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EON COLFER'S *ARTEMIS FOWL* NOVELS:  
CONTEMPORARY SUBVERSIVE TALES

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition:  
English Literature

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by  
Amy Ruth Wilson Clark  
September 2006

EOIN COLFER'S ARTEMIS FOWL NOVELS:  
CONTEMPORARY SUBVERSIVE TALES


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by  
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## ABSTRACT

Drawing especially on Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg, this thesis argues that Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* novels, through their depiction of the cyborg and their use of metafiction, intertextuality, and irony, subvert binaries and hierarchies that cause social injustice. Chapter One argues that Colfer's characters fit Haraway's notion of the cyborg, since they disrupt the oppressive binary opposition between innocence and experience that characterizes so much children's literature. Instead of creating a childhood pastoral or green world, Colfer creates what I call a virtual pastoral—a practical utopia. Chapter Two argues that Colfer's fairy hierarchy satirizes the human hierarchy. The fairy hero Holly Short, as compassionate cyborg, cares for all creatures, thus subverting the animal/human binary, while the anti-cyborg Opal enacts feminist fairy tales that subvert the male/female binary. Chapter Three argues that Colfer's cyborg, partly by disrupting the boundary between machine and organism, breaches the wall around the pervasive garden hierarchy of childhood innocence, making way for the virtual pastoral, a world in which technology gives children agency. Chapter Four argues against the

traditional textual hierarchies which classify children's literature as inferior, and which give adult writers power over child readers. Colfer, in creating liberatory children's fiction, appeals to adults while writing directly for children, and he uses humor and irony to allow the child reader to create his own inner audience, which, as Kenneth Burke argues, is fundamental to real agency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT . . . . .	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: THE CYBORG AND HER WORLD . . . . .	1
CHAPTER TWO: THE FAIRY HIERARCHY . . . . .	28
The Trolls . . . . .	29
The Anti-Cyborg . . . . .	37
CHAPTER THREE: THE GARDEN HIERARCHY . . . . .	48
CHAPTER FOUR: THE HIERARCHY OF TEXTS . . . . .	64
Conclusion . . . . .	79

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE CYBORG AND HER WORLD

Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* novels—a humorous, though sometimes violent, high-tech fantasy series for young adults—take place on the borders between two civilizations: the fairy civilization that has been driven underground by human encroachment, and the careless and sometimes greedy human civilization that prides itself on domination. While portraying increasingly successful interactions between the fairies (the "People") and humans (the "Mud Men"), Colfer critiques human domination over and destruction of species and ecosystems and depicts female and hybrid characters that subvert gender stereotypes and power relationships. The series of (currently) four books includes *Artemis Fowl* (2001), *Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident* (2002), *Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code* (2003), and *Artemis Fowl: The Opal Deception* (2005). Artemis Fowl, a prepubescent boy genius (aged 12, 13, and 14), is the human anti-hero of the novel. Though a criminal who seeks in the first book to rob the fairies of their gold, he is an ecologically minded and resourceful problem solver, and through his relations with the fairy Holly Short, he becomes increasingly moral

throughout the series. Colfer names his male protagonist—and titles all four books—after the goddess Artemis, who is known as a protector of animals and children. The author highlights the name in *The Eternity Code* when Artemis explains:

“[I]t is generally a female name. After the Greek goddess of archery. But every now and then a male comes along with such a talent for hunting that he earns the right to use that name. I am that male. Artemis the hunter.” (267)

Besides the feminist message inherent in this explanation, that a male must “earn” the right to have a female name, Colfer also references the Greek goddess throughout the books, troubling the boundaries between animal/human, organism/machine, child/adult, and male/female. For instance, Colfer subverts the image of the goddess in juxtaposing her name to “Fowl.” While the word can be seen as denoting a sense of being like an animal, or of being protective of animals, it can also be linked to its homonym “foul.” The entire Fowl family is made up of criminals—and Artemis Fowl carries on in that tradition.

Artemis’s bodyguard and companion—a prominent character in all four books—is the adult human Butler, a



"large Eurasian man" (AF 1, 3-4). The other prominent human character is Butler's sister, Juliet, who, like all the Butlers, is a martial arts expert, and who starts to take over Butler's role as Artemis's bodyguard in the third book.

In *Artemis Fowl*, the young villain Artemis sets out to find The Book, the fairy bible that contains all the People's rules, spells, and secrets, in order to steal the fairy gold. He kidnaps the other central protagonist, Holly Short, an elf who works for the fairy police. (Fairy is the general term for all the People-Holly's species is elf, and her job is Captain in the Lower Elements Police Reconnaissance, or LEP recon.) The other important fairy characters that appear in all four books are introduced in *Artemis Fowl*: Foaly, the "paranoid centaur" (42) responsible for all the LEP's technology; Commander Root, the old-fashioned head of the fairy police; and the humorous "kleptomaniac dwarf" (161), Mulch Diggums, a creature who eats through soil at amazing speeds, and who is called upon in every book to help the LEP. The central evil fairy character who is featured in the second and the fourth books is Opal Koboi, a pixie who constantly strives

to take revenge upon her adversaries and who is fixated on attaining world domination.

*Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident* has a double story line: Artemis sets out, with help from Holly and the other fairies, to rescue his father from the Russian mafia, while in the fairy world, Opal Koboi and Briar Cudgeon—another evil character—join forces to try to take control over the fairy civilization. In *Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code*, Artemis has invented—with the help of stolen fairy technology—a “C Cube” that “can read any information on absolutely any platform, electronic or organic” (13, 10). A human villain steals the C Cube, endangering the fairy security systems, so the fairies join Artemis and his human friends to help get the C Cube back. *Artemis Fowl: The Opal Incident* brings back the villain Opal Koboi, who is now obsessed with harnessing the power within the earth’s core. Artemis, Holly, and the other fairies again work as a team to defeat her plan.

Although I will examine characters that Colfer portrays as being subversive or feminist, the main focus of this thesis will be the cyborg. I’ll focus mostly on the two characters I see as cyborg—Holly Short, who, it can be argued, is the hero of all four books—and anti-cyborg—Opal

Koboi, who embodies many aspects of the cyborg in her physical being and in her oppositional behavior, but who lacks compassion and morality.

I'd like to draw on Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg—who is "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 151) and who navigates the borders between animal/human, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical—as well as ideas from theorists of children's literature and fairy tales to argue that Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* novels can be seen as works that depict the cyborg figure and use other literary techniques—metafiction, intertextuality, and irony—to subvert the binaries between animal/human, organism/machine, adult/child, and male/female. I'll argue that in traditional children's literature, these binaries are essentially subsets of the binary between innocence and experience, or, as Haraway might put it, subsets of the binary that is constructed from the false notion of either the Garden of Eden (innocence) or the apocalypse (the inevitable result of experience—once people have invented the nuclear bomb).

The characteristics of Haraway's cyborg are the same as the characteristics of subversive children's literature—

it is also oppositional, utopian, and at least somewhat without our false notions of perfect childhood innocence. Like Haraway's cyborg, subversive children's literature also embodies an ecological stance toward the treatment of animals and the earth itself, and contemporary subversive children's literature like Colfer's depicts an accepting and optimistic attitude toward technology as offering power to children and marginalized others. Haraway notes that "a cyborg is simultaneously a myth and a tool, a representation and an instrument, a frozen moment and a motor of social and imaginative reality" (*Primate Visions* 139). In addition, a key characteristic of the cyborg as I understand it, is the cyborg's *compassion*—and this is also a key characteristic of subversive children's literature. I believe that the best subversive children's literature must contain a character or characters whose compassion helps to disrupt harmful dualisms and allows readers to see what Haraway calls "an 'elsewhere' from which to envision a different and less hostile order of relationships among people, animals, technologies, and land" (*Primate Visions* 15). Feminist children's literature theorist Roberta Seelinger Trites notes that the subversive revisions of traditional fairy tales (which, it can be argued, Colfer

creates in his *Artemis Fowl* fairy tales), "rely on a character who rejects stereotypical behavior to balance assertiveness with compassion" (Trites 12). Victor Watson calls Colfer's first *Artemis Fowl* novel "cynical," (qtd. in Keenan 257) perhaps due to Colfer's sometimes harsh criticism and satire of human activities, but I believe that the compassion depicted in Colfer's cyborg figure Holly keeps these novels from being cynical.

Fairy tale theorist Jack Zipes and children's literature theorist Peter Hunt are both interested in literature for children that allows young readers to escape didacticism, to gain some control over texts (which may result in the ability to question other texts), and ultimately, to gain the power to make decisions of their own, even if these decisions put them at odds with the current societal status quo. In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Zipes contrasts the "classical fairy tales of the civilizing process" to what he considers "liberating tales" (179), tales that offer young people a "strident, anti-sexist, and anti-authoritarian perspective" (180). Hunt, in *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*, uses the term "childist" criticism to define what he attempts to do—understand the child and our concepts of childhood

better, in order to create more meaningful ways to analyze children's literature (16). And feminist fairy tale theorist Cristina Bachilega uses Walter Benjamin's term "borderline enquiries" to describe postmodern revisions of fairy tales that cause us to rethink traditional fairy tales in terms of gender equality and social justice (22). As I see it, all these theorists are interested in the same thing that Haraway is: breaking down boundaries and harmful dualisms that cause social injustice. The cyborg is the central metaphor for Haraway's optimistic revision of our world.

In *Primate Visions*, Haraway argues:

A cyborg exists when two kinds of boundaries are simultaneously problematic: 1) that between animals (or other organisms) and humans, and 2) that between self-controlled, self-governing machines (automatons) and organisms, especially humans (models of autonomy). The cyborg is the figure born of the interface of automaton and autonomy. (139)

Haraway considers a third boundary breakdown in "A Cyborg Manifesto," which she defines as a subset of the boundary between organism and machine. This boundary exists

"between the physical and non-physical" (153), and its breakdown is crucial to what she calls her "ironic faith" (149) in which the cyborg is the central image.

Haraway notes that a cyborg inhabits the borders between animals, humans, and machines. Holly Short is the character in Colfer's novels that most consistently operates in the borderlands, and she thus functions as a cyborg figure. Holly possesses animal characteristics: in *Artemis Fowl*, she drinks a "nettle smoothie" and has large pointed ears (33). She is pretty "[i]n a pointy sort of way" (76). Otherwise, her appearance and personality are humanoid. Artemis notes with surprise when he first sees her that she is not that different from people he knows: she is "[a] female . . . like Juliet, or Mother" (76). Holly is also like humans in that she understands and speaks whichever language the humans around her are speaking. But she also depends on machines: she wears a specialized helmet to keep her in contact with the LEPrecon unit and flies with mechanical "Hummingbird" wings (60). Holly's main technology is internal, however—her magical powers. These powers connect to her powers of compassion, as she mainly uses her magic to heal injured fairies and humans.

In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway defines a cyborg as "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (151). Holly possesses all three attributes. First, as the only female allowed to work as an active officer in the "notoriously dangerous" LEPrecon unit, Holly opposes the inherent sexism in the fairy civilization (32). She sarcastically criticizes Commander Root for what appears to be his sexism—Root is stricter with Holly than with any of the male officers. Holly imagines that Root doesn't want her to keep her job as Recon officer: "Root didn't think it was any place for a girlie" (32). Holly, infuriated, confronts Root about it and is only satisfied when she learns that Root is stricter with her because he wants her to do well as the first female Recon officer. Holly also consistently disobeys orders from her commander if she sees the need to cut through bureaucratic red tape—in *Artemis Fowl*, she hesitates, thinking about what is more important, "Lives or orders?" and then decides to save the lives of humans and the dangerous troll (54), and in *The Arctic Incident*, Holly refuses to wait for male backup before taking action to save a fellow officer (22-3). In *The Opal Deception*, Foaly notes that Holly is "not the best at taking orders" (3) and later in that book, Holly is



oppositional in first refusing a promotion because it would force her to work at a desk job, and then in quitting altogether her position on the LEP because she refuses to work under the new commander who—unlike Root, as it turns out—is sexist and incompetent.

Second, Holly is utopian in her compassion for all living things, and in her ability to navigate the borders between her world and the human world—she communicates with and protects humans, who are feared and disdained by most fairies. Holly maintains her optimistic view that all creatures (including humans) can make valuable connections with others and become better citizens not just to other creatures but to the earth itself. When Artemis finally shows a “spark of decency” at the end of *The Arctic Incident*, Holly tells him, “ ‘Perhaps you could blow on that spark occasionally’ ” (274). Holly consistently criticizes the human world for its ecological carelessness and is depicted as having compassion for the world’s creatures who’ve been harmed by humans. On her way to recharge her magical powers, Holly mourns the effect that humans are having on the earth’s ecosystems:

Holly flew low, skipping over the white-crested waves. She called out to the dolphins and they

rose to the surface, leaping from the water to match her pace. She could see the pollution in them, bleaching their skin white and giving them red sores on their backs. And although she smiled, her heart was breaking. Mud People had a lot to answer for. (*Artemis Fowl* 68)

Third, Holly is "without innocence," in having no sense of original sin. Holly, at age eighty, is not burdened by a biblical origin story: "[. . .] Cupid was her great-grandfather" (*Artemis Fowl* 31). The narrator declines to state whether either of Holly's parents (or Cupid, for that matter) is still alive, and we get the sense throughout the books that fairies have an indefinite life-span unless they are injured severely. (Commander Root, for instance, is killed by Opal in the fourth book with a large explosion—and he is over five-hundred years old at the time.) By referring to Cupid as Holly's ancestor, in novels in which Holly acts as heroine to the anti-hero boy Artemis, Colfer is consciously disrupting not just the myth of biblical origins, but myths of Greek gods and goddesses as well. While Colfer's Artemis is like his namesake in being, as I noted before, a good hunter (of his enemies), and in being a symbol of prepubescent virginity

throughout the series, the cyborg Holly embodies more of the goddess Artemis's positive characteristics than does the boy. Holly is protective of both animals and humans (as I will describe further in Chapter Two), and, like the goddess, she is portrayed as being somewhat androgynous. In *The Arctic Incident*, Holly's "auburn crewcut" is mentioned, and she is regularly called "sir" by her crew member (17). Later in that book, when she's piloting the fairy shuttle—a craft that flies through the tunnels under the earth—Holly feels exhilarated and explains, "It was a flyboy thing" (82).

But the goddess Artemis, while she has many positive attributes, can be vain, dictatorial, and cruel. Holly, as a compassionate cyborg, does not conform to the image of the goddess in this sense. Haraway writes, "It's not just that 'god' is dead; so is the 'goddess'" ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 162). This statement highlights the dualisms between male and female and between Christian and ancient religions, but Haraway is also arguing a deeper point. While a goddess may have some feminist attributes and may be a powerful image of certain kinds of femininity for some women, the goddess nonetheless has been formed in the image of the patriarchy. Melissa Coffey, one of the student

contributors to an online forum titled "Images of Women in the Ancient World: Issues of Interpretation and Identity," contends that Artemis may have originally been a mother goddess, but the Greeks gradually changed her attributes, making her non-fertile and perhaps more jealous and vain in the attempt to lessen the "powerful matriarchal cult" that she was associated with (1). In the conclusion to "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway writes:

Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. [. . .] It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (181)

Haraway knows that while we can't undo the damage that the patriarchy has done in molding goddesses for women to model themselves after, we can create a new "dream" for ourselves in the image of the cyborg.

Haraway further defines the cyborg as an entity who "would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of

mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 151). . . Holly exemplifies this definition literally, as she is a very long-lived, if not immortal fairy, and not one of the Mud People. Nor is Holly a racist, patriarchal projection of a goddess like the "National Geographic Woman," a tool of the white male that Haraway describes as a "strange pale intruder" in *Primate Visions*, a woman whose "prominent whiteness" is emphasized in order to bridge the gap between nature and culture and bring " 'Man' . . . into touch with his origin and nature" (152). Through his description of the cyborg Holly, Colfer subverts the masculinist notion of the possibility of a return to original innocence by way of a white female reaching out into the dark jungle: Holly has "nut brown skin" (*Artemis Fowl* 22) and "a coffee-colored complexion" (*The Eternity Code* 83).

But if she doesn't exist in the Garden of Eden, where does the cyborg live? Haraway includes in her vision of the cyborg a metaphor for place—the cyborg is utopian. Zipes argues that a liberating fairy tale "must reflect a process of struggle against all types of suppression and authoritarianism and posit various possibilities for the concrete realization of utopia" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of*

*Subversion* 178). I see a similarity between what Zipes and Haraway are trying to accomplish—they both have a utopian vision of a “less hostile” place where formerly powerless people can achieve some kind of power over their lives. Colfer creates such a world in his *Artemis Fowl* books.

I’d like to examine Roni Natov’s theories from *The Poetics of Childhood* on the green world or pastoral and the antipastoral in children’s literature, and compare the ways in which Haraway and Colfer conceive of a different kind of utopia inhabited by the cyborg. Natov claims that

the green world in the literature of childhood is a response to the worldliness of the world.

Whether it represents a retreat from the world’s injustices—parental or the extended social world—it offers a natural critique of civilization and stands in contradiction to the ‘unnatural’—machines, laws, and customs, all that runs contrary to children’s sense of freedom. (91)

While I admire Natov as a strong advocate for both children and children’s literature, I believe that the above statement illustrates a somewhat naïve belief in children’s “natural” state of innocence, which is built upon dualisms that cause power imbalances and ultimately, injustice in

our world. Also, Natov links "machines" to something that children need to escape in order to obtain freedom. I would argue that children today need machines—technology is one of the central ways in which children can acquire agency and thus, freedom.

Natov also contends:

In the literature of childhood, the green world may serve to expose the cruelty and waste of our society. In revealing the various ways we are ruptured from our society, these stories can be as deeply critical as the literature for adults. They may, therefore, insist on a return from the pastoral, so that the discovery that took place in nature can be integrated into our world in an offering of hope and renewal. (92)

Here, Natov seems to argue that the green world in children's literature can be a vehicle for change in our world, and her idea is similar to Haraway's in proposing an optimistic view of what the future could be. But the troubling concept for me is Natov's idea of a "return" from the green world or the pastoral, which is inevitable in most children's stories that depict green worlds or pastorals. It also seems that Natov does not oppose the

binary between nature and culture, but actually endorses it, equating nature with good and culture with evil. And while Natov asserts that we can take the good that comes from a green world and integrate it into our own society, I prefer Haraway's notion of living in our own world as it is, filled with cracks and fissures in the status quo that we can negotiate, thus making our own world livable, rather than depending upon an escape to a different world or using a template from a fantasy world to impose on reality a sense of our coming "back to nature."

I believe that Haraway essentially has a *practical* vision of what the world could be—a practical utopia, or what Zipes calls "the concrete realization of utopia," not a falsely innocent green world or pastoral. This practical utopia would be a world from which we wouldn't have to return, because it wouldn't be a fantasy world—it would be our own world, but one in which we deal with machines and technology in the wisest ways possible, get over feeling superior to others (either other varieties of humans or other creatures), and work with the imperfect world we have now. Haraway has no desire to mourn the false notion of the "good old days" or to wax nostalgic for the past or for a fantasy green world or pastoral. Colfer has a similar



view, for the world he creates in the *Artemis Fowl* novels provides readers with this practical utopian vision, where, for example, the fairy world isn't magically without any kind of sexism. Female characters have to deal with gender stereotypes in Colfer's books, just as real females must, but Colfer depicts his female characters opposing and subverting stereotypes, which can result in gradual, positive change. Holly, for instance, has to deal with sexist males in her daily work as an LEP officer, but she is oppositional in her approach. In *The Arctic Incident*, when she needs to shut down the shuttle that carries vacationing fairies to the surface, the gnome in charge of the shuttle asks, " 'Are you crazy, girly?' " (45), but Holly asserts her authority:

"Do you see this?" she demanded, pointing to the insignia on her helmet. "I'm LEP. A captain. No rent-a-cop gnome is going to stand in the way of my orders." (45)

The gnome calls her "[t]he crazy girly captain" and refuses to cooperate until Holly has to resort to threatening him with her "buzz baton" (46). Finally, when the gnome still thinks she is using an empty threat, Holly uses the gnome's own sexist view of her to scare him, recognizing him as a

weak bully: "Holly grinned. 'I'm the crazy girly captain. Remember?'" (47). The gnome then does as she orders.

Haraway and Colfer have another similarity in their view of a new kind of world—Haraway's cyborg and Colfer's characters work in that new world with optimism, energy, and playfulness. Kathleen McDonnell quotes Ashley Montagu in *Honey, We Lost the Kids: Rethinking Childhood in the Multimedia Age*, who argues that most people equate a loss of innocence or "growing up" with a loss of childhood traits: "simplicity, curiosity, openness to new ideas, joyfulness, emotional directness" (qtd in McDonnell 35). McDonnell also notes that Montagu "largely avoids using the word innocence in his discussion," but mentions "what he calls [children's] innate compassionate intelligence" (36). It seems to me that we could create a better world for people of all ages not by fantasizing about children returning to a pastoral, "innocent" world, but by trying to encourage people to keep the childhood traits that Montagu lists, or even in trying to return these traits to those who have lost them. Both Haraway's and Colfer's cyborg possess these childlike traits and offer a vision of a more practical utopia.

Natov comes closer to a vision resembling Haraway's when she speaks of the "Antipastoral," which she considers a subversive pastoral. She writes of Lewis Carroll's Wonderland as an antipastoral:

[. . . .] Carroll may be thought of as the voice of the shadow childhood, that which is hidden behind Victorian mores and expectations of innocence. Aligned with his child protagonist and his child readers, he reveals a fractured adult world of nonsensical rules and conventions.

(51)

And she notes that emotionally, Alice is "detached, unmoved by her own tears, which quickly become part of the grotesque landscape of objects" (51). Natov further argues that "[. . .] Carroll's perspective here is unromantic, a satiric antipastoral vision. Once Alice is small enough to get inside, what she actually observes is an artificial and hostile landscape" (51). Natov seems here to argue that a subversion of the innocence/experience binary would be a good thing, yet she calls the subversive antipastoral landscape "artificial and hostile" and "grotesque." She seems reluctant to let go of binaries: in her analysis, Alice as "the disrupter of the Edenic myth of Victorian

morality" is emotionally "detached" (51). Haraway's—and Colfer's—cyborg, on the other hand, inhabits not a hostile world in which she fears other creatures, but a world in which her compassion and ability to navigate the borders between animal, human, and machine enable her to live optimistically and playfully.

In the *Artemis Fowl* novels, Colfer creates what I would like to call a "Virtual Pastoral," which subverts binaries and hierarchies—and doesn't include a distaste for the machine, which the green world, the pastoral, and the antipastoral do. Colfer inspired me to come up with the term by linking the virtual to the pastoral in a literal sense: in one scene the fairies have created "a holographic hedge. There was even a holographic cow chewing the virtual leaves to throw humans off the fairy scent" (*The Arctic Incident* 272). Colfer's virtual pastoral doesn't necessitate a "return" to or a growing out of a world—because the virtual pastoral is a livable world—where children and adults, marginalized others, and machines can exist with dignity. In Colfer's series, there's no distinct pattern of any character going to a fantasy secondary world at the beginning of the books and then returning at the end of the books. Rather, these

characters, fairy and human, navigate the border between fairy and human—and go back and forth between these two worlds (underground and above ground) as the need arises. And the two central protagonists in the book, Artemis and Holly, representatives of the human and fairy worlds, usually travel together, and, throughout the series, become increasingly dependent on each other's help.

There's a sense of the virtual pastoral as a permanent state—Artemis taps away at his keyboard and calls people on cell phones, while the fairy techie Foaly also works at his keyboard in a small cubicle at the LEP headquarters and talks to other fairies, and at times, to humans, through tiny headsets and "iris cams"—contact lenses that record images to send back to Foaly, that keep track of fairies' vital signs, and that are "[a]lso wired for sound" (*Artemis Fowl* 172 ). And both Artemis and Foaly can be everywhere at once, not in a physical world, but in a virtual one. In addition, all these creatures can talk to one another, see one another on tiny screens, and they all operate in a speedy, non-linear, seemingly chaotic, energetic fashion. McDonnell quotes Douglas Rushkoff on these kinds of virtual interactions. Rushkoff calls today's young people

"`postmodern kids' who can multi-task with ease" (121).

McDonnell also writes:

Rushkoff believes that the surfing mentality so prevalent now started with the TV remote, and sees it as a new, emerging form of "discontinuous intelligence"—holistic, playful and interactive, rather than rigid and linear. (121)

Colfer depicts his characters displaying a "discontinuous intelligence" in the virtual pastoral.

Literary critic Virginie Douglas dislikes the *Artemis Fowl* books for not containing lush settings and elaborate descriptions and contends: "They lack literary sensitivity, being mainly made up of dialogue and action, with no descriptions and therefore no atmosphere despite the thrill of the plot. Indeed the book could almost be a screenplay" (2). Though Colfer doesn't create a lush green world or pastoral, he does create a new type of virtual pastoral that is perhaps more interesting to modern young readers than literature depicting a garden of childhood, a metaphor that cannot exist without the innocence/experience binary.

Natov's argument that the green world or pastoral provides an escape for children is very similar to everyday metaphors we use for early childhood education—a pastoral

or green world resembles our concept of "kindergartens" that keep children safe, but also separate from the adult world. John Holt uses the term "walled garden" of childhood to denote a concept that we use in contemporary life to supposedly keep our children safe (qtd in McDonnell 34). McDonnell brilliantly analyzes Holt's metaphor: she writes that when he created this term,

he illuminated the flip side of the metaphor, for a walled garden may be a beautiful place, but the children in it are certainly not free to come and go as they please. And to a large extent, the "beauty" of the garden rests on the absence of those things the wall is designed to keep out.

(34)

I would argue further that the walled garden of childhood reinforces the idea that children are supposed to remain "innocent" and then at the end of childhood, are required to reject innocence, that walled garden or pastoral (nature), and become experienced, entering the evil world (culture). The "garden" metaphors we use to describe childhood also connect to Haraway's notion of the binary (and apparently infinite breach) between the Garden of Eden and the apocalypse. A modern child's familiarity with

technology, along with literature like Colfer's that portrays a strong image of the cyborg, can encourage the discovery of fissures in the walled garden of childhood.

Natov notes that "critic William Empson claimed that all pastoral is allegorical. In the literature of childhood, the child actually can serve as the green world itself [. . .] the [child is] the figure of escape, renewal, and possibility" (92). When I began this analysis, I hoped to be able to view Colfer's Holly Short as a personification of the green world, because I liked the idea of renewal and possibility. I'd now like to see if a better vision exists—of a cyborg inhabiting a world in which she begins to obtain power. The green world, while providing an escape from the adult world and perhaps inspiration to change it, cannot provide empowerment in the real world. I would like to think of the modern child not as the personification of the green world, but as a cyborg, navigating a virtual pastoral—a practical, contemporary utopia. Haraway, while explaining the dualism that the cyborg navigates between the physical and non-physical (and noting that navigating this breach may give power to women in non-industrialized countries), writes that "There might be a cyborg Alice taking account of these new dimensions"



(CM 154). This "cyborg Alice" may not be only a fictional character, like Carroll's Alice or Colfer's Holly, but the child herself.

Haraway writes that in her vision of the cyborg,

[n]ature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 151)

In this thesis, I want to focus on these issues, and how Eoin Colfer, through his depiction of a cyborg inhabiting a virtual pastoral, as well as through his use of irony, metafiction, and the carnivalesque, subverts three interrelated hierarchies: the fairy hierarchy, which I see as a satire of the human hierarchy; the garden hierarchy, which surrounds children with a wall of innocence, robbing them of agency; and the hierarchy of texts, which unjustly treats children's literature as second rate. All of these hierarchies are manifestations of the oppressive binary opposition between innocence and experience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FAIRY HIERARCHY

The first hierarchy I'd like to address is the fictional fairy hierarchy that Colfer creates in the *Artemis Fowl* series, which is built upon polarities between animals and humans (or in this case, humanoid fairies) and between males and females. In this chapter, I'll examine how Colfer's fairy hierarchy can be seen as a satire of the human hierarchy in which we stereotype and oppress those we choose to consider as the Other. I'll first look at the ways in which Colfer disrupts his own fairy hierarchy by creating the cyborg figure Holly, who shows compassion to the animals lowest on the fairy hierarchy—the trolls. He also subverts the view that animals are to be thought of as less than humans by describing them (often through the point of view of Holly) sympathetically, using terms that might cause young readers to identify with the trolls. In the second half of this chapter, I'll explore the ways in which Colfer breaks down the male/female binary through creating the anti-cyborg Opal, who becomes a metafictional Sleeping Beauty, witch, and Cinderella. In his depiction of the anti-cyborg, Colfer creates postmodern fairy tales

that subvert the traditional, civilizing fairy tales to which he alludes.

### The Trolls

The two sections in *Artemis Fowl* in which the troll is a primary character are complicated examinations of the boundary between animal and human, and could be seen as having what reviewer Virginie Douglas calls "racist undertones" (3) if it weren't for the understanding and compassion of the cyborg Holly. The troll is presented as a bestial other. He is described in pure animal terms—on the animal side of the dualism that Haraway wants to break down. In the novel, Holly first gives a stereotyped view of the trolls: "Their tiny brains had no room for rules or restraint" and when they accidentally get into the pressure elevators—the fairies' main form of transportation to the surface:

[u]sually the concentrated air current fried them, but sometimes one survived and was blasted to the surface [of the earth]. Driven crazy by pain and even the tiniest amount of light, they would generally proceed to destroy everything in their path. (39)

The troll is also described as a "[b]ull troll [. . .] with tusks like a wild boar" (43). And Foaly, the centaur techie, says of the troll, "It's a dumb animal, for heaven's sake!" (208).

In his article "The Animals," Jean Baudrillard writes mostly against using animals for industry and experimentation, but he also writes of the way that humans make animals fit into "a racially inferior world" (135). He argues that we do this to secure our supposedly higher position in the world: "We take them for nothing, and it is on this basis that we are 'human' with them" (134-5). Colfer appears on the surface to take the trolls "for nothing," as his characters define the troll as beast, but while he puts trolls low on the fairy hierarchy, he also subtly presents a way in which humans (and humanoids) can be more responsible to animals through the way he depicts Holly as a compassionate cyborg.

Haraway argues in *Primate Visions* that "gender is the explicit key to the code" when she writes about the symbolic National Geographic woman (136). Haraway notes that when Jane Goodall (as a perfect example of the symbol) touched the chimpanzee's hand in a "shared earthy touch . . . her touch was redemptive; its power saved others" (136).

Similarly, Holly's touch is important to reaching out to the human world, which might cause us to view her as masculinist symbol—a female who is responsible for reaching across the breach between the Garden and the apocalypse. When Butler, Artemis's servant and best friend, is gored by the troll in *Artemis Fowl*, Holly saves him by touching his hand, allowing her inner technology, her magic, to heal him. Butler notices "blue sparks dancing along his torso" and wakes up a bit to see that "[t]here was a hand resting on his forearm. Sparks flowed from the slim elfin fingers" (232).

But Colfer doesn't depict Holly as empty symbol. Besides healing Butler's physical wounds, and in a move that goes beyond what Haraway might call the false innocence of the image of the "shared earthy touch," Holly also works on Butler's conscience. When Butler seems compelled to take revenge on the troll who has hurt his sister Juliet, Holly tells him that he owes her a favor and that he should stop. This causes him to think: "Butler paused. Juliet was alive, it was true . . . Every brain cell in his head screamed for him to pull the trigger. But Juliet was alive" (238). Here, Holly appeals not only to Butler's sense of loyalty (to her since she's saved his

life) and logic (his sister hasn't been killed), but provides him with an example of someone who is able to understand and have compassion for all life. The cyborg Holly operates in the boundary between human and animal, and thus increases compassion in the human.

The troll isn't a humanoid creature—it does what its instincts tell it to do, and Holly recognizes this. Holly understands the troll as pure animal, and *thus* worthy. She successfully navigates the border between animals and humans—in her wisdom, she expects different actions from different individuals depending on their abilities. The troll has no ability to think logically or to restrain himself. Butler does, and Holly expects him to act responsibly. This scene portrays the complex relationship between animals and humans, and presents an optimistic view that might help young readers to see that we need to respect animal nature as it is, and treat all creatures with kindness.

Alison Lurie's analysis of how the unpleasant creatures are depicted in Baum's *Oz* books is similar to my view of how the unpleasant and dangerous trolls are handled in the *Artemis Fowl* books. Lurie, who considers the *Oz* books subversive, writes:

Though all these creatures cause Dorothy and her friends a great deal of trouble, it is never suggested that they should be destroyed or even reformed—instead they appear to have a right to their own peculiar customs and way of life.

(*Boys and Girls Forever* 39)

Similarly, in *Artemis Fowl*, the trolls are treated with respect not just by Holly, but by Commander Root. Not only do Holly and Root contain the troll without harming him at the beginning of the book, but they also object strenuously when another commander in the LEP wants to use the troll as a weapon (which ends up being the cause of Butler's injuries). Root says, "I don't want anything to do with this butchery" (209) and Holly uses the fairy swear word "D'arvit!" (215) when she sees what the LEP is planning. In addition, Holly feels pity and compassion for the troll when Butler is fighting him: she refers to him as a "stricken creature" and notes that the "unfortunate troll fought back pathetically" (238). Colfer here is also reversing the roles of the "dumb animal" and the human—Butler, through wanting revenge, becomes animalistic in his lack of self-control, and, as mentioned above, it takes

Holly's compassion to save both the troll and Butler's sense of himself as a rational human.

In *The Opal Deception*, the trolls take a larger role—the evil Opal Koboi throws Holly and Artemis in with the trolls in the defunct “Eleven Wonders” theme park (167). Again, it seems on the surface that Colfer presents a view of the animals as bestial others—the trolls will certainly kill Holly and Artemis if they catch them, and Holly thinks of them as “not much farther up the IQ scale than stinkworms, and [acting] almost completely on instinct” (218). But in this book, Colfer gives a more balanced view of the trolls than in the first book—Artemis, upon first seeing them, thinks of them as “magnificent carnivores” (177). Holly notices “cubs” (217) and “one relatively little guy” (218), which gives readers the opportunity to identify with the trolls' young family members. And though the trolls are presented as killers, in Colfer's world they at least kill painlessly: “Holly knew that if one drop of that venom [from the trolls' tusks] got under her skin, she would fall into a happy stupor” (217).

Also in this volume, Colfer uses the trolls as part of the scenery—part of a virtual pastoral he creates in order to satirize human accomplishments. The trolls have taken



over and are gradually tearing down the defunct "Eleven Wonders Theme Park," which is a fairy tribute to human accomplishment. Colfer presents another ecological message as Mulch Diggums gives the reason for why the park is deserted: " 'It did okay for a few years, but I think looking at those buildings made the People remember just how much they missed the surface'" (167). Colfer describes one of the buildings (the "Temple of Artemis"—which further emphasizes the fact that Artemis is named after a female goddess):

The Temple of Artemis exhibit was a scale model that had been constructed with painstaking accuracy, complete with animatronic humans going about their daily business as they would have been in 400 B.C. Most of the human models had been stripped to the wires by the trolls, but some moved jerkily along their tracks, bringing their gifts to the goddess. Any robot whose path brought them too close to a pack of trolls was pounced on and torn to shreds. (179-80)

The Eleven Wonders theme park literally reduces the accomplishments of humans—all the "wonders" are miniature versions, with shaggy trolls gradually tearing the

electronic humans apart. Colfer's fairy amusement park further satirizes human accomplishments when the character Opal says, " 'Ten thousand years of civilization, and you only manage to produce eleven so-called wonders'" (176). Perhaps readers won't feel as bad for the violent trolls who are reduced to living in a defunct amusement park as they do for the cute dolphins that swim along with Holly in the first book. But Colfer gives readers the opportunity to see similarities in both creatures' fates—and to see that human activity is the cause of problems for both the dolphins and the trolls. The trolls, it can be assumed, previously ran free on the earth when the fairies lived above ground, but now, enclosed in small spaces, they have no way to live a normal troll life. And just as coyotes and mountain lions can sometimes act violently when they are encroached upon by human suburbs, so the trolls start attacking fairies when they have to inhabit confined spaces together. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway contends that "[m]ovements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture" (152). Colfer creates, in his depiction of the trolls, something that Haraway might consider to be a

beginning of this recognition of our connection to animals in our world.

### The Anti-Cyborg

Besides finding fissures in the animal/human dualism to break down that part of the fairy hierarchy, Colfer uses metafiction and intertextuality to create feminist, postmodern fairy tales that subvert the male/female dualism. In *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, Roberta Seelinger Trites gives her definition of feminist children's novels:

Responding to the traditional repression of feminine power, these novels serve as a corrective, sometimes consciously and sometimes less obviously so, to the images of feminine docility that proliferated in children's novels prior to the contemporary women's movement. (5)

Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* novels may be in the category of "less obviously so," because there's no evidence that he set out to write feminist children's novels, and his first two novels were written for boys. Celia Keenan notes: "At the heart of [Colfer's first two] books was a question about how to be a boy and grow up in the world" (258).

And, in an interview with Craig McDonald, Colfer notes that he "expected [the readership of the *Artemis Fowl* books] to be mostly boys" and that he originally put in the character Holly Short "as a nod to the girls" (3). But Colfer's intent (or lack thereof) doesn't make his novels less feminist. In this section, I'd like to illustrate how Colfer, again through depicting a strong (though evil) female character Opal Koboi, subverts what Zipes calls the "fairy tales of the civilizing process" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 179). Colfer also corrects the "images of feminine docility" through having his cyborg character Opal act in metafictional versions of traditional fairy tales. In *The Opal Deception*, Opal acts as Sleeping Beauty, the evil witch in Snow White, and a reverse high-tech Cinderella.

Opal Koboi possesses many positive cyborg attributes, but she is lacking in compassion and is not utopian, which is why I want to call her an "anti-cyborg." Opal, like Holly, exists in the borders of the physical and non-physical in being miniature: though Colfer doesn't specify her exact height, she is described as a "tiny pixie" (*The Arctic Incident* 76) and we get the sense that she is even smaller than the other characters. She can also be seen as

an animal/humanoid hybrid, as she is described in *The Arctic Incident* as being "catlike" (74) and even wears a "cat suit" (76). Opal, like Holly, also has technology through her magical powers, but her main advantage is in being, like Foaly and Artemis, a precocious computer genius: "By the age of ten months she was already walking unaided; by a year and a half she had a vocabulary of more than five hundred words. Before her second birthday she had dismantled her first hard drive" (72).

Opal is also oppositional. She refuses to be the kind of young woman her father wants her to be—a decorative wife for a suitably wealthy man. Opal grows up to create her own business partially through destroying her father's business:

Opal's first action in college was to ditch her history of art degree in favor of the male-dominated Brotherhood of Master Engineer. No sooner was the scroll in her hand than Opal set up shop in direct opposition to her father.

Patents quickly followed. An engine muffler that doubled as an energy streamliner, a 3-D entertainment center, and of course her specialty, the DoubleDex wing series. (73)

And Opal continues to carry a grudge from her college days against the patriarchal fairy society. Opal argues with Foaly, the centaur who has created much of the fairy technology. Foaly tries to get Opal to lose her temper (and thus give information Foaly needs) by mentioning that he won the "science medal back in university" (157). His tactic works, and Opal angrily states, " 'That medal was mine, you stupid centaur. My wing design was far superior to your ridiculous iris-cam. You won because you were a male. And that's the only reason'" (157). Colfer heightens the feminist story of rebellion against her father and the male-dominated fairy society by depicting all the fairies admiring, or at least respecting, Opal's accomplishments: "Everyone knew how Opal had bankrupted her father. It was a legend in the corporate world" (*The Arctic Incident* 156). And Opal's argument that the science medal should have been hers is never disputed by the narrator or any character (including Foaly).

Opal displays extraordinary opposition, moreover, in deciding to reject her own biology as a fairy, and to become human. To this end, she gets plastic surgery to change her appearance, and starts injecting herself with human growth hormone, which gradually causes her to change

species. Haraway writes: "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 163). Opal, in literally disassembling and reassembling herself through plastic surgery and hormone treatments, becomes the feminist self of which Haraway speaks, though she lacks a key attribute in not wanting to be a part of any collective.

Surrounding Opal is a virtual pastoral which serves to enhance her anti-cyborg characteristics. In *The Arctic Incident*, Opal is most often seen curled up in her hover chair—brand name "Hoverboy" (219)—in her high-tech "inner sanctum" that can only be accessed by a chip implanted in a finger (74). In *The Opal Deception*, most of Opal's action takes place in her luxurious pod, full of technology which, like Foaly's cubicle at the LEP headquarters, allows her to be everywhere at once. Because she enjoys revenge, she even puts a video screen at the bottom of a drainage pipe which she has set up for Artemis and Holly to be sucked into. Holly and Artemis eventually come into contact with Opal's pre-recorded message:

An aqua-pod. It was anchored to the grille by a plastic tie. Opal's face filled the small screen

sealed inside, and her grin filled most of her face. She was saying something again and again on a short loop. The words were inaudible, but the meaning was clear: *I beat you again.* (189)

Celia Keenan gives her assessment of the *Artemis Fowl* books:

Artemis Fowl's story represents an extreme form of intertextuality, interlinking a great variety of texts, pictorial and written, including LEPrecon reports, secret codes, psychological reports from J. Argon, encrypted diaries of Fowl himself, films and other media. . . . The series is self-consciously post-modern. It has multiple layers, genres, registers. (267)

In addition to Keenan's list, Colfer partially writes in the genre of the fairy tale—in order to subvert it. In *The Opal Deception*, Opal tries to take revenge against all of the main characters in the *Artemis Fowl* novels for thwarting her plans in the second book, and tries to dominate not just the fairy world, but to take over the human world as well. In this book, Colfer not only creates an anti-cyborg figure to subvert the fairy hierarchy, but also uses metafiction to create a feminist fairy tale.



At the beginning of *The Opal Deception*, Opal clones herself—another way in which she “reassembles” herself—to escape the hospital in which she’s been detained since her last evil plan failed in the second book. The fairies take a DNA swab of her every few minutes, knowing that she is exceptionally devious, but Opal has in previous years designed a clone of herself and grown it to adult size (which only takes two years in a pixie, it is assumed). When Opal is awakened from her self-induced “cleansing coma” (12) by her assistants, she admires her sleeping clone: “ ‘Remarkable,’ said Opal, brushing the clone’s skin with her knuckle. ‘Am I that beautiful?’ ” (20). Here, Opal not only acts the part of Sleeping Beauty as a comatose clone, but also the part of the witch in Snow White who obsessively admires herself in a magic mirror. But in this version, the “mirror” is high-tech, a clone created by Opal herself.

Later in the novel, as Opal’s evil plan starts to deteriorate, Colfer makes another reference to the Snow White story: Opal looks at Holly through a video feed and thinks, “That cretinous captain. Who did she think she was, with her crew cut and cute bow lips?” (277). Echoing the witch in Snow White, who needs reassurance when she

sees another beautiful woman (I delight that in this case the beautiful woman sports a crew cut), "Opal glanced at herself in a reflective surface. Now, there was real beauty. There was a face that deserved its own currency" (277). Further, Opal's assistant Mervall Brill acts the part of the magic mirror as Opal questions him about his devotion to her: " 'Because I know what you are thinking,' Opal had said . . . 'I can see your thoughts swirling around your head. Right now, you're marveling at how beautiful I am'" (278). But here, Colfer pokes fun at the original tale, with Brill taking an oppositional approach. While Brill agrees with Opal verbally, he is "traitorously wondering if there was a cuckoo flitting about her head at that very moment. Opal was going seriously off the rails with all this changing her species and world domination" (278). Later, Brill worries that Opal actually can read his thoughts, so again referencing the magic mirror in the Snow White story, he thinks: "Holly Short is prettier than you, he thought as loudly as he could. A treasonous thought, to be sure. One Opal could hardly fail to pick up if she could indeed read minds" (282).

At the end of the book, Opal barely manages to get away from the LEP and escape to the Italian countryside.

And here, she becomes a sort of reverse Cinderella figure— an evil Cinderella who has the agency to choose her own stepmother. Opal mesmerizes a local farm woman with her last bit of magic before becoming human and unable to use magic anymore:

It was Opal's bad fortune that she had used her last drop of magic to convince this woman that she was her daughter. Now she was without magic, and a virtual prisoner in the Italian lady's vineyard. And what's more, she was being forced to work, and that was even worse than being in a coma. (329)

Opal's new "mother" tells her to start work on a humorous list of Cinderella-type chores:

"Crack the earth with the blade, then dig an irrigation trench between these two frames. And after dinner, I need you to hand wash some of the laundry that I have taken in this week. It's Carmine's, and you know what his washing is like." The lady grimaced, leaving Opal in no doubt as to the state of this person Carmine's clothing." (330)

Colfer also uses fairy tale phrasing when Opal hopes to be picked up by the LEP so she can stop working so hard:

Her wish was to be granted, but not until a week later, by which time her nails were cracked and brown, and her skin was rough with welts. She had peeled countless potatoes and waited on her new mother, hand and foot. Opal was also horrified to discover that her adopted parent kept pigs, and that cleaning out the sty was another one of her seemingly endless duties. By the time the LEP Retrieval team came for her, she was almost happy to see them. (330)

Trites argues: "Feminist power is more about being aware of one's own agency than it is about controlling other people" (8). In his metafictional references to fairy tales, Colfer creates a vision of that feminist power—Opal receives poetic justice for trying to control other people (to the point of world domination!), and the Cinderella character that many girls may have grown up admiring for her passive good girl behavior is satirized. This may cause young readers to reexamine and possibly reject some of the messages in traditional tales. Colfer reminds readers that the non-compassionate, controlling, and vain

woman is not someone to emulate, but neither is the traditional Cinderella, the passive princess who is not aware of her own agency.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE GARDEN HIERARCHY

Baudrillard, in "The Animals," includes children in lists with animals and people who are considered others by our society, and I wonder if perhaps, much as we make animals into bestial others, we may make children into "innocent others," beings who are seen as almost a completely different species than adult humans. And just as we put animals into a separate category so that we can feel human (and also higher on the hierarchy than them), we may be putting children into a separate category so that we can feel like adults who are in greater control of our surroundings than most humans actually are.

Psychologist Lloyd de Mause argues that adults fear children's vitality, can't feel empathy with them, and thus wish to control them (qtd. in McDonnell 28-9). It may be possible that some adults are afraid of children in the same way that some people are afraid of animals.

Baudrillard argues that

our sentimentality toward animals is a sure sign of the disdain in which we hold them. It is proportional to this disdain. It is in

proportion to being relegated to  
irresponsibility, to the inhuman, that the animal  
becomes worthy of the human ritual of affection  
and protection, just as the child does in direct  
proportion to being relegated to a status of  
innocence and childishness. (134)

I don't believe that adults outwardly consign children to  
the same status as beasts, but I do think that, just as we  
may burden our pets and other animals with a false  
sentimentality (trying to make them more like us), we often  
burden children with innocence (trying to make them *less*  
like us). And Baudrillard is getting at something even  
more insidious when he mentions worthiness—perhaps we can  
only provide children with the "ritual of affection" if  
they maintain their status as innocents.

McDonnell writes that, in constructing our current  
definition of what childhood should be, we've created a  
"philosophy of protectiveness" that has benefited children  
in some important ways—for instance, by providing  
protection against sexual assault by adults and by creating  
child labor laws (26). But she also believes that  
protectiveness taken too far reinforces the idea that  
children are inherently weak, and leads to a hierarchy.

Because so many of the metaphors surrounding childhood innocence contain the word "garden," I will call this the garden hierarchy. The garden hierarchy embodies a power imbalance in which adults try to control children and severely limit their agency. A good example from real life is the kindergarten classroom, in which children, while protected against danger, are often severely regimented—children are taught to stand in line before going into or out of the classroom and are made to put off physical needs until it is sanctioned by the teacher or school—the students have scheduled snack times, nap times, and even toilet times. In this chapter, I'd like to examine some of the ways in which Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* books subvert the garden hierarchy. I also want to analyze how Haraway's notion of the machine/organism binary and its subset, the physical/non-physical binary, relates to what I've been calling the virtual pastoral, and can help to illuminate reasons for the ways in which Colfer depicts his small characters.

Haraway writes that the boundary between the physical and non-physical is a subset of the machine/organism dualism, and argues that "[w]riting, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of



civilization, but miniaturization has changed our experience of mechanism" (153). She goes on to link miniaturization with power, and finally to write of a vision of "sunshine-belt machines," which she compares to cyborgs: "Cyborgs are ether, quintessence" (153). This is another way in which Holly can be seen as a cyborg. Holly is introduced in *Artemis Fowl* as being three feet tall, "one centimeter below the fairy average" (31). Colfer also notes her "slim frame with long tapered fingers" and, like Haraway, he links the cyborg's small size with power, when he continues the sentence: "perfect for wrapping around a buzz baton" (31). But more importantly, Holly can become what Haraway might call "quintessence" because she can use her powers to shield herself from view:

Shielding is really a misnomer. What fairies actually do is vibrate at such a high frequency that they are never in one place long enough to be seen. Humans may notice a slight shimmer in the air if they are paying close attention—which they rarely are. (*Artemis Fowl* 52-3)

As a shimmer, and making full use of her fairy technology—her magic—Holly is the perfect "sunshine-belt machine." Colfer's depiction of a small, sometimes invisible humanoid

character with great strength is a very powerful image for a child that can help to subvert the adult/child power structure. Children often feel that their small size correlates to a lack of power. But Holly, operating in the blurred distinction between physical and non-physical, is the most powerful character in the books.

Besides creating the miniature and powerful cyborg Holly, Colfer depicts a fictional world in which small people and children have the agency of adults. Artemis is a prepubescent teen in the series—yet he controls his own destiny very competently. Artemis is also the boss of the gigantic Butler, who is one of the few large characters in the series. In *Artemis Fowl*, the subversion of adult/child roles is made clear early on, when the narrator notes: "Passersby would have been amazed to hear the large Eurasian man [Butler] refer to the boy [Artemis] as *sir*" (3-4). Besides an occasional attempt of Butler's to make Artemis feel guilty about some of his more nefarious schemes, Artemis is also free of adult supervision throughout the series. And, as a child genius, Artemis is more competent than most of the adults around him. In *The Arctic Incident*, Artemis is forced to see Dr. Po, his school psychologist, but Artemis grows impatient at being

analyzed, knowing that "[h]e himself had read more psychology textbooks than the counselor. He had even contributed an article to *The Psychologist's Journal*, under the pseudonym Dr. F. Roy Dean Schlippe" (8). Later in the book, Colfer again subverts the stereotype of small size being linked to powerlessness when Artemis, Holly, Commander Root, and Butler go on a mission to save Artemis's father from the Russian mafia: "[. . .] the party emerged into the Arctic night looking for all the world like an adult and three children. Albeit three children with inhuman weaponry clanking under every loose fold of cloth" (119).

Colfer also uses his anti-cyborg figure Opal to subvert the adult/child dichotomy, as he ironically titles chapters "Daddy's Girl" in the the second and fourth books. In the books, daddy's girl turns out to be more powerful than either her real daddy or her chosen daddy. In *The Arctic Incident*, the narrator describes what might have been the ideal daughter for the Koboi family: "Born to a family of old-money pixies [. . .] she would have made her parents quite content had she attended private school, completed some wishy-washy arts degree, and married a suitable vice president" (72). The narrator continues with

the wishes of Opal's father: "Ferall Koboi's [. . .] dream daughter would have been moderately intelligent, quite pretty, and of course, complacent" (72). Colfer subverts the notion of the beautiful and passive daughter in having this daddy's girl, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, get a degree in engineering, and go on to bankrupt her father's business.

In *The Opal Deception*, Colfer depicts Opal as an ironic daddy's girl who has the agency to choose her own father and use her mesmer-her power that operates in the boundaries between the physical and non-physical—to force him to do her bidding. As Opal changes from fairy to human, she realizes that she needs a human with land to carry out her plan to harness the energy inside the earth (which will also cause the discovery of the fairies and possibly, their demise). She chooses a rich environmentalist to be her daddy: "Opal picked Giovanni Zito from her list of prospective puppets because of two things: Zito had a large fortune, and land directly above a huge high-grade hematite orebody" (244). Calling herself Belinda, Opal uses her mesmerizing powers on Zito, convincing him that he's adopted her, and also that he "would do anything for [his] darling Belinda" (249).

Possibly satirizing the power relationship between teachers and children, Opal also constantly corrects Zito's English usage. Once she's gotten him mesmerized to think that she is his daughter and that the imaginary adoption papers are in his bureau, Zito and Opal have this exchange:

"Belinda, my little girl. Papers are in bureau."

"The papers are in *the* bureau," corrected Opal. "If you persist with this baby talk I will have to punish you."

She wasn't joking. (251)

Colfer doesn't merely undermine the garden hierarchy; he replaces it with the virtual pastoral, creating a world in which the fear of technology is explored, but also in which, ultimately, technology is depicted as giving power to small people and children. McDonnell, in a chapter titled "Brave New Humans," discusses the controversy surrounding the television show *Teletubbies* when it first appeared, addressing both adults' fear of technology and adults' ideas on childhood innocence. She notes that ". . . the show seemed to stir some to an almost irrational level of outrage" with its depiction of "technological babies" inhabiting an "environment awash in high-tech devices . . ." (113). McDonnell argues that the cyborg-

like tv characters (creatures with televisions embedded in their stomachs) inhabiting what sounds like a virtual pastoral—"a Tubbytronic Superdome surrounded by a landscape dotted with strange devices that periodically pop out of the ground to issue directives from disembodied (albeit friendly sounding) voices" (113)—disturbed many adults. McDonnell brilliantly ties the idea of fear of technology to our fear that modern children may be losing their innocence:

I think the response to Teletubbies has to do with deeper fears about what's happening to childhood and concern that the show violates (or seems to violate) some of our most cherished notions. There's a widespread belief that children are supposed to grow up in Edwardian nurseries clutching teddy bears, not creatures that resemble chubby space aliens. Their stories are supposed to be set in a once-upon-a-time fairy tale backdrop, not in some futuristic dome. Teletubbies is more like something out of Brave New World than Mother Goose. (113-14)

McDonnell goes on to assert that Teletubbies make us fear that "machines might rob us of our humanity--indeed, that human beings are in danger of *becoming* machines" (114).

McDonnell then describes children's movement from the walled garden--or what she calls here the "Edwardian nursery"--to the virtual pastoral:

But the peculiar genius of *Teletubbies* comes from its creators' understanding that children don't share our fear of the new. Objects that look alien and futuristic to us look normal and familiar to them. [. . .] Kids are more comfortable with new technology than adults are, simply because they grow up with it. They have none of the same fears to overcome. (114)

Marc Prensky has a term for this new generation of children who are comfortable with technology: "digital natives" (as opposed to older people like myself who are "digital immigrants") (1). He writes of ways that teachers can better connect with and teach these new students, and notes, "They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age" (1). Prensky also observes that

Digital Natives are used to receiving their information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics *before* their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked.

(2)

Prensky argues that rather than resist new technology, teachers should embrace it and find new ways to work meaningfully with their students. Colfer, in the *Artemis Fowl* series, finds a new way to write books that may be meaningful to these digital natives.

In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway discusses the border region between organism and machine, and like her vision of the animal/human dualism, it is both complex and optimistic. Haraway recognizes that people are fearful of machines, but mostly because we fear their becoming autonomous. She argues that this fear exists because if machines did possess autonomy, it would subvert the nature/culture binary: "In short, the certainty of what counts as nature—a source of insight and promise of innocence—is undermined, probably fatally" (152-3). Similarly, adults may fear the new digital natives,



worrying that the adult vision of the garden of childhood will also be undermined. Haraway shows us a way to disrupt the garden hierarchy. She proposes that we don't need to be frightened by machines or approach the idea of autonomous machines with "cynicism or faithlessness" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 153).

Haraway might also agree that we needn't be frightened by a new generation of children empowered by the machine. She claims in the section on the organism/machine duality that "[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 152). But it may be that along with our machines, our children are also "disturbingly lively" in their comfort with and expertise in the use of technology. In *Artemis Fowl*, Colfer addresses both the issues of fear of technology and of a joyful embracing of technology through the characters Commander Root and Foaly. Root, as an older father figure type, is what Prensky would call a digital immigrant, and is somewhat dubious of technology. Root mourns the past in a way that hearkens to Haraway's idea of the false innocence of the Garden. Root's thoughts on technology are highlighted at one point in a dangerous mission:

Root emerged shaking from the pod. He didn't remember it being like this in his time. Although, truth be told, it had probably been an awful lot worse. Back in the shillelagh days, there were no fancy polymer harnesses, no auto thrusters, and certainly no external monitors. It was just gut instinct and a touch of enchantment. In some ways Root preferred it like that. Science was taking the magic out of everything. (94)

Root is sentimental for the days when technology wasn't so prevalent, but has to admit that things were "probably an awful lot worse."

On the other side of the spectrum is Foaly, a digital native who has invented most of the fairy technology. Foaly is often at odds with his supervisor, Root, and it is through technology that Foaly obtains agency. Foaly has real power over Root, which may account for some of Root's fear of technology, as he may primarily fear being made obsolete or having his job taken over by younger, more technologically adept fairies. At one point, Foaly makes Root put out his smelly cigar, claiming it will harm the computers (*Artemis Fowl* 78). Root, being unfamiliar with

the system, and thus losing agency in the situation, has to put the cigar out, even though he is almost certain that Foaly is just trying to torment him. Foaly later

smirked behind his hand. Driving up Root's blood pressure was one of the few perks of the job. No one else would dare to do it. That was because everybody else was replaceable. Not Foaly. He'd built the system from scratch, and if anyone else even tried to boot it up, a hidden virus would bring it crashing about their pointy ears. (80)

Young readers will surely appreciate the portrayal of Foaly and see the connection to their own lives—most of them are probably better at using computers and other electronic gadgets than their parents. Here, Colfer is not just showing how the boundary between organism and machine can be successfully navigated, but also how young people can use technology to subvert the adult/child binary and obtain agency equal to that of their parents.

Artemis, as another example of a digital native, also uses technology to gain agency. In *Artemis Fowl*, when Artemis has successfully translated the Fairy Book into English using several computer programs, he "could hear the blood pumping in his ears. He had them . . . Their every

secret would be laid bare by technology" (28). Though what Artemis does is highly immoral (and this is pointed out in the book), the computer technology is not presented as scary—it is a tool that Artemis uses to achieve his goal. Colfer, in his depiction of Artemis, and Haraway seem to have similar views on technology. At the end of "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway states:

The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (180)

Artemis embraces technology, and by the end of the novel comes to understand the boundaries, if not perfectly, a little better. Colfer talks about this in an interview with Judith Ridge. He's asked why he gets complaints about the first book in the series, and he says it is because Artemis "was a bad guy" (3). He goes on to explain, though, that Artemis is also "evolving through contact with other people . . . and he's making alliances with the fairy people and he's learning . . . he's seeing the effect of what he does on other people" (3). That is exactly what

Haraway is getting at, in her vision of the cyborg and her explorations of the borderlands: we need to see that humans are not separate or inherently superior entities and that we have an effect on everything in the world. As noted in Chapter Two, Trites comments that "Feminist power is more about being aware of one's own agency than it is about controlling other people" (8). Colfer, in depicting Artemis coming to terms with the amount of agency he *should* have, parallels Trites's notion in terms of child power.

As I noted in Chapter One, an optimistic Douglas Rushkoff calls today's young people "postmodern kids." He also argues that they are our "evolutionary future" (qtd. in McDonnell 121). And Haraway writes: "Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival" (CM 153). Colfer's novels, though they exist in fantasy, offer partial answers. In the *Artemis Fowl* books, Colfer celebrates new technologies rather than being afraid of them, and creates postmodern literature for postmodern digital natives. Haraway might have another term for these young people—cyborgs.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE HIERARCHY OF TEXTS

When I've talked to people about this thesis, an almost universal response even among people with graduate degrees in literature is first, surprise at the fact that serious scholarly work exists in the field of children's literature and fairy tales, and second, the attitude that if a person has children, he or she is automatically an expert in children's literature—and that serious scholarship of children's literature is therefore perhaps unnecessary. This attitude would be similar to that of a person who has read a book thinking that she or he is an automatic expert in the field of literary criticism.

Similar to how children are sometimes treated as an other by adults, children's literature is also often treated as being of poor quality compared to literature for adults. Peter Hunt notes that there exists "an unbroken value scale running from adult classics to rubbish for children, with acceptably second-rate adult books and the best possible children's books sharing the same rung" (35). And McDonnell, who writes children's fiction, notes that

children's literature is "ghettoized," and that "[j]uvenile fiction is considered a lower life-form" (83).

Above is the first of four positions my research has revealed that relate to the part of the hierarchy of texts containing the dichotomy between children's literature and literature for adults. In this chapter I'd like to briefly analyze those positions: 1) that children's literature is substandard compared to literature for adults; 2) that the only good children's literature is that which can also be enjoyed by adults; 3) that children's literature that appeals to adults is not good for children; and 4) that good children's literature can be enjoyed by adults, as long as the writer's prime intention seems to be to write for a child audience. I'll advocate the fourth position, which Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series seems to exemplify. I'll also analyze—through the theoretical lens of Kenneth Burke—the part of the hierarchy of texts in which a power imbalance exists between adult writers of children's books and the child reader, and note the ways that Colfer subverts this part of the hierarchy.

The second position is illustrated by what W. H. Auden and C. S. Lewis have written about children's literature. Auden noted that "there are good books which are only for

adults . . . there are no good books that are only for children" and Lewis argued, "I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story" (qtd. in Hunt 43). This position recognizes that some children's literature can be high quality, but it imposes adult standards of value on children's literature. Worse, this position strips children of the agency of personal taste in what they like and don't like. Hunt analyzes Peter Dickinson's article "In Defence of Rubbish," in which Dickinson argues that perhaps what adults consider to be low-quality work is not always without value to a child (56). Hunt notes: "The adult eye is not necessarily a perfect instrument for discerning certain sorts of values" (56).

Several children's literature experts and reviewers advocate the third position. Virginie Douglas, for instance, criticizes what she calls Colfer's "commercial opportunism" in creating "crossover books intending to appeal to both children and adults" (2). Some people in the children's literature world dislike the current trend of books—like Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, as another example of crossover books—being purposefully marketed to a dual audience, and think that the writers set out to create



literature that is only intended to bring in big profits. This position seems to recognize the value in books written solely for children, but denigrates writers like Colfer and Rowling whose writing appeals to both children and adults, whether this is intended by the writer or not. This view may be based on what I called the garden hierarchy in Chapter Three, a view that encourages the protection of children at the cost of their agency and their being separated from adults in most activities.

The fourth position seems to blur the distinctions between children's and adults' books. In *Don't Tell the Grownups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature*, Alison Lurie writes about the success that Ford Madox Ford enjoyed in publishing his fairy tales that were meant for a dual audience, and she seems to applaud writers who intentionally write for both children and adults. She notes that in Victorian England, "The line between adult and juvenile fiction was less strict than it is now" and that it wasn't unusual for major writers like Dickens, Thackeray, Christina Rossetti, and Wilde to write fairy stories and children's stories (75).

Colfer continues the tradition of writers like Ford and Wilde, who wrote subversive fairy tales for children,

but whose stories were also enjoyed by adults. In an interview with Craig McDonald, on being asked how he perceives his audience, Colfer mentions that he writes "the kind of books I would have liked to read as a kid" (2).

Colfer also says that he recognizes that adults may be reading his books along with children or aloud to children, so he

saw no reason not to throw in a few references and jokes for them. But, again, that's an area where you do have to be careful. If it becomes too knowing, then it can swamp the book. Just a couple of little references. [. . .] [Y]ou can go too far and then it becomes an adult book and that's not what I want. (2)

Colfer later says, "I think the secret of getting an adult readership is not to look for them" (3). From these statements, and from the content of the works themselves, I conclude that while Colfer writes books that *appeal* to an adult audience, he is not writing *for* an adult audience.

Colfer writes for children—and in doing so, creates what Peter Hunt might call true "childist" literature—literature that "allow[s] the reader precedence over the book" (198).

Isobel Jan notes that critics judge children's literature

by "academic standards," and concern themselves too much with whether a certain book "is or is not 'literature', is or is not 'well-written'" and argues that "[s]cholastic disputes of this order only disguise the truth which is that such works exist in their own right and not as rungs on a ladder to adult reading" (qtd. in Hunt 44). I'd like to analyze some of the ways in which Colfer writes for children, creating books that "exist in their own right," and thus subverts the hierarchy in which children's literature is subordinate to literature intended for adults.

Hunt quotes Annette Kolodny who asserts that since reading is a learned activity, it is also "sex-coded and gender-inflected" like other interpretive activities (192). Hunt goes on to argue that "[i]t is quite possible, then, that in playing the literary/reading game, children are progressively forced to read against themselves as children" (Hunt, 192). Colfer doesn't require his readers to read against themselves as children—rather, he allows his readers to read as children, and possibly, against adult culture. Colfer employs humor—often scatological—and irony as rhetorical techniques intended to allow a child reader the agency to create what Burke calls an audience

member's "own audience" (1336), thus equalizing the power structure between adult writer and child reader.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes that a "rhetoric of identification" is necessary to persuade an audience (1336), but also argues that even when the audience member is identified with the rhetorician, "he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate . . ." (1325). Burke links identification to division to show how they can both be part of persuasion. He mentions Freud's views on jokes, and notes that the "purest rhetorical pattern" is two people making a joke about a third person: "speaker and hearer as partners in partisan jokes made at the expense of another" (1335). Colfer uses this technique in some of his unusual similes, and thus identifies with his young audience. For example, in *The Arctic Incident*, Colfer describes the centaur Foaly having what Americans would call a light-bulb moment when he realizes that he's been duped by the evil Opal: "The penny dropped. A big penny with a clang louder than a dwarf's underpants hitting a wall" (141). Besides bringing a dead metaphor back to life, Colfer here combines scatological humor with a simile that serves to connect the writer and reader in a shared

joke against the dwarf (and his personal hygiene or lack thereof).

The simile identifies the reader more closely with the fictional world, but there is another layer at which Burke's theory on inclusion and exclusion works: Colfer and his reader are also enjoying a shared joke at the expense of adult-enforced standards of taste. Even if the joke is not directed at a third excluded party (the dwarf can be seen as a generic dwarf), the third is present in the excluded adult. And perhaps this makes the joke even better, because not only is the reader laughing at the joke itself, but perhaps delighting in the fact that it excludes (or seems to exclude) parents, teachers, and other authority figures.

Burke connects not just the ideas of identification with persuasion, but also persuasion with indoctrination. He discusses the idea of the self as its own audience, and argues that indoctrination cannot take place without the cooperation of this inner self:

The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of

identification. To act upon himself persuasively, he must variously resort to images and ideas that are formative. Education ('indoctrination') exerts such pressure from without: he completes the process from within. If he does not somehow act to tell himself (as his own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only the voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within. (1336)

In both traditional (what Zipes calls "civilizing") children's literature and subversive children's literature, the rhetoric of identification is used. Traditional children's literature often accomplishes this by creating a child protagonist with whom the child reader can identify. However, traditional literature also indoctrinates, teaching a reader that good things will happen to a "good" child, and bad things will happen to a "bad" child (a child who has poor manners or hygiene, or behavior that adults don't like or that is outside societal norms). Hunt argues that indoctrinating literature is "lisible" or "readerly" with the author exerting a huge amount of control over the

text, making the reader into a passive consumer of the text (83). At the other end of the spectrum, which we can identify with subversive literature, are "scriptable" or "writerly" texts—in which the reader has to do some work to make sense of the text, but also has some agency in deciding what the text means to her or him (Hunt 83). The "lisible" text seeks to make the child behave as the text says he or she should, indoctrinating the child to current societal norms, while the "scriptable" text may disrupt the indoctrination process that Burke writes of, causing the reader to reject the outer pressures of persuasion by having control over her or his own self-audience.

Colfer writes a scriptable text, partly through what reviewer Judie Newman calls his "pared-down" writing style: "[Colfer's writing has] the virtues of a script or scenario; events are replayable in the reader's head with the individual's own imaginative additions and interpretations" (2). She also writes:

Nobody in this novel sits down to explain over several pages all their past history; the reader is allowed to use personal initiative to make the connections . . . The mode is interactive, not passive. (2)

One aspect of Colfer's writing style is his use of often satiric sentence fragments. When I first read these novels in adult English-major mode, I wondered about what I considered to be the writer's overuse of sentence fragments. Sometimes annoying. But perhaps Colfer's "pared-down" writing style that includes lots of humorous sentence fragments makes the text accessible to developing or reluctant readers without condescending to them. While easy to read, a sentence fragment can seem edgy, where "See Spot run" cannot. More importantly, though, Colfer's sentence fragments are part of what makes these texts scriptable, leaving connections for the reader to make.

When Colfer introduces Holly Short in *Artemis Fowl*, he employs sentence fragments in a stream-of-consciousness narrative to create a humorous description of Holly's uniform and her generally churlish attitude towards humans:

The fairy suited up, zipping the dull-green jumpsuit up to her chin and strapping on her helmet. LEPrecon uniforms were stylish these days. Not like that top-o'-the-morning costume the force had to wear back in the old days. Buckled shoes and knickerbockers! Honestly. Still, probably better that way. If the Mud



People knew that the word "leprechaun" actually originated from LEPrecon, an elite branch of the Lower Elements Police, they'd probably take steps to stamp them out. Better to stay inconspicuous and let the humans have their stereotypes. (33).

Hunt writes that "originality, or freshness, is something which potentially opens the mind, and [. . .] it can be detected in single sentences" (117). In the few short sentences above, Colfer creates an original, fresh vision of the high-tech fairy, connects that vision to our stereotype of the old-fashioned leprechaun, and makes the reader aware that human-created stereotypes can be misleading. The humorous sentence fragments appeal to the audience, catching it off guard, and while the audience is off guard, Colfer delivers a serious message about stereotypes. Here, Colfer is identifying with and persuading his audience, but it seems to me that he is not indoctrinating the audience. Through throwing out the idea of stereotypes in a humorous way, and in a fantasy world, Colfer leaves it up to the reader to connect—or, just as important to some readers; not connect—the stereotype of the old-fashioned leprechaun to other, more dangerous stereotypes we promote in our world.

Colfer also creates a scriptable text through his use of the carnivalesque—Bakhtin's term for

a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the traditional literary canon through humor and chaos [. . .] lampooning and overturning [. . .] traditional hierarchies and values by mingling 'high culture' with the profane. (Childers 38-9)

Colfer creates this subversive mode around the humorous character Mulch Diggums. Mulch is introduced in *Artemis Fowl* as a "kleptomaniac dwarf" (161) whose physical attributes are explained:

For those unfamiliar with dwarf tunneling, I shall endeavor to explain them as tastefully as possible. [. . .] [D]warf males can unhinge their jaws, allowing them to ingest several pounds of earth a second. This material is processed by a superefficient metabolism, stripped of any useful minerals and . . . ejected at the other end, as it were. Charming. (162)

We later learn that Mulch also ejects copious amounts of dwarf gas, which he uses to surprise and disarm the much larger Butler: "Mulch was not one bit surprised that his

recyclings had managed to hurl the elephantine Mud Man several yards through the air. Dwarf gas had been known to cause avalanches in the Alps" (193). Colfer's narrator evinces disgust at Mulch's digestive system while explaining it in detail, in a falsely regretful, "tasteful" manner, which serves to subvert the binary between "high" and "low" art, and again allows the young reader to enjoy a joke at the expense of adult mores.

And there's another way in which Colfer's depiction of Mulch allows the child reader agency. Because Mulch literally digs through the earth everywhere he goes, he symbolizes the ultimate escape from the walled garden of childhood. Not only does his digestive system give him power over bigger creatures than himself (like Butler in the scene described above), but he can dig out of any enclosure or into any building he wants to. And, in highlighting Mulch's digestive system in a humorous manner, Colfer creates literature that may enable young people to talk openly and joke about their own digestive processes, rather than being ashamed of them.

Guilbert argues, in a review comparing the *Artemis Fowl* books to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books:

Colfer has his People being compelled to put up like the Mud People with the PC police, but in many ways, he is more politically correct as a novelist than Rowling. It is easy to read Rowling as a nostalgic, white supremacist, capitalist, antifeminist, eurocentric conservative; while Colfer is clearly none of that. Colfer's narrator is sometimes on the side of the grotesque dwarf; Rowling's never is. Colfer resorts to irony much more frequently than Rowling. (3)

In his affectionate and ironic portrayal of the dwarf Mulch Diggums, Colfer is also on the side of the child, subverting the power structure between adult writer and child reader.

Hunt writes, "There is no reason why children's books should not be included within the same respectable canon [as literature for adults] [. . .] or studied with the same rigor [. . .] Equally, there is no reason why another, different, and parallel discourse should not be created to deal with children's literature. The only real question is one of status, and that is a matter of power" (55). In addition to the power imbalance between the two types of

literature, Hunt writes that there is often a power imbalance between the writer and the readers of children's books, and that children's literature often "prescribes what the reader *must* be" (84). Colfer, through writing books intended for children but that adults can also enjoy, and through various humorous techniques that *don't* prescribe what the child must be, subverts both power imbalances embodied in the hierarchy of texts. Zipes writes that transfigured tales (traditional fairy tales that are rewritten to become liberating tales) "are geared to make readers aware that civilization and life itself are processes which can be shaped to fulfill basic needs of the readers" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 180). Colfer writes liberating tales that make readers aware of their own agency, thus creating children's books that may fulfill some of the needs of young readers, rather than indoctrinating them to the adult status quo.

### Conclusion

Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, I've had trouble deciding which terms to embrace—subversive, liberatory, feminist, childist, postmodern? Though not synonymous, all these terms apply to Colfer's

*Artemis Fowl* books in different ways. And the theorists who use these terms and Donna Haraway, in her vision of the cyborg, do have in common a central idea: that we should look toward an existence in which we can begin to break down dualisms between male/female, adult/child, animal/human, and machine/organism, to envision a better kind of existence not just for the privileged few, but for all. The children's literature theorists have in common the idea that adults need to invent a way of presenting these ideas to children in books, not as a condescension to marginalized, "innocent" others, but as important ideas to intellectually capable, technologically adept young people who need increasing agency to create their future worlds. While I like the terms "subversive," "postmodern," "feminist," and "childist" as bringing progressive critical viewpoints to children's literature, I particularly like Zipes's term "liberatory," which alludes not just to an overturning or a negation of the status quo, but to offering a positive-freedom. Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series, while it can be labeled all the terms listed above, is most importantly *liberatory* to young readers, offering an alternate vision of what our world could become if compassionate and oppositional young people—in the image of

the cyborg—worked together to disrupt hierarchies and binaries that cause social injustice.

In *Honey We Lost the Kids: Rethinking Childhood in the Multimedia Age*, McDonnell notes that we haven't lost the kids, but we are losing "the old idea of childhood" which is "a set of assumptions that don't match up with contemporary realities—new technology and mass media, fallen taboos, changing family structures, recognition of rights of children" (19). Part of what we may also be losing is the idea of strict hierarchies based upon gender, race, income, sexual orientation, and age. Haraway writes:

[A] cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 154)

I believe that future generations of young people—digital natives—who can obtain the agency to find fissures in the walled garden of childhood are people who might engage

fully in this political struggle, and thus live in a world in which multiple perspectives are considered. McDonnell writes of the Echo generation (the children of the Baby Boomers) that through their natural compassion and comfort with the new, "[m]any kids also have a comfort with diversity that their elders can only dream of" and that "[t]hey also have an unprecedented awareness of world issues" (176). And Hunt notes of children in general, "They will be more open to genuinely radical thought and the ways of understanding texts [. . .]. They are less bound by fixed schemas, and in this sense see more clearly" (57). Colfer's texts give readers a chance to see possibilities clearly and to perhaps engage in some radical, optimistic thought.

Jack Zipes writes:

It has been demonstrated by psychologists and educators time and again that stories and fairy tales do influence the manner in which children conceive the world and their places in it even before they begin to read. [. . .] [S]tory characters become part of a child's 'real world' and form part of their cultural heritage. Thus,



tales play an important role in early

socialisation. (*Don't Bet on the Prince* xii)

Part of the socialization of the classical tales includes teaching children that they should give up their agency and that they should accept and eventually learn to construct dualisms and hierarchies that advocate treating some people—perhaps even their own future children—and creatures as inferior others. Liberatory children's literature offers at least a partial antidote to this form of socialization.

McDonnell asserts:

Kids want respect. They want to be useful. And they *do* want to learn what we have to teach them. But they don't want to be shunted into some rarified world of their own. They want to take part in the full life of the human community.

(190)

Liberatory children's literature can be part of what adults have to teach children. As writers, critics, and purchasers of children's literature, adults can encourage children to seek out liberatory children's books, like Colfer's novels, that allow young people the agency to create a better human community—a community that Haraway might call a cyborg world.

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