia fosters help-seeking). His work is helpful in shedding off the previously held connotations

around nostalgia as reality-avoidance by stunted individuals, instead accepting that kidults and their nostalgic habits and consumption patterns raise the quality of life.

Ultimately, as Arnett asserted, kidult culture is about independence of choice and autonomy to bring personal meaning to adulthood. The connection between infantilization and consumption of products and media from childhood is tenuous at best, since adults have continued to work, get married, have careers and families well into the twenty-first century. From an intellectual perspective, toys, movies, and children's books have not replaced adult discourses or mature conversations, but added a newer direction to them, one that questions norms and the status quo. It is the same sort of unwarranted hysteria that surrounded the normalization of television which was supposedly going to transform all viewers into idiotic zombies, or the prophecies of societal doom and the end of the family unit when women joined the workforce. Whether an adult picks up a children's book as a subversion of normative expectations; whether they are asserting their right to define their own adulthood; whether they are seeking newer ways to relax and find joy; or whether it is a simple act of nostalgia, the fact remains that adults have the right to read what they want since the prerequisite of adulthood is agency of choice. Scandalised cultural commentators and ivory tower academics will just have to make peace with the fact that adulthood can in fact be a space for more than just pragmatism and strait-laced life choices and there are worse things to criticise than adults reading stories that bring hope, joy, and revitalization.

4.3 The Rise of Children's Literature

The conversation on crossover fiction has been significantly influenced not only by the vindication of kidults but also by the evolving status of children's literature within both academic and commercial circles. Its journey from marginalization to mainstream acceptance has played a pivotal role in reshaping perspectives and bringing newer directions to the age-old question – who decides what is good literature?

As demonstrated in chapter 3, the content of these crossover book is a far cry from the “simplistic” children’s literature that seems to have taken root in the larger cultural imagination. Contemporary children’s literature is sophisticated, complex, authentic, and though different from adult literature in many ways, a legitimate and moreover, an important literary tradition that, simply put, offers excellent stories of the human condition. This rise of children’s literature as a legitimate field can be viewed as a product of political shifts that led to distrust of the traditional canon-making institutions and the popularity of cultural study approaches that championed the study of marginalized areas and to examine contexts as well as just the form of texts. Although children’s literature has been around since classical times, as discussed in chapter 2, it was only in the 1960s, that it began to be viewed as a valid form of literature that deserved academic attention and commercial investment.

Mike Cadden offers an erudite overview of the gradual rise in the status of children’s literature and the acceptance of it both in university settings as well as within literary criticism, outlining the history as well as the concerns in theorizing children’s literature, emphasising on the importance of academic theoretical inquiry and analysis of children’s literature by observing that “For as ethically revelatory as the novel has always been, no literary genre has ever taught us more about a culture and its values than the literature published for a society’s children” (*Telling Children’s Stories* xxi).

M.O. Grenby raises some pertinent questions about the reluctance to accept children’s literature as serious, worthy of academic attention, stating that, “Teaching, studying, and researching children’s literature could be characterised as beneath the dignity of serious students and academics... Was it due to turf wars between departments of education and departments of literature? Was sexism at its root, because children’s literature had become associated predominantly with female teachers and students? Was it due to an unshakeable perception that studying children’s literature was undemanding?” (*Children’s Literature* 200).

Deborah Stevenson, in her essay *Sentiment and Significance: The Impossibility of Recovery in the Children's Literature Canon or, The Drowning of The Water-Babies* goes so far as to argue that even if children's books do find use in canon dependent academic curriculums, it might still be impossible to gain entry in the larger literary canon (112-113). She contends that there are too many other factors that disallow critics to view children's literature as literature, even while she acknowledges that "children's literature scholarship is by no means invalid; it sheds much light on literature as a whole as well as the genre it discusses" (113). However, Stevenson's anxieties have proved baseless as today in 2024, fortunately, children's literature in the Western academic institutions has become a staple area of study. Several universities in UK, USA, and Canada, and Australia offer specializations in children's literature at the graduate and doctoral level indicating the wholehearted acceptance of children's literature, theory, and criticism in the academic circles.

Institutions like the Children's Literature Association (ChLA), International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and American Library Association (ALA) are just some examples that are active, well-funded organizations that offer grants, scholarships, networking opportunities, awards, and hold frequent conferences and symposiums, furthering research in the field.

While children's literature is accepted as a field of study, questions about its quality in comparison to the adult canon persist, leading to one of the most fundamental questions within theoretical discourse – Is there a difference in quality between children's and adult literature? This question is significant because it seems to be the basis of the prejudice against children's literature. Adult literature is considered superior under the assumption that it is more sophisticated and technically and artistically advanced, as compared to children's literature. Harold Bloom, A.S. Byatt, Frank Furedi amongst others have argued that for adults to read this seemingly 'lightweight' fiction is degrading and infantilising. Furedi termed it 'cultural

infantilism’, expressing his concerns around kidult culture and the adults who read children’s books and refused to grow up while Harold Bloom’s famous essay titled *Can 35 Million Book Buyers be Wrong? Yes* which denounces the Harry Potter books as the worst of western culture symbolize the utter arrogance of cultural gatekeepers.

The main objection seems to be one of aesthetic – that children’s literature is simply too plain. Some of the characteristics that are often attributed to children’s literature are that the protagonist must be a child or childlike, the books should be short, the plot must be action-oriented, the language must be accessible and simple, and the content must both entertain but also impart some educational or moral information. All these assumptions are directly connected to the construct of childhood and what society thinks children must be provided with. The way society and culture chose to define children impacted the status of the literature they read as well, as Kimberley Reynolds notes “As childhood became a more distinct phase, it was understood to have its own reading needs and requirements. Perhaps perversely, concern about what was suitable and useful for children was instrumental in the process of relegating children’s literature to the bottom of the literary hierarchy. ‘Suitable for children’ came for many to be synonymous with ‘anodyne’ and ‘stylistically moribund’. Among other factors, this resulted in the conscious exclusion of children from the audience for ‘serious’ fiction” (Forever Young Fantasies of Childhood 27).

Much of the discourse around the inherent inferiority of children’s literature seems to be rooted in the idea that children are, to borrow Nick Lee’s term, ‘human becomings’. Traditionally, adults have been viewed as complete “beings” that have achieved a final state of existence. However, children are considered incomplete, irrational, and inane – they are ‘becomings’ and are valid individuals once they have reached adulthood, the complete state of being. Lee, however, offers a counter position and asks to recognise that children are active, have agency, and most importantly, have valid individuality. He urges researchers to “choose

to see children as human beings, active in social life, rather than as human becomings, passive recipients of socialisation” (47). He also argues that the becoming/being binary has divided children and adults. Instead, he asserts that it is important in research to bring in the understanding that all human life involves an endless and endlessly variable process of becoming (104). He radically revisualizes the totality, complexity, and continuity of human life. Rață, echoing Lee’s call for the removal of assumptions around childhood, astutely asks, “...if one removes these assumptions, what traits would remain to reflect the true characteristics of children’s literature? Would there be any specific characteristics at all? McDowell argues that: [t]he distinction between adult and children’s fiction is an artificial one, maintained for administrative convenience” (*Children’s Literature: A Cinderella Story* 240-241).

Contemporary children’s writers seem to have responded, as they do not write to teach/moralize/instruct/entertain the becoming child anymore but write to capture and portray the whole child in their stories. Children’s literature thus, has transformed in its purpose from offering just education and/or amusement to capturing the realities, anxieties, dilemmas, and pleasures of being a child.

Kimberley Reynolds, in her notable study of the transformative potential of children’s literature confirms that children’s literature, in fact, has been a space of innovation and experimentation. She acknowledges that just as in adult literature, there are ordinary books within children’s literature as well, but she asserts that many textual experiments are first tried out in children’s writing and that it is a “wild zone where new ways of thinking are explored, given shape, and so made part of the intellectual and aesthetic currency of that generation...” (*Breaking Bounds* 15). For her, children’s literature is not only a breeding place for innovation but it is also restorative in its function, as it “incubates genres that have ceased to be used in adult fiction and participates in generic innovation...[and is a] wellspring from which adult

writers can draw” (Breaking Bounds 18). Capable of both preserving exhausted genres and also contributing to the creation of new ones, children’s literature is fertile literary landscape, yet it continues to be questioned due to the cultural dominance and hegemony of adult-centric discourses and, as Reynolds observes, “Until something is identified and named by the cultural establishment, which deals almost exclusively in art directed at mature audiences, it is culturally invisible” (Breaking Bounds 19). Highlighting the significance of children’s book in not only literary and generic innovation but also the impact it has on larger culture, she concludes that:

[C]hildren’s literature provides a curious and paradoxical cultural space: a space that is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive. It is a space ostensibly for children...[but] has also provided a space in which writers, illustrators, printers, and publishers have piloted ideas, experimented with voices, formats and media, played with conventions, and contested thinking about cultural norms (including those surrounding childhood) and how society should be organized...Many children’s books offer quirky or critical or alternative visions of the world designed to provoke that ultimate response of childhood, ‘Why?’ ‘Why are things as they are?’ ‘Why can’t they be different’ (Breaking Bounds 4)

One of the most published and cited researchers in children’s literature, Peter Hunt, states that children’s literature’s dichotomy lies in the fact that it is both “one of the liveliest and most original of the arts, and the site of the crudest commercial exploitation” (Understanding Children’s Literature 2) and despite all the academic hesitation, cultural condescension, and inherent contradictions of the field, it would be best if it was accepted that “that children’s books are complex, and the study of them infinitely varied” (Understanding Children’s Literature 2). He urges critics to stop considering children’s literature under the same value

systems as that of adult literature, highlighting that two are written and experienced in different ways, and advises to begin seeing the inherent worth of what children's literature has to offer (Understanding Children's Literature 4).

Indeed, one look today at the diversity of formats and genres found in children's literature reveals Reynolds to be accurate in her analysis. The rise of the picture book genre and the exciting innovations happening with illustrations, combining various art mediums, and wordless narratives within the genre are a good example of the generic innovation Reynolds talks about. Other instances include the current popularity of the verse novel in young adult fiction, a genre that has stagnated in adult literature; the emergence of hi-lo, short for high interest, low vocabulary, which combines complex plot and content with language that is accessible to reluctant or emerging readers who read below their grade level, positively impacting adult literacy as well; the emergence of the New Adult genre as separate from Young Adult literature; the appearance of Branded Fiction and the potential of marketing and publicity on literature; the strong focus on diversity and representation of marginalised voices with active efforts being taken to publish more BIPOC authors; and the enduring presence of speculative fiction as it dwindles in adult literature – these are just some of the contemporary exciting advances and innovations that have all emerged from children's literature in the twenty first century. O'Sullivan also notices the shifts and transformations as children's literature pushes the artistic boundaries of what was previously expected from or acceptable in children's literature and transforms into a distinct and self-aware artistic form, stating, "...during the past few decades, [children's literature has] adopted sophisticated techniques of literary modernism, including abandonment of overt and controlling narrative voices in favour of single and multiple focalizations, montage effects, stream-of-consciousness, and other forms of psychonarration" (Historical Dictionary 2).

Although, Philip Nel, in his article, *The Fall and Rise of Children's Literature*, tracing the acceptance of children's literature within circles of literary theorists and critics, concludes that things by 2008 had changed and "In both word and image, in painting stories that appeal to the imagination, literature for children defies easy categorization. Great works endure for the ages, regardless of the age of their readers" (27). As recently as 2013, a scandal broke out when it came to light that the University of Kent had a controversial statement on their official website, assuring potential students that they will not be writing mass market thrillers and children's literature in their programmes. A screenshot of this description was shared on social media and led to cultural commentator SF Said to write a defence of children's literature titled *Who Says Children's Books Can't be Great Literature?* In his defence, Said made many valid observations about the academic snobbishness that was rampant. He highlighted how "The statement sets up a rhetorical system that places "great literature" in opposition to children's fiction and thrillers, making them mutually exclusive. It implies that children's fiction cannot be great literature and appears to belittle children's fiction as a form that by definition cannot do the things great literature can...And yet, by every criterion listed, children's fiction is entirely capable of being great literature. Indeed, if you're looking for writing that changes the reader and the world, there may be no better form" (Said).

Ultimately, just as adult literature is comprised of great books and trashy, mediocre ones, the same applies to children's literature as well, and generalizations about how it is uncomplicated and unsophisticated hinder the study of those quality titles that have and will stand the test of time and critical evaluation. The distinction must be made between good and bad writing, not children's and adult literature. Take for example, some of the classics of children's literature like *Watership Down*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Wind in the Willows* to name a few – these titles have endured because readers continue to find meaning, identification, and validation of their subjectivities in these stories. Of course, there exist inherent differences in

writing for adults and writing for children, but that does not imply that children's literature is not serious, meritorious literature; that it does not make the significant artistic and cultural contributions to literature. The presence of crossover fiction merely proves that shame and derision attributed to children's books is an ivory tower attitude and that readers will seek stories that resonate with them, even if they come from unexpected, unsanctioned sources. Perry Nodelman seems to agree as he reflects on his experience with interrogating adults about reading *Harry Potter* and concludes that these adult readers don't read the heptalogy as adult fiction but engage with the texts as children's fiction. The only difference he sees is that "These adults read the Potter books not because they are not children's literature but because they are—perhaps the only children's literature adults can read without shame" (Hidden Adult 341) and if this shame was eliminated, then possibly adults would read even more children's books. He wisely expounds that "This means that texts of children's literature can be and often are as complex as texts for adults – but the complexity is of a very specific and quite different sort" (Hidden Adult 341).

Beyond academic circles, the cultural snobbishness around children's literature is also exposed by the attitudes of other institutions like awards and bestseller lists that function to bestow prestige and recognition on literary works but have actively distanced themselves from children's literature. Consider the case study of the creation of the New York Times Children's Bestseller list. In her article titled *Testing the Tastemakers: Children's Literature, Best Seller Lists and the "Harry Potter Effect"*, Rebekah Fitzsimmons gives a detailed account of how the New York Children's Bestseller list was made as a result of outrage against *Harry Potter*, a children's book, reigning at top of the Bestseller list. In 2000, the New York Times introduced a separate Children's Best Seller List to address the dominance of the *Harry Potter* series on their main bestseller list. This change, the first major revision since 1984, came in response to complaints from adult authors who felt overshadowed by Rowling's popularity and that they

were being treated unfairly by being asked to share this space with a children's author. The argument was that being on the Times list was a coveted position, which entailed bonuses, promotions, publisher recognition but the continued presence of the *Harry Potter* books at the top spots was robbing the more serious, adult authors of their chance. Thus, to appease such protests and preserve the integrity of adult literature, the new Children's Bestseller List was created.

This led to major criticism and the backlash against Rowling's banishment came from many camps: librarians, teachers, children's literature scholars, novelists, her American publisher Scholastic, and even competing publishers who saw this new list as further marginalization of children's books and reinforcement of a cultural hierarchy that undervalued the acceptance and socio-economic impacts of children's books. Moreover, Fitzsimmons' analysis reveals that such a move eventually down valued the entire bestseller institution and there was no special status or achievement attributed anymore to making it to a bestseller list, since there were so many variations. What this separation did was bring to the surface the underlying prejudices that cultural gatekeepers like the Times List maintained against children's literature. While such cultural policing is not new, what the "Harry Potter Effect", as Fitzsimmons labels it, highlighted is how these lists had real implications on not only book promotions and market management but also had the ability to confer the tag of artistic merit on titles that they accepted. By relegating children's books to separate lists and hindering the entrance of children's literature to the mainstream, they were actively downgrading both the acceptance of children's literature as well as contributing to the presumptions that books for children were inferior to adult literature. Leonard Marcus rightly remarks that "the move [to create a separate list] seemed an embarrassing face-saving exercise and a final refusal to concede that children's books might in fact occupy a significant place in the cultural mainstream" (Minders of Make Believe 313).

Another example of cultural elitism and literary establishments' prejudice against children's literature is also found in the case of book awards. The first Golden Age of Children's Literature, generally considered to stretch from late nineteenth century to twentieth century, just before World War 2, saw a significant rise in the production of children's books and many writers were coming forth specifically as "children's writers". It is no coincidence then, that it was around the same time that the three most prestigious children's books awards – The Newbery Medal, the Caldecott Medal and the Carnegie Medal – were established. The first Newbury medal was awarded in 1922, the first Caldecott Medal was awarded in 1938 and the first Carnegie Medal was awarded in 1937. These awards marked the growing visibility and respectability of children's literature. However, they also reinforced a division between children's books and the broader literary canon. The creation of these specially dedicated awards insinuated that a children's writer was never expected to win other prestigious awards like a Nobel Prize for Literature, which were reserved for 'serious adult literature'.

Indeed, it was a surprise in 2012, when declassified documents released by the Nobel Prize committee showed that Tolkien was passed over for the Nobel Prize in 1961. Anders Österling, a jury member, wrote that Tolkien's writing was not of a high quality but this critique has obviously not stood the test of time as Tolkien is one of the most seminal authors, not only of speculative fiction but also of twentieth century English Literature. Andreas Ekström, the journalist who reported these documents went on to say "Tolkien was nominated by CS Lewis, that was the first thing I saw ... Lewis was a professor of literature, and hence qualified to nominate. However, the short commentary from Anders Österling, the dominant literature critic in the academy, was fairly sour, stating 'the result has not in any way measured up to storytelling of the highest quality'" (qtd in Park). It is apparent that even though he never proclaimed he wrote for children, but because his books became associated with children's literature, Tolkien was rejected only by some arbitrary idea of "great story telling". Sandra

Beckett highlights the impact of J.M.G. Le Clézio, a French author, who wrote several books for both children and adults, winning the Nobel Prize in 2008. For her, this win marked a momentous acceptance of crossover fiction and children's literature in the literary mainstream (J.M.G 20). While this was quite a feat, Beckett seems to downplay the significance of the fact that Clézio himself does not believe in making any distinctions between children and adult literatures, thus erasing the category of children's literature as well as avoiding the label of a children's author. There remains the fact that a writer who is only a children's writer, and has no published books for adults, is yet to win such an award.

Nevertheless, the presence of crossover fiction directly challenges these gatekeepers and cultural policing. There is a convergence in the rise and popularity of crossover fiction and literary institutions blurring the boundaries of children's literature and adult literature. While the children's awards mentioned above remain esteemed indicators of the success of a children's book, many of the primary texts chosen for the purpose of the thesis have all received mainstream awards as well, proving their widespread appeal and gradual acceptance. When children's books are accepted by adult readers, the pressure on 'adult' book awards to recognise such books also increases, which was the case with the seminal crossover title – Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*. Philip Pullman was awarded the Whitbread Book of the Year award for the third book in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* in 2001. Whitbread awards, now called the Costa book awards, are one of the most recognized and respected literary awards in the UK, administered by the British Booksellers Association. It was an unprecedented move for a children's book to win in the overall category, the "Book of the Year" instead of only being considered in the "Children's Book of the Year" category, which is generally where Pullman would be found. In 2003, another famous crossover title *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* also won the Whitbread Book of the Year award as an adult novel (even though it had been published as a children's book as well). If we

continue to analyse the awards won by this crossover book, we see a very extraordinary mixture. It also won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Alex Prize which is an award for "adult books that have appeal to adolescents". It was also long listed for the Man Booker Prize. The same goes for Neil Gaiman. Not only does he hold the unique and historical honour of winning both the Newbery and the Carnegie awards for children's literature, but both *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book* have also won The Hugo Award for Best Novel, a premier award for science fiction and fantasy writing. To quote Beckett, "With the extraordinary commercial success of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter saga and other super crossovers, crossover fiction has been seen largely as a marketing and mass media phenomenon. However, it has long been a literary phenomenon that is only recently receiving the acknowledgment that it deserves from the literary establishment." (J.M.G 20). What these awards did was not only legitimize the contributions of these texts to literature but also give them a stamp of cultural approval, making them a status symbol for readers. This cultural currency acquired by children's literature through winning admittance to these lists and awards nominations challenges the perceptions that crossover fiction is merely a marketing phenomenon and asserts the artistic relevance of these books. With the book covers loudly proclaiming such awards, an adult might not feel silly about picking up the book, even if it was stacked in the children's section.

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, crossover fiction does not exist in a literary vacuum and many factors beyond its narrative characteristics have impacted its rise and popularity. Two of the most significant though are the vindication of kidult culture and the increasing awareness of children's literature as a valid, meritorious, and noteworthy part of literature. On one hand, the discourse around kidult culture, which was once laden with negative connotations and moral panic, has evolved to recognize the complexities and nuances of modern adulthood. Instead

kidults can, as this chapter shows, be considered as adults who create space for novelty, freedom, experimentation, and personal-fulfilment, radically challenging the traditional definitions of adulthood. This redefinition and refusal to conform has allowed adult readers to seek children's literature as a new source of narratives. On the other hand, the dawning recognition by academic and cultural establishments that children's literature has complex, artistic, and profound stories to offer, has given children's books higher visibility in the mainstream. The work of various scholars who have established the merits of children's fiction as well as the ongoing acceptance of institutions like awards committee and bestseller compilers have publicised children's literature to newer audiences, granting them literary merit that makes them more acceptable and accessible to adults.

Works Cited

- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "A Longer Road to Adulthood." *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. Oxford University Press, 2014. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929382.003.0001>.
- . "Oh, Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood—Commentary on Trzesniewski & Donnellan (2010)." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 89–92. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691609357016>.
- Beckett, Sandra L. "J.M.G. Le Clézio: The Role of a Nobel Laureate in the Crossover Phenomenon." *Barnboken*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2009, pp. 19 - 31. *Taylor and Francis*, <https://doi.org/10.14811/clr.v32i2.4>. PDF Download.
- Bernardini, Jacopo. "The Infantilization of the Postmodern Adult and the Figure of Kidult." *Postmodern Openings*, vol. 5, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/2014.0502.03>.

- Cadden, Michael. *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*. University of Nebraska Press, 2010.
- Chand, Nandika. "Kidult Culture: Iconic Brands Mastering Marketing to Reach the Inner Child". *Brand the Change*. 4 Aug. 2023, <https://brandthechange.com/strategy/kidult-culture-iconic-brands-mastering-marketing-to-reach-the-inner-child/>. Accessed 4 September 2023.
- Clark, Travis. "Why Hasbro and Other Toy Companies Are Embracing 'Kidults.'" *The Current*, 17 July, 2023. <https://www.thecurrent.com/hasbro-toy-game-companies-kidults-marketing-advertising-demographic>. Accessed 4 September 2023.
- Crawford, Kate. "Adult Responsibility in Insecure Times." *Soundings* (13626620), no. 41, Spring 2009, pp. 45–55. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.3898/136266209787778939>.
- Dvornyk, Marina. "Postmodern rejuvenation of grown-ups: who kidults are?" *Academia*, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/30503060/Postmodern_Rejuvenation_of_Grown_Ups_Who_Kidults_Are. Accessed 5 April 2017.
- Falconer, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. Routledge, 2009.
- Fitzsimmons, Rebekah. "Testing the Tastemakers: Children's Literature, Bestseller Lists, and the 'Harry Potter Effect.'" *Children's Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2012, pp. 78–107. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2012.0002>.
- Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Hayford, Sarah R., and Frank F. Furstenberg. "Delayed Adulthood, Delayed Desistance? Trends in the Age Distribution of Problem Behaviors." *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, vol. 18,

no. 2, June 2008, pp. 285–304. *PubMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2008.00561>.

Houriham, Margery. *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005. *Taylor and Francis Group*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203974100>. PDF.

Hunt, Peter. "Introduction: The World of Children's Literature Studies". *Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* edited by Peter Hunt. 1st ed, Taylor & Francis, 1999.

"JRR Tolkien Snubbed by 1961 Nobel Jury, Papers Reveal." *BBC News*, 6 Jan. 2012. *www.bbc.com*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-16440150>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

Juhl, Jacob, and Marios Biskas. "Nostalgia: An Impactful Social Emotion." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 49, Feb. 2023, p. 101545. *PubMed*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101545>.

Juhl, Jacob, et al. "Nostalgia Promotes Help Seeking by Fostering Social Connectedness." *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, vol. 21, no. 3, Apr. 2021, pp. 631–43. *PubMed*, <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000720>.

Lowe, Stephanie. "Kidults - Do You Have One in Your Life? This Culture Is on the Rise, so We Spoke to a Psychotherapist and Toy Expert (and It All Makes Much More Sense Now)." *GoodToknow*, 20 Feb. 2024, <https://www.goodto.com/family/kidult-meaning-and-why>. Accessed 5 March 2024.

Lee, Nick. *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*. Open University Press, 2001.

- Luna, Beatriz. "Kidults: Does Delaying Responsibility Affect Our Brains?" *CBC Radio*, 20 Feb, 2015. *CBC.ca*, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-221-inside-the-world-of-columbiners-kidults-radical-homemakers-and-more-1.2961895/kidults-does-delaying-responsibility-affect-our-brains-1.2961922>. Interview. Accessed 24 April 2020.
- Manzoni, Anna. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Youth Independence Multidimensionally in the United States." *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 59, no. 4, Nov. 2016, pp. 362–77. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316653797>.
- Marcus, Leonard S. *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.
- McCulloch, Fiona. *Children's Literature in Context*. Continuum, 2011.
- Nel, Philip. "The Fall and Rise of Children's Literature." *American Art*, vol. 22, Mar. 2008, pp. 23–27. *ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/587914>.
- Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- O'Sullivan, Emer. *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, 2010.
- Parker, Sam. "Revealed: Why 'The Lord Of The Rings' Was Rejected By The Nobel Prize." *HuffPost UK*, 6 Jan. 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/01/06/tolkien-lord-of-the-ring-nobel-prize-rejection_n_1188684.html. Accessed 5 August 2020.
- Peters, Maria Verena. *Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century: Harry Potter's Kidults and the Twilight Moms: Phd Project in Literary and Cultural Studies*. 2018. universi – Universitätsverlag Siegen, PhD Thesis. *Opus Seigen*, <https://dspace.ub.uni-siegen.de/handle/ubsi/1328>. Accessed 16 September 2020.

- Rață, Irina. "Children's Literature - A Cinderella Story". *Cultural Intertexts*, vol 1, 2014, pp. 236-251. *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339017967_Children's_Literature_-_A_Cinderella_Story. Accessed 1 May 2018.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. "Forever Young: Fantasies of Childhood." *Children's Literature: From the Fin de Siecle to the New Millennium*. Liverpool University Press, 2011, pp. 1–34.
- . "Breaking Bounds: The Transformative Energy of Children's Literature." *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007, pp. 1–23. *Springer Link*, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230206205_1. PDF.
- Said, S. F. "Who Says Children's Books Can't Be Great Literature?" *The Guardian*, 3 Dec 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/dec/03/childrens-books-great-literature-university-of-kent-sf-said>. Accessed 16 May 2020.
- Sloan, Erica. "How the Playful Nostalgia of 'Kidulting' Can Boost Your Mental Health, According to Psychologists." *Well+Good*, 6 Jan. 2023, <https://www.wellandgood.com/kidulting-nostalgia/>. Accessed 9 July 2023.
- Speder, Z., et al. "Are Conceptions of Adulthood Universal and Unisex? Ages and Social Markers in 25 European Countries." *Social Forces*, vol. 92, no. 3, Mar. 2014, pp. 873–98. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sot100>.
- Stevenson, Deborah. "Sentiment and Significance: The Impossibility of Recovery in the Children's Literature Canon, or The Drowning of The Water Babies." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 21 no. 1, 1997, p. 112-130. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.1997.0010>.

“What Is ‘Kidulting’, the Trend Becoming Popular among Millennials?” *Firstpost*, 16 Aug. 2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/kidulting-the-trend-becoming-popular-among-millennials-mental-health-13005172.html>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

Wiederhold, Brenda K. “Nostalgia as Self-Care: Embracing the Kidult Culture.” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, vol. 27, no. 4, Apr. 2024, pp. 238–39. *liebertpub.com (Atypon)*, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2024.29308.editorial>.

Wong, Brittany. “More And More People Are ‘Kidulting.’ Maybe You Should, Too.” *HuffPost*, 22 Nov. 2022, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-kidulting_1_63752a91e4b08013a8b247ed. Accessed 5 September 2023.

Chapter 5

Finding Kinship: Conclusion and Future Directions

Rachel Falconer, in her work, has insisted on the importance of the individual reader's moment of discovery of children's books. She views the adult individual choice to actively pick and read a children's book to be of much greater significance than any marketing scheme. However, it is not only the discovery but also the continuation of interest, the repeated act of reading, engaging, absorbing and passing on these stories to each other as adults that is also of utmost importance. It was a curiosity of these motivations that drove this project, the question of what it was in these stories that kept adults so captivated; what about the childhood's worlds of play, magic, fantasy, creatures, and friendships could draw adults in, adults who had left behind these worlds, years ago.

This thesis reveals a facet of the answer surely lies within the stories themselves, specifically in their similarities to each other. Chapter three confirms that the children's books that appeal the most to adults share some very meaningful traits in theme, character, endings, voice, and genre. Unlike Falconer, who believes it is impossible to arrive at characteristics of crossover novels, this thesis aligns with Harju's idea that not all children's books will secure adult interest in them and there must be select narrative elements that draw adults in. Consider various titles by children's authors like Rick Riordan, Eoin Colfer, Cressida Cowell, Cornelia Funke who wrote at the same time as the texts studied as crossover fiction, were similar in genre, had hefty publicity and marketing surrounding their books, had movie adaptations of their novels, and yet their books did not crossover to the adult readership in the same way J.K. Rowling, Phillip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, and Daniel Handler's (Lemony Snicket's) did. Thus,

there must be a set of pre-existing narrative characteristics that appeal to adult more. As discussed in Chapter Three, it can be concluded that when it comes to children's books, adults are drawn to themes of death as positive, natural, inevitable; the ambiguity and moral complexities of love; the reluctance of being a chosen one; and parent-child relationships and finding a chosen family. These themes resonate especially with the condition of adulthood and children's books that deal with these themes have high crossover potential. When it comes to endings, these books offer complex, open-ended but ultimately familiar 'happy endings' that offer comfort, optimism and hope which appeals to adults who live in an increasingly alienating, fragmented, and hostile society. Adult readers are also invested in characters that are both heroes, the chosen ones, yet flawed, and ordinary, mirroring both the responsibility and the helplessness of being an actual adult. Adult readers are also engaged by the heteroglossia employed within the narrative where languages of play and school clash, mingle, and co-exist with language of politics, bureaucracy, and religion. And finally, adults, who have always been avid consumers of the fantasy genre in various media and formats, now turn to children's literature as a new source of speculative fiction.

Thus, a combination of these traits appears to especially enable the crossover of children's books to an adult readership. That is not to say other children's books haven't gained adult readers. *The Curious Incident of Dog at Night Time* by Mark Haddon or older books before the time period studied in this thesis, like *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Patterson are fitting examples of crossover books that do not display these narrative features. However, the general trend for crossover fiction, sidestepping the occasional rule challengers/anomalies has definitely been a mix of the characteristics as discussed in chapter three. The latest book to crossover, children's author Katherine Rundell's *Impossible Creatures* published in 2023 is also a fantasy title with child protagonists who are unwilling chosen ones, employs heteroglossic discussions of storytelling, myth-building, environment, existence, and

imagination, has themes of death, love, finding a chosen family, and the ending is open-ended yet returns the readers to a safe, familiar, knowable world. It was awarded the Waterstones Book of the Year Award and Rundell, acknowledging the crossing over of her work said in an interview “ The fact that this book has won rather than any of my others is so thrilling because this, in being a children’s book that I hope could also be read by adults, is the book that I hope could speak to everyone” (qtd. in Creamer) and states that children’s books are a “way of talking more broadly about the things we value and the things we love” and that they are “philosophy’s more brightly painted cousin” (qtd. in Creamer).

Interestingly in 2019, Rundell wrote a forty-page long treatise titled *Why You Should Read Children’s Books Even Though You are So Old and Wise* which traces a brief history of children’s books and why adults must not feel shy or embarrassed of reading these stories. She expressively lists her own personal motivations for reading children’s books and reminds readers of the fact that even though adulthood is enjoyable in its freedom and independence, it is not always an agentic state. She observes “...because at so many times in life, despite what we tell ourselves, adults are powerless too, we as adults must hasten to children’s books to be reminded of what we have left to us, whenever we need to start out all over again” (22-23). She denounces those calling children’s books escapism, instead offering the term “findism” as for her “Children’s books are not a hiding place, they are a seeking place” (31). Rundell acknowledges the advancements made by contemporary children’s books, declaring that “...children’s books began to play by their own rules and, in so doing, became works of art distinct in themselves, in their own tradition, not watered-down versions of some other, adult thing” (20) and asserts the need for children’s books for they are life-affirming and remind adults of important things like bravery, wit, empathy, and love (26). Rundell is essentially calling for the acceptance of children’s literature as mainstream and legitimate, which is another reason for the rise of crossover fiction.

Chapter 4 concludes that there are two main cultural factors as to why crossover fiction has become popular – firstly, kidult culture and the consumption of products and media associated with childhood have evolved from negative connotations to now signify mental health, personal fulfilment and joy, and the right to create individual definitions of adulthood, beyond the outdated, traditional markers that signified a normative adulthood. Moreover, the perceived crisis of infantilization of culture and adulthood turned out to be merely a felt crisis. Critics engaged in perpetuating this discourse transferred the negative connotations associated with “childishness” onto both children’s literature and its adult readers. By creating prejudice and stigma around children’s literature and kidults, the critics were bolstering their own status as cultural connoisseurs, drawing a distinct boundary between high and low culture, with age serving as the dividing line. However, as explained in the chapter, more nuanced sociological research has vindicated modern adulthood and interrogated the fallacies of stability, maturity, universality, and permanency attributed to traditional (and outdated) adulthood. The shift in discourse around kidults has encouraged adults to seek out novel, emancipatory experiences, and reading children’s literature is a significant one.

The second reason is the growing recognition amongst academic and cultural establishments that children’s literature contains complex, artistic, and profound stories, which has significantly increased the prominence of children’s books in the mainstream. Academia has increasingly acknowledged that, just like in adult fiction, children’s books too have a range of offerings, some mediocre and some that are indeed great literature. This has not only legitimized children’s literature as artistically valid but also brought about an appreciation of its socio-cultural importance. This shift in perception has been bolstered by the work of various scholars who have meticulously analysed and championed the merits of and innovations in children’s literature. Moreover, the gradual acceptance from institutions such as award committees and bestseller compilers has played a crucial role in furthering the status of

children's literature and providing it with a cultural stamp of approval, encouraging adult readers to engage with these 'award-winning, best-selling' texts. If children had been borrowing books from the adult shelf, now adults are doing so from the shelves of childhood because these books are available, marketed, sold but also because they are wonderfully complex, universal, thought-provoking stories about the human condition.

The cumulative effect of these shifts, both in the definition of adulthood and the status of children's literature, has been a dismantling of binaries like adult/child, canonical/popular, and high culture/low culture and children's books as crossover fiction have occupied a prominent position in contemporary literary culture, enriching the reading lives of both children and adults. Ultimately crossover fiction is a moment of discovery for adults, and a moment of triumph for children's literature.

What crossover fiction achieves is also the healing of the severed connection between adulthood and childhood, the adult and the child. W. H. Auden (writing about Lewis Carroll) said: "There are good books only for adults, which presuppose adult experience, but there are no good books only for children" (qtd in Jones). This quote is significant because not only does it remark on the inherent quality of children's literature but also reminds one of the continuances between childhood and adulthood; just because one is an adult, does not mean childhood is not a valid part of their identity and experiences. Reading children's books should be natural to the condition of adulthood, because childhood is a natural part of an individual's identity. Marah Gubar's *Kinship Model* lends a perfect lens to understand the more abstract functions of crossover fiction.

Approaching the category of child and the study of childhood, Gubar dwells on how agency in children is often the focus of children's literature criticism and most of the discourse on the subject falls into one of two categories – the difference model or the deficit model. In the difference model, children are constructed as the 'other', vastly and markedly different than

adults, presupposing that because of these differences, children have no agency and adults, all of it (Gubar 298). The fallacy of this way of thinking is that it “makes no allowance for the possibility that some children might exercise the same sort of agency as some adults, or even outperform grown-ups as thinkers, doers, and writers” (Gubar 299). In the deficit model, children are treated lesser and inferior to adults in terms of their agency, often compared to marginalized groups, and thus will always be oppressed and subjugated by adults. However, the fallacy of this approach is that not all children are marginalised, and some might have “considerably more agency than an adult, whether because of the vagaries of the developmental process (for example, neurodiversity) or because of social conditions that grant a particular kind or class of children more decision-making power than adults around them who belong to a still more disenfranchised group” (Gubar 300).

These models encapsulate the conventional attitudes to children, even in historical and cultural contexts. Whether it is the child as other in the Romantic imagination – wild, free, innocent, unlike adults, severed from their world of conflict and moral ineptitudes; or it is the child as deficient – sinner in Puritan literature, deficient in virtue and piety, inexperienced and ignorant in the Enlightenment tradition, in need of adult instruction and education. However, as we know now, children are not innately innocent or unaware of moral transgressions, they are not sinners who need strict lesson in obedience and duty, and neither are they completely *tabula rasa*, with their own thoughts, opinions, and worldviews that they can exercise beyond educational literacy.

Not only does the figure of child feature under these models, but also, children’s literature. Through the thesis, it has been highlighted continuously how children’s books were seen as the other, too different in content, theme, and form, for adults to be able to enjoy them as well as deficient in comparison to literature written for adults, lacking style, sophistication,

and maturity, leading to the cultural and academic outrage against kidults and the practice of reading children's fiction.

Instead, Gubar's Kinship Model lends itself to understanding and moreover, normalizing crossover fiction. It does not construct the child as an 'alien other' or the child as a 'universal novice' but maintains that "children and adults are fundamentally akin to one another, even if certain differences or deficiencies routinely attend certain parts of the aging process" (Gubar 302). The Kinship Model emphasizes on the likeness and connectedness but also allows for difference and variation; it assumes that children have enough similarities among themselves – and possess enough differences from adults – to justify the category of 'child', but the aim of the model is to stress upon an elemental similarity and only then focus on age related differences and deficiencies. This model is revolutionary because in a widely aetionormative culture, it provides a flip of perspective where "instead of presuming that adults represent the norm and then investigating how children deviate from that norm, kinship-model adherents test out what happens if we regard the position that children generally inhabit as standard or shared" (Gubar 302-303).

While Gubar is concerned with literary criticism and the scholarly endeavours of trying to understand and analyse the category of child and her agency in such criticism, the kinship model can be extrapolated in the context of crossover books by refusing to view adulthood and adult literature as the norm, and focussing on the shared similarities between the experiences of childhood and adulthood and the way any narratives that answer questions of self and universe can appeal to readers, regardless of the readers' age or which literary tradition these narrative might belong to. Child readers and adult readers are alike in their human need for stories, but their kinship also extends further for every adult has been a child and those experiences of childhood have shaped the adult. Even when children adopt adult books as has been the case with *Robinson Crusoe* or *Little Women*, it must be because these narrative tug at

this shared kinship, these elemental similarities with adults. Crossover fiction , then, is a fiction of kinship, of empathy, and of commonality, transcending age-related differences, to provide common points of reference, and not only bring seemingly contradictory readers/experiences closer to understanding each other, but also provide a chance for the divided adult to become a cohesive whole.

This finding of kinship becomes even more imperative when one traces the trends relating children and adults that are developing in these past few years. There has been an increasing call for the separation of adults with children and those without in public spaces, creating child-free areas or zones. Many polarizing discourses can be found online about restaurants banning children, couples organizing child-free weddings, airlines charging more for tickets that guarantee child-free seating, and even some libraries and museums that are placing minimum age restrictions on visitors. An article in the Washington Post sums up these discourses and asks experts about whether this can amount to discrimination and the scholars who believe in the right of children to participate in public life maintain that it is indeed age-based discrimination, a violation of human rights, and a general societal decline in generational connections and responsibilities (Ables and Jeong). Whether this trend turns into a bigger social crisis is yet to be seen, but it is indeed symptomatic of the fact that children continue to be marginalised, relegated as the other. Reading crossover fiction, then, is another way of bridging this gap, creating empathetic connections, and reminding adults that the child is indeed part of the whole.

Finally, reading crossover fiction is simply an activity that brings pleasure to adults. Writing in 1995, William Touponce postulates the need for a theory based on pleasure. He systematically approaches the popular theoretical structures of the time like structuralism, psychoanalysis, and deconstructionism, and points out to the absence of pleasure in theoretical discourse. He believes that it is this disregard of pleasure that enables looking down on

children's literature and children's books that are written for the purpose of pleasure. He calls upon the need to develop a theory that addresses the function, modes and historical reckoning of pleasure, leaving us with the question of why pleasure obtained from reading must be inundated with negative connotations. Crossover fiction thus offers an opportunity to answer Touponce's question as adults reading these books are not always necessarily looking for allegorical meanings, philosophical epiphanies or biting social commentary. Although these texts have all three, they are also simple sources of pleasure to adult readers and this function cannot be overlooked, when trying to understand the popularity of crossover fiction with adults. A report on reading for pleasure in emerging adult readers states the benefits of RfP which includes not only a general rise in literacy and language use, and positive attitudes towards reading, but also increased community participation and feelings of interconnectedness (Duncan 8), making the pleasure gleaned from crossover titles a productive and positive practice for adults. In fact, if we go by C.S. Lewis' definition of Joy – "Joy is distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing" (Surprised by Joy 72), then crossover fiction is joyful indeed for it has both the pang and stab of complex issues and ambiguous moralities, yet it offers an aesthetically and practically pleasing experience. Ultimately, whichever term one picks, to quote Beckett, "Over the past decade, millions of adult readers are discovering or rediscovering the **pleasure** of reading children's books, a **joy** that some adults had always known" (Global and Historical Perspectives 133, emphasis added).

To conclude, there is indeed much more that remains to be discovered in crossover fiction. This thesis is one of the answers to the many questions crossover fiction raises and analysing crossover fiction under the kinship model or expanding on the pleasure theory for crossover fiction are just some of suggestions for future directions. Moreover, up until now, children's literature has been a western-centric area but slowly, it is opening to other literary

traditions and cultural definitions. Global children's literature, transnational adaptations, diverse children's fiction, and translation are just some of the buzz words that are up-coming in the field and it would be interesting to study crossover fiction in different cultural contexts that have alternative definitions of childhood, adulthood, and children's literature.

Works Cited

Ables, Kelsey, and Andrew Jeong. "Is It Discrimination If You Can't Bring Your Kids to a Restaurant?" *Washington Post*, 13 May 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/12/no-kid-zones-south-korea-ban/>.

Accessed 3 Jan 2024.

Beckett, Sandra L. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2009.

Creamer, Ella. "Katherine Rundell Wins Waterstones Book of 2023 with 'Immediate Classic.'" *The Guardian*, 30 Nov. 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/30/katherine-rundell-waterstones-book-of-2023-impossible-creatures>. Accessed 24 Jan 2024.

Duncan, Sam. *Understanding Reading for Pleasure for Emerging Adult Readers*. National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), London, 2013.

Gubar, Marah. "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies."

Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures, vol. 8, no. 1, June 2016, pp. 291–310.

utpjournals.press (Atypon), <https://doi.org/10.3138/jeunesse.8.1.291>. PDF Download.

Jones, Nicolette. "What Exactly Is a Children's Book?". *The Times*, 30 April 2004.

<https://www.thetimes.com/article/what-exactly-is-a-childrens-book-5tlbrcgxhd>.

Accessed 15 December 2023.

Lewis, C.S. *Surprised by Joy*. 1955. *Project Gutenberg Canada*.

<https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy-01-h.html>.

Accessed 2 June 2023.

Rundell, Katherine. *Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Touponce, William F. "Children's Literature and the Pleasures of the Text." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1995, pp. 175–82. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0992>.

Bibliography

Primary Texts:

Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. Bloomsbury, 2002.

---. *The Graveyard Book*. Bloomsbury, 2008.

Pullman, Philip. *Northern Lights*. Scholastic Press, 1995.

---. *The Subtle Knife*. Scholastic Press, 1997.

---. *The Amber Spyglass*. Scholastic Press, 2000.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

---. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Bloomsbury, 1998.

---. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Bloomsbury, 1999.

---. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

---. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Bloomsbury, 2003.

---. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Bloomsbury, 2005.

---. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Bloomsbury, 2007.

Snicket, Lemony. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning*. HarperCollins, 1999.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Reptile Room*. HarperCollins, 1999.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Wide Window*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Miserable Mill*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Austere Academy*. HarperCollins, 2000.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Ersatz Elevator*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Vile Village*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Hostile Hospital*. HarperCollins, 2001.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Carnivorous Carnival*. HarperCollins, 2002.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Slippery Slope*. HarperCollins, 2003.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Grim Grotto*. HarperCollins, 2004.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Penultimate Peril*. HarperCollins, 2005.

---. *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End*. HarperCollins, 2006.

Secondary Sources:

Ables, Kelsey, and Andrew Jeong. "Is It Discrimination If You Can't Bring Your Kids to a Restaurant?" *Washington Post*, 13 May 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/12/no-kid-zones-south-korea-ban/>.

Accessed 3 Jan 2024.

Anggraini, Theresia Enny. *The Characteristics of Child-to-Adult Crossover Literature*. 2015.

The Ohio State University. PhD Thesis. *etd.ohiolink.edu*,

https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=osu1440027648. Accessed 27 October 2019.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "A Longer Road to Adulthood." *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. Oxford University Press, 2014. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199929382.003.0001>.

---. "Oh, Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood—Commentary on Trzesniewski & Donnellan (2010)." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 89–92. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691609357016>.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

---. "Discourse in the Novel". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 2010, pp. 259-422.

Bal, Mieke, and Christine van Boheemen. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 3rd ed, University of Toronto Press, 2009.

- Beauvais, Clémentine. *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015.
- . "Didactic". *Keywords for Children's Literature*, edited by Philip Nel, Lissa Paul, and Nina Christensen, Second ed, New York University Press, 2021, pp. 57-60.
- Beckett, Sandra L. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2009.
- . *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*. Routledge, 1999.
- . "Crossover Literature." *Keywords for Children's Literature*, edited by Philip Nel, Lissa Paul, and Nina Christensen, Second ed, New York University Press, 2021, pp. 47 – 50.
- . "J.M.G. Le Clézio: The Role of a Nobel Laureate in the Crossover Phenomenon." *Barnboken*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2009, pp. 19 - 31. *Taylor and Francis*, <https://doi.org/10.14811/clr.v32i2.4>. PDF Download.
- Bernardini, Jacopo. "The Infantilization of the Postmodern Adult and the Figure of Kidult." *Postmodern Openings*, vol. 5, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/2014.0502.03>.
- Bingham, Jane and Grayce Shcolt. *Fifteen Centuries of Children's Literature: An Annotated Chronology of British and American Works in Historical Context*. Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Blyton, Enid. *The Burnt Cottage*. 1943. HarperCollins, 1996.
- . *The Twins at St. Clare*. 1941. Hodder Children's Books, 2016.
- Bradford, Clare, et al. *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582583>. PDF Download.

- Bukhina, Olga. "Why Are They So Afraid of Children's Books? The Subversive Power of Imagination (Part 1)." *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura*, vol. 1, no. 2, Dec. 2019, pp. 170–87. <https://doi.org/10.32798/dlk.163>.
- Cadden, Michael. *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*. University of Nebraska Press, 2010.
- Chand, Nandika. "Kidult Culture: Iconic Brands Mastering Marketing to Reach the Inner Child". *Brand the Change*. 4 Aug. 2023, <https://brandthechange.com/strategy/kidult-culture-iconic-brands-mastering-marketing-to-reach-the-inner-child/>. Accessed 4 September 2023.
- Clark, Travis. "Why Hasbro and Other Toy Companies Are Embracing 'Kidults.'" *The Current*, 17 July, 2023. <https://www.thecurrent.com/hasbro-toy-game-companies-kidults-marketing-advertising-demographic>. Accessed 4 September 2023.
- Crawford, Kate. "Adult Responsibility in Insecure Times." *Soundings* (13626620), no. 41, Spring 2009, pp. 45–55. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.3898/136266209787778939>.
- Creamer, Ella. "Katherine Rundell Wins Waterstones Book of 2023 with 'Immediate Classic.'" *The Guardian*, 30 Nov. 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/30/katherine-rundell-waterstones-book-of-2023-impossible-creatures>. Accessed 24 Jan 2024.
- Crumpler, Thomas P. and Linda Wedwick. "Readers, Texts, and Contexts in the Middle: Re-Imagining Literature Education for Young Adolescents." *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- Cullingford, Cedric. *Children's Literature and Its Effects: The Formative Years*. Cassell, 1998.

Darton, Frederick Joseph Harvey. *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Dvornyk, Marina. "Postmodern rejuvenation of grown-ups: who kidults are?" Academia, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/30503060/Postmodern_Rejuvenation_of_Grown_Ups_Who_Kidults_Are. Accessed 5 April 2017.

Duncan, Sam. *Understanding Reading for Pleasure for Emerging Adult Readers*. National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), London, 2013.

English, Leona M. "Children's Literature for Adults: A Meaningful Paradox". *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, Vol 9, 2000, pp. 13-23, https://www.iup.edu/pse/files/programs/graduate_programs_r/instructional_design_and_technology_ma/paace_journal_of_lifelong_learning/volume_9_2000/english2000.pdf. Accessed 27 June 2017.

Falconer, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. Routledge, 2009.

Ferguson, Dana. "Children's Fantasy: Introduction" *Children's Literature Review: Excerpts from Reviews, Criticism, and Commentary on Books for Children and Young People*. Edited by Dana Ferguson. Gale Cengage Learning, 2010, pp. 21-23.

Fitzsimmons, Rebekah. "Testing the Tastemakers: Children's Literature, Bestseller Lists, and the 'Harry Potter Effect.'" *Children's Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2012, pp. 78–107. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2012.0002>.

Gallo, Don. "Bold Books for Teenagers: The Promise and Seduction of Sequels." *English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 4, Mar. 2005, pp. 124-128. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/30046474>.

- Gates, Trevor G. "Chosen Families". *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Marriage, Family, and Couples Counseling*, edited by Jon Carlson and Shannon B. Dermer, SAGE Publications Inc, 2017, pp. 240-242. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483369532.n74>.
- Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Gubar, Marah. "Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature Criticism." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38 no. 4, 2013, pp. 450-457. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2013.0048>.
- . "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies." *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, vol. 8, no. 1, June 2016, pp. 291–310. *utpjournals.press* (Atypon), <https://doi.org/10.3138/jeunesse.8.1.291>. PDF Download.
- Hammerberg, Dawnene D. "Reading and Writing 'Hypertextually': Children's Literature, Technology, and Early Writing Instruction." *Language Arts*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2001, pp. 207–16. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483140>. Accessed 20 July 2019.
- Handy, Bruce. *Wild Things: The Joy of Reading Children's Literature as an Adult*. Simon and Schuster, 2017.
- Hayford, Sarah R., and Frank F. Furstenberg. "Delayed Adulthood, Delayed Desistance? Trends in the Age Distribution of Problem Behaviors." *Journal of Research on Adolescence : The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, vol. 18, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 285–304. *PubMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2008.00561>.
- Hillel, Margot. "A Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Child as Redeemer". *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Roderick McGillis, pp. 57 - 70. Praeger, 2003.

Hintz, Carrie, and Eric L. Tribunella. *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed, Broadview Press, 2019.

Houriham, Margery. *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005. Taylor and Francis Group, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203974100>. PDF.

Hunt, Peter. "Introduction: The World of Children's Literature Studies". *Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* edited by Peter Hunt. 1st ed, Taylor & Francis, 1999.

Jones, Nicolette. "What Exactly Is a Children's Book?". *The Times*, 30 April 2004. <https://www.thetimes.com/article/what-exactly-is-a-childrens-book-5tlbrrcgxhd>. Accessed 15 December 2023.

"JRR Tolkien Snubbed by 1961 Nobel Jury, Papers Reveal." *BBC News*, 6 Jan. 2012. *www.bbc.com*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-16440150>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

Juhl, Jacob, and Marios Biskas. "Nostalgia: An Impactful Social Emotion." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 49, Feb. 2023, p. 101545. *PubMed*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101545>.

Juhl, Jacob, et al. "Nostalgia Promotes Help Seeking by Fostering Social Connectedness." *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, vol. 21, no. 3, Apr. 2021, pp. 631–43. *PubMed*, <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000720>.

Lee, Nick. *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*. Open University Press, 2001.

Lerer, Seth. *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

- Lowe, Stephanie. "Kidults - Do You Have One in Your Life? This Culture Is on the Rise, so We Spoke to a Psychotherapist and Toy Expert (and It All Makes Much More Sense Now)." *GoodToknow*, 20 Feb. 2024, <https://www.goodto.com/family/kidult-meaning-and-why>. Accessed 5 March 2024.
- Lewis, C.S. *Surprised by Joy*. 1955. *Project Gutenberg Canada*.
<https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy-01-h.html>.
Accessed 2 June 2023.
- Lowry, Lois. "Point of Departure" *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010, pp. 193 - 195. *Taylor and Francis eBooks*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- Lukas, Michael David. "A Multiplicity of Voices: On the Polyphonic Novel." *The Millions*, 15 Feb. 2013, <https://themillions.com/2013/02/a-multiplicity-of-voices-on-the-polyphonic-novel.html>. Accessed 5 December 2017.
- Luna, Beatriz. "Kidults: Does Delaying Responsibility Affect Our Brains?" *CBC Radio*, 20 Feb, 2015. *CBC.ca*, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-221-inside-the-world-of-columbiners-kidults-radical-homemakers-and-more-1.2961895/kidults-does-delaying-responsibility-affect-our-brains-1.2961922>. Interview. Accessed 24 April 2020.
- Maija-Liisa Harju. *'Being Not Alone in the World' Exploring Reader Responses to Crossover Books*. 2012. McGill University, PhD thesis.
- . "Tove Jansson and the Crossover Continuum." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2009, pp. 362–75. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.0.0472>.
- Manlove, Colin. *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England*. Cybereditions, 2003.

- Manzoni, Anna. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Youth Independence Multidimensionally in the United States." *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 59, no. 4, Nov. 2016, pp. 362–77. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316653797>.
- Marcus, Leonard S. *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.
- McCallum, Robyn and John Stephens. "Ideology and Children's Books" *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2010, pp. 359-372. Taylor and Francis eBooks, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543>. PDF Download.
- McCulloch, Fiona. *Children's Literature in Context*. Continuum, 2011.
- McGillis, Roderick, editor. *Children's Literature and the Fin de Siècle*. Praeger, 2003.
- Moss, Stephen. "Terry Pratchett: 'Fantasy Is Uni-Age.'" *The Guardian*, 22 Apr. 2013. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/22/terry-pratchett-raising-steam>.
- Nel, Philip. "The Fall and Rise of Children's Literature." *American Art*, vol. 22, Mar. 2008, pp. 23–27. ResearchGate, <https://doi.org/10.1086/587914>.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. 1996. Routledge, 2016.
- . *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. Routledge, 2010.
- . *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2002.
- Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- . *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Longman, 1996.

O'Sullivan, Emer. *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature*. The Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Parker, Sam. "Revealed: Why 'The Lord Of The Rings' Was Rejected By The Nobel Prize." *HuffPost UK*, 6 Jan. 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/01/06/tolkien-lord-of-the-ring-nobel-prize-rejection_n_1188684.html. Accessed 5 August 2020.

Park-Fuller, Linda M. *Voices: Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and Polyphony, and the Performance of Literature*. *Literature in Performance*, vol. 7, 1986, pp. 1-12.
<https://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/604/voices-lpf.html>. Accessed 17 January 2020.

Peters, Maria Verena. *Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century: Harry Potter's Kidults and the Twilight Moms: Phd Project in Literary and Cultural Studies*. 2018. universi – Universitätsverlag Siegen, PhD Thesis. *Opus Seigen*,
<https://dspace.ub.uni-siegen.de/handle/ubsi/1328>. Accessed 16 September 2020.

Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. De Gruyter, 1982.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110838626>.

---. *Carnegie Medal Winner's Speech: Philip Pullman for Northern Lights*. Carnegies Working Party. Email.

Rață, Irina. "Children's Literature - A Cinderella Story". *Cultural Intertexts*, vol 1, 2014, pp. 236-251. *ResearchGate*,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339017967_Children's_Literature_-_A_Cinderella_Story. Accessed 1 May 2018.

Reynolds, Kimberley. *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

---. "Forever Young: Fantasies of Childhood." *Children's Literature: From the Fin de Siecle to the New Millennium*. Liverpool University Press, 2011, pp. 1-34.

---. *Children's Literature: From the Fin de Siècle to the New Millennium*. Liverpool University Press, 2011.

---. "Breaking Bounds: The Transformative Energy of Children's Literature." *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007, pp. 1–23. Springer Link, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230206205_1. PDF.

Rosen, Judith. "PW: Breaking the Age Barrier." *PublishersWeekly.Com*, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19970908/34610-pw-breaking-the-age-barrier.html>. Accessed 3rd February 2017.

Routledge, Christopher. "Children's Detective Fiction and the "Perfect Crime" of Adulthood". *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural* edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Christopher Routledge, Palgrave, 2002, pp. 64 – 81.

Rundell, Katherine. *Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Said, S. F. "Who Says Children's Books Can't Be Great Literature?" *The Guardian*, 3 Dec 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/dec/03/childrens-books-great-literature-university-of-kent-sf-said>. Accessed 16 May 2020.

Shi, Xiaofei. "Differences, Idiosyncrasies, and Shared Humanity: Reconceptualising Crossover Literature." *International Research in Children's Literature*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 2022, pp. 178–90. *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2022.0449>.

Sloan, Erica. "How the Playful Nostalgia of 'Kidulting' Can Boost Your Mental Health, According to Psychologists." *Well+Good*, 6 Jan. 2023, <https://www.wellandgood.com/kidulting-nostalgia/>. Accessed 9 July 2023.

- Speder, Z., et al. "Are Conceptions of Adulthood Universal and Unisex? Ages and Social Markers in 25 European Countries." *Social Forces*, vol. 92, no. 3, Mar. 2014, pp. 873–98. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sot100>.
- Stevenson, Deborah. "Sentiment and Significance: The Impossibility of Recovery in the Children's Literature Canon, or The Drowning of The Water Babies." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 21 no. 1, 1997, p. 112-130. Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.1997.0010>.
- . "History of Children's and Young Adult Literature". *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, edited by Shelby A. Wolf et al, Routledge, 2011, pp. 179 – 193.
- Sorby, Angela. "Golden Age." *Keywords*, NYU Press, 2 June 2015, <https://keywords.nyupress.org/childrens-literature/essay/golden-age/>. Accessed 7th June 2017.
- Thacker, Deborah Cogan. "New Voices, New Threats". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 104 – 114. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- . "Playful Subversion". *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* edited by Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, Routledge, 2005, pp. 139 – 150. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203995372>.
- Thaidigsmann, Karoline. "Memory Studies and the Analysis of Crossover Literature: Methodology and Case Study (Poland)". *Researching Memory and Identity in Russia and Eastern Europe: Interdisciplinary Methodologies* edited by Jade McGlynn and Oliver T.

- Jones. Springer International Publishing, 2022, pp. 125 – 140. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99914-8>.
- Tijupa, Valerij. “Heteroglossia”. *Handbook of Narratology* edited by Peter Hühn et al. Walter de Gruyter Berlin, 2009, pp. 124-131.
- Tolkien, JRR. *On Fairy-Stories*. ILAS 2350 - University of Houston. https://uh.edu/fdis/_taylor-dev/readings/tolkien.html. Accessed 24 July 2017.
- Touponce, William F. “Children’s Literature and the Pleasures of the Text.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1995, pp. 175–82. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0992>.
- Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator’s Voice*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21109-8>. PDF.
- Webb, Jean. “Walking Into the Sky: Englishness, Heroism, and Cultural Identity: A Nineteenth – and – Twentieth Century Perspective”. *Children’s Literature and the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Roderick McGillis, pp. 51 - 56. Praeger, 2003.
- “What Is ‘Kidulting’, the Trend Becoming Popular among Millennials?” *Firstpost*, 16 Aug. 2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/kidulting-the-trend-becoming-popular-among-millennials-mental-health-13005172.html>. Accessed 5 September 2023.
- Wiederhold, Brenda K. “Nostalgia as Self-Care: Embracing the Kidult Culture.” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, vol. 27, no. 4, Apr. 2024, pp. 238–39. *liebertpub.com (Atypon)*, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2024.29308.editorial>.
- Wong, Brittany. “More And More People Are ‘Kidulting.’ Maybe You Should, Too.” *HuffPost*, 22 Nov. 2022, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-kidulting_1_63752a91e4b08013a8b247ed. Accessed 5 September 2023.
- Wrigley, Christopher. *Return of the Hero*. Book Guild Publishing, 2005.

Zvirin, Stephanie. "Crossovers: Children's Books for Adult Readers." *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, edited by Bernice E. Cullinan, Diane, Goetz Pearson, Continuum Publishers, 2005, pp. 209 – 211.