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Kids Take Charge:
Reflections on an Emergent Motif in School Stories for Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the kids-take-charge (KTC) motif within recent school stories produced for young adult audiences, situated in terms of a genealogy of school stories. The corpus of school stories includes English- and French-language works produced as fiction, film, or life-writing, both for teens and adults in Canada, the US, and the UK. This thesis identifies the historical and ideological shifts that may have given rise to the motif. School stories lend themselves to the identification of some of the distinct models of selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ that have figured prominently in works about and for adolescents in various sociocultural contexts. The research question that is asked is: Why is this type of story emerging now, and what social purposes might it serve? The question is inspired by the possible impact of power relations on youth in society, discussed in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* by Roberta Trites, who suggests that power is everywhere in young adult literature because power is the key category of the adolescent experience. The thesis also draws on the work of theorists such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Beverly Lyon Clark, Henry Giroux, George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, among others.

The corpus includes the following works: *The Lightning Thief*, part of the Percy Jackson series by American author Rick Riordan; *Schooled*, by Canadian-born author Gordon Korman; the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling; *High School Musical*, a film that appeared in movie theatres and was shown on the Disney Channel; *Harriet’s Daughter* by M. NourbeSe Philip; and variations on the classic residential and early school stories as they travelled to the New World, such as Louisa May Alcott's *Jo's Boys*; Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown School Days*, LM Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, and Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, among other works.

Chapter One establishes the contours of the KTC motif via a variety of contemporary fictional works for young adults through contrasting the stories of change-making by young adults in these works with patterns found both in classic British school stories of the 19th century and in early Canadian and American variations on the theme. The chapter explores what it means for young people to achieve an adult sense of self, and what resources they are expected to engage in the process. The chapter also examines the kinds of models of youth selfhood and emerging adulthood that can be linked to the KTC motif.

In Chapter Two, I argue that a qualitatively new motif concerning power and agency has emerged within a number of school stories produced over the past two decades. As I identify it, the KTC motif is characterized by three defining features, whether it appears in works of fantasy or realism. First, the central protagonist must confront a problem or crisis of systemic importance; how this challenge is resolved will affect an entire school, community, or even—in works of fantasy—the fate of entire worlds. Second, stories that feature the KTC motif generally de-emphasize the importance of adult mentors in preparing young people for, and guiding them through, these challenges. Third, the KTC motif enshrines a particular notion of the ‘authentic self’ as the source of personal power and agency: victory is assured only insofar as the central protagonist becomes and remains ‘true’ to himself or herself. Finally, I ask what the vision of power and agency implicit in the KTC motif could mean for young people as they move toward becoming adult actors in a complex and globalizing world.

In Chapter Three, I examine questions that enable me to access the model of social change, comparing these accounts to a narrative of social change in the broader world. I also assess how adolescents are liable to view and interpret their own experiences through a global

lens as prodigious consumers of narratives produced in a global culture. This chapter assesses the extent to which social forms of difference and inequality, such as gender, race, and class, are integrated into presentation of the problem and strategy/solution within the KTC motif, and how social changes are encouraged by young protagonists.

In the KTC motif, I find that self-actualization brings power—and power from within trumps power from without, at least within cultures based on Western individualism. Exceptions are discussed through the examples of narratives based on Caribbean-Canadian identities (Norbese-Philip) and on indigenous identities. Contemporary school stories that follow the KTC motif continue to have a moralizing or didactic bent, in keeping with a trend in YA literature that underlines the agency of youth protagonists over that of adults. Where the classic school story ultimately affirms the existing order, the KTC motif suggests that the existing power order is corrupt. I suggest that the KTC motif may in part reflect the needs of a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy, in which people are flexible, self-motivated, and willing to believe that whether they succeed or fail depends not on the soundness of institutions, but on the strength of their own unique talents and even their personal 'authenticity.'

Keywords: Young adult literature, school narratives, agency, comparative canadian literature, youth culture, empowerment, self definition, kids take charge (KTC), resistance

Résumé

Dans cette thèse, j'explore le modèle de l'enfant qui prend charge "kids-take-charge (KTC)", à travers des récits produits pour des audiences de jeunes adultes, en termes de généalogie de récits scolaires. Le corpus des récits scolaires inclut des travaux en anglais et en français produits comme science-fiction, film ou faits vécus, pour les adolescents et les adultes du Canada, des États-Unis et le Royaume-Uni. Cette thèse identifie les changements historiques et idéologiques qui ont pu causer la naissance de ce modèle. Les récits scolaires ont mené à l'identification de certains modèles distincts d'individualité et "coming into one's own" qui ont figurés principalement dans les travaux sur et pour les adolescents dans des contextes socioculturels variés. La questionrecherche qui est posée est : pourquoi ce genre d'histoire émerge maintenant, et quel but social peut-il servir ? La question est inspirée par l'impact possible du pouvoir des relations sur la jeunesse dans la société, examiné dans *Disturbing the Universe : Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* par Roberta Trites, qui suggère que le pouvoir est partout et la littérature de jeunes adultes parce que le pouvoir est la catégorie clé de l'expérience des adolescents. Cette thèse nous amène aussi au travail des théoriciens comme Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Beverly Lyon Clark, Henry Giroux, George Herbert Mead et Charles Horton Cooley parmi tant d'autres. Le corpus inclut les travaux suivants : *The Lightning Thief*, partie de la série Percy Jackson des auteurs américains Rick Riordan; *Schooled*, de l'auteur canadien Gordon Korman; la série des Harry Potter de JK Rowling; *High School Musical*, un film qui est apparu sur les écrans de cinéma et qui a été diffusé sur la chaîne Disney ; *Harriet's Daughter* de M. NourbeSe Philip; et variations des classiques sur les pensionnats et récits scolaires qui ont voyagé dans le temps, comme Louisa May Alcott's *Jo's Boys*; Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown School Days*, LM Montgomery's *Anne of*

Green Gables, and Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, pour ne nommer que ceux-là. Le chapitre 1 établit les contours du motif "KTC" à travers une variété d'œuvres de fiction contemporaines pour jeunes adultes en contrastant les histoires des changements faits par les jeunes adultes dans ces travaux avec des modèles trouvés dans les classiques récits scolaires britanniques du 19^e siècle et dans les premières variations canadiennes et américaines sur le sujet. Le chapitre examine également les types de modèles d'individualité des adolescents et jeunes adultes qui peuvent être liés au motif "KTC".

Au chapitre 2, je soutiens qu'un relativement nouveau concept concernant le pouvoir et l'agence est apparu dans un certain nombre de récits scolaires produits dans les deux dernières décennies. Comme je conceptualise le motif KTC, 3 fonctions bien définies que ce soit dans les œuvres de fantaisie ou le réalisme. Premièrement, le personnage central doit affronter un problème ou une crise d'importance systémique ; comment ce défi est résolu affectera une école entière, une communauté ou même – dans les œuvres de fantaisie – le destin du monde entier.

Deuxièmement, les récits qui représentent le concept KTC insistent généralement moins de l'importance de mentors adultes dans la préparation et la supervision des jeunes à affronter ces défis. Troisièmement, le concept KTC conserve la notion particulière du "soi authentique" comme source du pouvoir personnel et agentivité : la victoire est assurée seulement dans la mesure où le protagoniste central devient et demeure "vrai" pour lui et elle-même. Finalement, je demande qu'est-ce que la vision du pouvoir et de l'agentivité du concept du KTC implique pour les jeunes lorsqu'ils deviennent des acteurs adultes dans un monde complexe et globalisé.

Au chapitre 3, j'examine les questions qui me permettent d'accéder au modèle du changement social en comparant les explications du changement social dans un monde plus large. J'évalue aussi comment les adolescents sont susceptibles de voir et d'interpréter leur propre expérience à

travers une lentille globale comme consommateurs prodigieux de récits produits dans une culture mondiale. Ce chapitre évalue la mesure dans laquelle les différentes formes sociales et l'inégalité, comme le sexe, la race et la classe sociale sont intégrés dans la présentation du problème et la stratégie/solution dans le motif KTC et comment les changements sociaux sont encouragés par les jeunes protagonistes.

Dans le motif KTC, je constate que le développement personnel apporte le pouvoir – et le pouvoir de l'intérieur est un atout du pouvoir de l'extérieur, au moins dans les cultures basées sur l'individualisme occidental. Les exceptions sont traitées dans les exemples de récits basés sur les identités Caraïbes-canadiennes (Norbèse-Philip) et sur les identités indigènes. Les récits scolaires contemporains qui suivent le motif KTC continuent d'avoir un penchant moralisateur ou didactique, conformément à une tendance dans la littérature jeunesse qui souligne l'agentivité des jeunes protagonistes sur celui des adultes. Où l'histoire scolaire classique affirme en fin de compte l'ordre établi, le motif KTC suggère que le pouvoir établi est corrompu. Je suggère que le motif KTC peut en partie refléter les besoins d'une économie post-industrielle basée sur la connaissance dans laquelle les gens sont flexibles, motivés et décidés à croire que s'ils réussissent ou non dépend pas de la force des institutions, mais de leur force de caractère et même de leur propre "authenticité".

Mots-clés: fiction pour jeunes adultes, récits scolaires, agentivité, Littérature canadienne comparée, culture jeunesse, résistance, définition de soi, kids take charge (KTC)

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My father, Jim Malisch, was a man I admired and feared but mostly just loved. He was a hardworking man, and a father that protected my brother and me passionately. My mother, Laurie Walls, is a strong-spirited woman with a temper to match. I love her dearly and never relinquished the desire to continue living with her and my brother in our childhood home in Toronto.

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Introduction

In her groundbreaking work, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Trites suggests that power is everywhere in young adult literature because power is the key dynamic of the adolescent experience (6). Adolescents are learning their place in power-laden social hierarchies; experiencing the tensions of power within friendships and romantic relationships; bullying and being bullied (Trites 4-45). Young adult (YA) literature offers one place adolescents can turn to interpret their world and the workings of power within it; school stories, in particular, offer the chance to think through how the school is a microcosm of power relations in the larger society. Teachers, in this context, take on a parental role, but ultimately may be said to have even more power over the student than their parents, in that they oversee the student's social life, social formation, access to and the acquisition of important social and cognitive information and skills, and thereby much of their ability to succeed. By using theories of power, such as those offered by Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, Trites suggests we can crack apart the power relations within YA stories and help teens use these stories to better reflect on their own experiences.

Trites builds her argument based largely on YA literature of the 1970s and '80s.¹ In setting out to develop a thesis topic, my initial goal was to pick up where Trites left off and

¹ Note that Trites' work, *Disturbing the Universe*, is not solely about school stories, but about young adult (YA) fiction. Not all school stories are written for YA audiences, and not all YA fiction centres on the school experience. That said, there is a vibrant, longstanding interplay between the two categories; indeed, the first English-language work published for young people—Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy*, published in 1749, is also considered the first full work of the classic school story narrative form (Clark 325).

analyze power relations within more contemporary school stories from Canada and the US and extend

her inquiry to French texts by Québécois authors. What I refer to as school stories are YA stories that take place in educational environments. I use the term “school story” to comprise both “school story” YA works, as well as texts that 1) focus on young protagonists and 2) feature school as a primary site of action in the story or use education, school-based conflicts, and/or the influence of school or teachers as a major catalyst for action. These texts include not only written works, but film, videos, and television shows.

What I found, as I read and watched a number of recent YA school stories, was that the teen protagonists of some of these stories seemed to embody a new form of power that represents a shift in power from the educator to the child. In a variety of settings, from fantasy to realistic fiction, I encountered young adult characters solving grave social problems—or even saving entire worlds—more or less single-handedly, with unsettling levels of aplomb. They did so, moreover, less by applying skills gained from adults, than simply by being 'true to themselves.' From British fantasy author J. K. Rowling's character, Harry Potter; to Troy Bolton, star of Disney's global *High School Musical* franchise; to Percy Jackson, the central protagonist of American author Rick Riordan's *Heroes of Olympus* YA fantasy series; to Capricorn Anderson, the central protagonist of a YA novel, *Schooled*, by Canadian-born author Gordon Korman: kids appear to be taking charge and saving the day, largely just by being their most 'authentic' selves. Tentatively I dubbed what I was seeing 'kids-take-charge' (KTC) motif, and this motif moved to the centre of my research.

In this thesis, I explore the KTC motif within recent fiction and film school stories produced for YA audiences. I situate it in terms of the genealogy of the school story, through a discussion that includes treatment of English- and French-language works produced both for teens and adults in Canada, the US, and the UK. I explore the historical and ideological shifts that may have given rise to the motif. I ask: Why is this type of story emerging now, and what social purposes might it serve? I suggest that the KTC motif may in part reflect the needs of a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy, in which people are flexible, self-motivated, and willing to believe that whether they succeed or fail depends not on the soundness of institutions, but on the strength of their own unique talents and even their personal 'authenticity.' The primary question is, therefore, what stories of power are being told within contemporary school stories produced for young adult (YA) audiences, and what if anything do these stories suggest about larger social shifts? While my approach to this question is comprehensive, I will explore it through an assessment of a corpus of school stories. This corpus will include the following works to examine KTC motif and its usage and meanings and to establish its contours.

The Lightning Thief, part of the wildly popular “Percy Jackson” series by American author Rick Riordan, is pure fantasy: Jackson is a poor student beset with severe ADHD and dyslexia who comes to learn he is actually a “demi-god” or “half-blood” son of a human mother and the Greek god Poseidon (Riordan). After gaining this knowledge he became a student at “Camp Half-Blood,” a training ground for demi-gods that, like Hogwarts in the Harry Potter books bears many resemblances to the early British vision of a boarding school.

Schooled, by Canadian-born author Gordon Korman, is the story of an isolated teen, home-schooled by a hippie grandmother, who is suddenly thrust into the harsh social world of a

large public middle school. *Schooled* could not be more different from *The Lightning Thief* in a number of respects. It is realistic fiction, not fantasy. While it is a well-regarded YA novel and was also published by a Disney imprint, it hardly has the profile of the Percy Jackson works, which are being serialized as blockbuster films. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the thesis, these two very different works bear key similarities in terms of how the central teen protagonists manage crises, and in terms of where the source of their personal power lies.

The Harry Potter series (Rowling) comprises seven fantasy novels set in a magical world that runs parallel to the world of the non-magical humans, or “muggles” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 7). The central dilemma that evolves over the course of the series is of earth-shattering importance: struggle against a vast evil force that threatens to engulf both the magical and muggle realms of existence.

High School Musical by contrast, is a film that appeared in movie theatres and was shown on the Disney Channel (Power 1). Moreover, the central dilemma in the non-fantasy narrative of *High School Musical* is, not surprisingly, far more mundane. Central protagonists must confront the balkanization of social life into stereotypical groupings like ‘jock’ and ‘nerd,’ within the context of their US high school in the Southwestern US.

Harriet’s Daughter, by M. NourbeSe Philip, examines how youth's perception and exercise of their self-efficacy can be grounded in discourses of power and language through the story of Margaret, a first generation Canadian of Bajan descent who sees herself as the descendant of Harriet Tubman, who led hundreds of slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad during the American Civil War. This narrative is aligned with the narrative's rather

realistic representation of a contestatory approach to play and of the role of play and female friendship, based on the way in which schoolyard play emerges. It is also connected with a theme of the self-education of the protagonist. The narrative in this novel provides evidence of Margaret's struggle against being sent back to the Caribbean to be schooled and disciplined in the traditional sense, and therefore it provides a unique view of the challenges to autonomy that schools are perceived to represent from the point of view of youth.

A range of other primary texts are used to establish the contours of the classic school story (including Hughes' *Tom Brown School Days*) and variations on the classic story as it travelled to the New World (e.g., Alcott's *Jo's Boys*; Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*; Connor's *Glengarry School Days*). Comparisons are also offered with the grittier school stories that began to appear in the 1960s and '70s.

The research question is examined via the following framework and working hypothesis. A key emergent motif in contemporary school stories, both fiction and video/film, is one in which the central teen protagonist is able to solve grave—sometimes even global—crises, and where the ultimate key to their power is learning to be 'true to themselves. The KTC motif differs from earlier school stories from 19th and early 20th century Canada, Britain, and the US, which emphasize the moral training that protagonists receive in schools and depict students taking their proper place in the existing social order by emulating accepted or hegemonic adult role models (as, for example, in the works of Fielding; Hughes; Alcott; Connor; and Garrard). The KTC motif, by contrast, suggests that teen protagonists must contest and redeem the existing social order, and that they can best do so by being their most 'authentic' selves, rather than by emulating adults around them. The motif, as I am identifying it, also departs from the example of gritty

English- and French-language (Québécois) novels for and/or about adolescents that emerged in Canada and the US in the 1960s and '70s (for example, works by Cormier). In these stories, the social order was often painted as corrupt and in need of change, but success was not nearly so easy to achieve as in stories featuring the KTC motif.

The emerging kids-take-charge (KTC) motif has been enabled by several historical trends: the decline of church influence over education, corporal punishment, and other factors that emphasized obedience to authority within the educational realm; the rise of the use of Progressivism theory in education, which placed central importance on the student's inner world and experience (Baker; El-Bassiouny, Tamer and Aisha; Elliott and MacLennan; Ellsworth; Quart); and the ascent of teens and younger 'tweens', those typically over the age of ten but not yet teenagers, as a key consumer segment (Alsup; Arnett ; El-Bassiouny, Taher, and Abou-Aish; Giroux and Pollock ; Haddad and Atassi; Kjeldegaard and Askegaard). In earlier periods it may have been less desirable to emphasize adolescents' inner lives or to suggest their power came from within, given both economic and ecclesiastical pressures to raise children who knew how to behave 'properly' and conform to social expectations. Now, with the need for creative, self-driven individuals able to contend with a flexible and ever-shifting cultural frame, it may be more desirable to tell stories that emphasize how success or failure depends on adolescents' inner resources and personal initiative.

Agency is a significant part of the process. In line with Emirbayer and Mische, I understand agency to mean not merely purposeful action directed toward a specific social outcome, but action that is temporally grounded. Actors, on this account, are caught up in the flow of "time as constituted through emergent events, which require a continual refocusing of

past and future, and the concept of human consciousness as constituted through sociality, the capacity to be both temporally and relationally in a variety of systems at once” (Emirbayer and Mische 968). This way of approaching agency is further treated below in discussion of my application of close reading to works written, by and large, for young adults. Even without embracing a concept such as “self-efficacy” (Bandura 122-23), it is possible simply to note that western psychology associates the *lack* of a durable sense of self with a host of clinical problems, from identity crisis to psychosis (Akhtar 25-44). In my selected corpus there is a direct connection between the process of engaging in self-knowledge or self-discovery that lends itself to protagonists’ discovery of their own power and agency. Accordingly, some researchers suggest we teach young readers to critically engage in fictional accounts in order to tacitly examine their own lives from external points of view (Bean and Moni 644-46). However, Bean and Rigoni neither identify nor tease apart the various models of identity and selfhood present in YA works; moreover, they assume, *a priori*, that teen readers themselves operate according to a specific, postmodern model of selfhood (640-42).

Children, and thus young readers, may operate within a framework of agency that allows them to have power in spite of that which is wielded over them by adults, and in this way allows them to act within, and because of, their own ability to take the power they need. As Richard Flynn explains, when children, in a general sense, “exercise agency” either on their own or as a part of a collective effort, this does not mean that they do so autonomously and outside of the influence of adults. Nonetheless, he writes, these “actions, however, are not necessarily confined to the framework adults provide; children’s frameworks often extend beyond the ones provided by adults in charge, including, for instance, their interaction with material objects and other

children” (Flynn 257). What this claim suggests is that there is evidence of a lack of a binary relationship between children’s power and adults’ power, but that children may be active participants in helping to shape their futures, their social culture, and hence strengthen their agency at the same time.

The thesis draws on a range of secondary sources to establish the literary precursors of the stories I discuss, to examine these from a theoretical perspective, and to elucidate how power is presented and plays out in YA narratives. These include discussions of the school story (e.g., Clark; Trites) and the emergence of YA fiction (Brown; Jenkins; Milliot). In particular, Trites’ approach fits within a larger trend recognizing what I identify as school stories as a powerful source of insight into students’ and teachers’ experiences of education (Giroux and Simon). Trites is particularly attuned to the fact that unless texts are critically examined they can represent the “ideological manipulation” of young readers (156). In Trites’ view, by exploring such texts critically via postmodern and poststructuralist theory, educators can help open up the possibility of truly reader-centred readings and of teens making their own meanings from texts (Trites 159). Additional historical sources are used to describe Progressivism in education and the decline of the church as an educational authority, as well as the ascent of ‘tweens’ and teens as a consuming public of global significance (Baker; El-Bassiouny, Tamer and Aisha; Elliott and MacLennan; Ellsworth; Quart).

Chapter One establishes the contours of the KTC motif via a variety of contemporary fictional works for young adults. It contrasts the stories of change-making by young adults in these works with patterns found both in classic British school stories of the 19th century (e.g., Hughes’ 1857 *Tom Brown’s School Days*). The chapter also explores what it means for young

people to achieve an adult sense of self, and what resources they are expected to enlist in the process. Finally, the chapter also examines the kinds of models of adult selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ that are offered to adolescents in YA literature, and how these may be linked to the KTC motif.

In Chapter Two, I argue that a qualitatively new motif concerning power and agency has emerged within a number of school stories produced over the past two decades. As I identify it, the KTC motif is characterized by three defining features, whether it appears in works of fantasy or realism. First, the central protagonist must confront a problem or crisis of systemic importance; how this challenge is resolved will affect an entire school, community, or even—in works of fantasy—the fate of entire worlds. Second, stories that feature the KTC motif generally de-emphasize the importance of adult mentors in preparing young people for, and guiding them through, these challenges. Where teachers and other wise adults are present, their own powers are typically limited or curtailed in some way, so that the central protagonist must ultimately find a way forward on his or her own. Third, the KTC motif enshrines a particular notion of the ‘authentic self’ as the source of personal power and agency: victory is assured only insofar as the central protagonist becomes and remains ‘true’ to himself or herself. These characteristics are useful to keep in mind, insofar as they influence and interact with representations of social change in the selected texts. I begin by introducing a specific strategy of close reading that I apply to interpretation of works written, by and large, for young adult and child readers. Next, I discuss each of the three defining features of the KTC motif as I have identified them, comparing the conventions of the KTC motif as it emerges in these works to earlier patterns found in school stories both in Britain and North America. Finally, I ask what the vision of power and agency

implicit in the KTC motif could mean for young people as they move toward becoming adult actors in a complex and globalizing world.

In Chapter Three, I examine questions that enable me to access the model of social change presented using two YA texts that offer compelling stories of social change: the Harry Potter books and the film, *High School Musical*. I then compare the two accounts to a narrative of social change in the broader world, and assess how adolescents are liable to view and interpret their own experiences through a global lens as prodigious consumers of narratives produced in a global culture. This chapter assesses the extent to which social forms of difference and inequality such as gender, race, and class, are an integral part of the problem and strategy/solution within the KTC motif, and how social changes are achieved in these narrative forms.

The Conclusion of this thesis provides an overall assessment of the findings, and offers a final analysis of the intricacies of power struggles in contemporary school stories featuring students as change makers who decisively redirect the course of events, whether for their schools, for their families and communities, or—in series such as *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*)—for entire worlds. In conclusion, I go beyond identifying and mapping the contours of the KTC motif to frame a series of hypotheses concerning the broader social conditions that have given rise to it.

Chapter One: Finding the Self

In western society, adolescence is commonly understood as a time to ‘find oneself’ and solidify one’s identity—an idea codified by psychologist Erik Erikson (1908-1996, citing and drawing on his own works from the years 1946-1951). Of course, the very concept of finding oneself begs the question: what is the nature and content of the self that adolescents are meant to seek or establish? What does it mean for young people to achieve an adult sense of self? What resources are they expected to enlist in the process? And what are the consequences of success or failure? Perhaps most importantly, it becomes crucial to ask: what models of adult selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ are offered to adolescents? And what values and ideological assumptions do these models contain that can be linked to the KTC motif? This chapter considers each of these models of self in turn, situating them in terms of compatible social theories. The answers to these questions should mean a great deal to us.

The ‘social self’ featured in many early school stories reflects the settled, self-satisfied, European worldview from which those stories grew. The ‘assembled self’ that began to emerge in school stories of the 1960s and 70s in the West similarly reflects a distinct social milieu: one of political ferment, coupled with a new literary and political assertiveness by marginalized groups (a development that is particularly well exemplified in the politically-informed multicultural context of Canadian school stories). Yet the new, globalized, and globalizing school stories that emphasize a stable and authentic self seem curiously out of step with the social conditions teens now must navigate, including: economic and job precarity, relentless technological advance, climate change, refugeeism, and ethnic conflict, to name just a few.

Given this disjuncture, the ideological implications of models of self become particularly important to assess.

Whatever we accept about the nature of adolescence, or even the nature of the self itself, it seems axiomatic that having achieved a durable and workable sense of self is central to successful functioning as an adult. This, at least, is the view of voluminous research on “self-efficacy,” which suggests that a positive self-concept is the key to resilience, competence, and personal agency over one’s life span (Artistic et al. 218-20; see also Bandura; Bandura and Schunk; Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons), which may be the link between KTC and its representations of an ‘authentic’ self.

As a longtime teacher of teens and preteens, I have yet to find a parent who does not speak in earnest terms about wanting their child to develop a strong sense of self. This parental value in Western society is often reflected in modern school stories where there is a need for a child to challenge the authority of a teacher, such as in the Harry Potter series’ hostile relationships between the protagonists and Professors Snape, Umbridge, Quirrell, and others. It can be said that KTC may be a motif that is culturally contingent because power is often relative to how youth is constructed in certain cultures, by both parents and by the state, in terms of school as an institution, and this may be linked back to post-structural shifts in social norms associated with authority that began in the 1960s and 1970s. In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for example, which has informed child-centered teaching and therefore, by extension, YA literature (Alsup 158), Paulo Freire suggests that the early educational model is one where the teacher is the expert “depositing” knowledge into students, and he posits an alternative model emphasizing authentic exchange. In order to adopt this model, persons of higher institutional

status (typically the teacher or parent) have to shed their piousness and sense of generosity vis a vis the oppressed and risk a truly dialogic encounter in which both individuals are mutually vulnerable human subjects and co-creators of the learning experience. This can lead to solidarity and hence the prospect for structural change, even as it yields greater personal authenticity for all involved. The outcome of the shift towards post-structuralist thought in the Western social context has increased a focus on self, and how the protagonist “takes a sort of control over her story and her experience... [so that] oppressive cultural scripts be exposed and subverted” (Alsup 160). To this end, a radically different model of self emerges in certain school stories from the 1960s onward (Clark 328).

Nonetheless, not all self-knowledge and leadership created from and by youth can be said to be truly empowering. Young adult literature/contemporary school stories often feature themes of defiant youth subcultures. There is only so far that youth can go in asserting their power and their sense of self before it becomes transgressive and a challenge to parents and teachers. While youth can embody resistance to dominant ideologies, Dick Hebdige takes a complicated stance on the question of whether youth subcultures focused on defiance can achieve this goal. Hebdige adopts Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemonic ideology as dependent on members of the nondominant classes to embrace and reproduce it (22). This suggests the potential for destabilization, since the hegemonic project cannot be complete without active participation by a spectrum of individuals, but a potential that is simultaneously undermined by the subordinate classes’ reproduction of key aspects or values of the hegemonic ideology that they otherwise dislike or contest. Moreover, Hebdige suggests that visual representations can act as potent

forces of ideological destabilization, even when individuals adopt such representations (e.g., punk style) without intending to engage in political critique (28).

A more cynical perspective points to a different type of active participation in the reproduction of hegemonic Western culture. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Louis Althusser focused on the role of education in moulding individuals according to the needs of the capitalist economy (258). Althusser represents an important starting point for any critical inquiry into education, or narratives of education, because he is profoundly skeptical of the possibility of human liberation, without a fundamental reordering of economic relationships. (He relies on the works of the mature Karl Marx with his relentlessly systemic analyses of capitalism, as opposed to the early Marx, who included more of a focus on human attempts at wholeness and authenticity.) So, for instance, there are models for education or educational reform—whether embedded in contemporary school stories or proposed by educational researchers—that promise more authentic, liberating, egalitarian outcomes. However, Althusser's work alerts us to the ways that even "radical" educational models may actually serve the evolving needs of capitalism, e.g., for more individualistic, flexible workers who can function in a knowledge economy. This aspect of his work has been elaborated upon by thinkers such as Bowles and Gintis, who suggest that schools do not simply prepare students cognitively for work, but help instill the attitudes and dispositions that will allow students to function as workers within corporate hierarchies (230-31). Bowles and Gintis suggest that schools in capitalist societies operate under the "correspondence principle"; that is, their internal structures are designed to prepare students for the hierarchies of the labour market (231). Discipline, rote learning, and the like, groom complacent workers for a manufacturing economy.

Accordingly, it is important to ask whether the KTC motif may help to instill attitudes and dispositions needed in a or our contemporary and future class of workers who are crucial to a knowledge-based, post-industrial economy (Benner 250-60). According to Althusser's, cultural and ideological apparatuses are built around the need to produce the types of worker that a capitalist system requires, and therefore agency is recognized as being both potentially supportive and subversive of normative values. An early example of this can be found in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, where the structuralist forces of her social formation are less important to the narrative than the protagonist's agency and ability to work to protect her own interests and futures. Most children are protected from the challenges of life, but because Anne is an orphan and has had to fend for herself under a number of different trying circumstances and employments, she is not only circumspect of the motives of others but is also aggressive in her pursuit of her needs. Anne is independent. She still acts within the intrinsic, daily constraints of reliance that all children must, but she has an unrestrained independence of spirit. Whereas within the other children's novels assessed herein the protagonists are only beginning to face their personal development in the face of danger, loss and separation, in *Anne of Green Gables* Montgomery illustrates what can occur after many years of practical survival borne by a child. Anne is the result, in some ways, of a childhood shaped by loss and little else. She represents a nascent adulthood, not only because of her age but because of her maturity. The things she wants and desires most in life, she pursues. Perhaps the idea of a deep, implicit, authentic self is being sold to teens at this moment as a way to paper over, ideologically, the strains on self that arise when one must constantly remake one's occupation, re-train, or even repackage identity in order to survive in an economy where work demands constant shifts and

employment is not expected to be secure or stable (see Boltanski and Chiapello). Althusser represents an important starting point for any critical inquiry into education, or narratives of education, because he is profoundly skeptical of the possibility of human liberation, without a fundamental reordering of economic relationships.

Tellingly, many of YA stories grapple with the experience of various ‘others,’ including (young) women, francophone Canadians, First Nations students at residential schools, and working class youth (see, e.g., Blais; Hinton; Sterling). In marked contrast to early school stories from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, these narratives tend to highlight the overwrought and insecure nature of common-sense notions of ‘finding oneself,’ ‘standing up for oneself,’ or ‘coming into one’s own.’ Young protagonists must struggle to cobble together a sense of self from multiple sources, often despite forces that threaten to fragment their identities and lives. Intriguingly, there is little work that explores the models of selfhood teens encounter and consume through fictional texts.² For instance, Bean and Moni argue that “adolescent readers view characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens,” and that they take in important messages about identity development through their reading (638; see also Bean and Rigoni).

School stories lend themselves to the identification of some of the distinct models of selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ that have figured prominently in works about and for adolescents in various sociocultural contexts. Not all of the texts I analyze can be considered young adult (YA) fiction in the strict sense—that is to say: “novel[s] specifically marketed to an adolescent audience” (Trites 7)—but they all share an emphasis on school and schooling and the

² ‘Text’ here is understood broadly to include video and other media.

power dynamics that emerge as adolescents begin to face their adulthood, a feature that emerges as useful in two distinct ways. First, from a methodological standpoint, this focus narrows the scope of texts, so that there is a thematic continuity among them, even when I venture into analysis of the *High School Musical* (Ortega) made-for-television movies. This enables me to identify shifts in models of selfhood offered over time with some confidence (although I make no claim to comprehensiveness). Second, a focus on school stories through the trajectory of “finding the self” is pertinent to decoding the KTC motif.

I propose that, over time, at least three distinct models of selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ have emerged in school stories. First, a number of early school stories from the 19th or early 20th century—including the iconic *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (Hughes), as well as ‘New World’ variants, such as the Canada-based *Glengarry School Days* (Connor)—highlight the civilizing process through which an adult sense of self is achieved. In these stories, rambunctious young people grow into a stable sense of selfhood by accepting adult mentorship and learning to tame their own instincts, so that they can take their place in the extant social order. This is what I will refer to as the *social self*, and it resonates with the work of early 20th century social psychologists, such as Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead (Cooley 183-184; da Silva 11-13), who view the achievement of selfhood as an interactive process between self and society, and who generally emphasize and valorize the reproduction of social norms, rather than social contestation. Second, the grittier, more realistic school stories that began to emerge in the 1960s in both Canada and the US anticipate a radically different model of selfhood. This is an

idea of selfhood achieved *despite and against* social forces that threaten to undo any cohesive sense of self and identity. I refer to this as the *assembled self*.

Third, in more recent texts produced for young adults—including blockbuster works of YA fiction, such as the Harry Potter books, as well as the *High School Musical* franchise—another model of self emerges that contrasts markedly with those works explored above. In these works, friends, mentors, and community members often play important roles, which might seem to harken back to the social self of the classic school story. At the same time, young protagonists are forced to face severe trials, suggesting a potential kinship with the model of an assembled self offered in a number of the grittier, more modern school stories of the last two decades. Yet ultimately, the model of selfhood that emerges most clearly in works such as *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* or *High School Musical 3* is the *authentic self*: self as a deeply internal resource that guides young protagonists toward increasingly positive outcomes, the more thoroughly they come to rely on it. This idea of self articulates with the Romanticism of 18th and 19th c. Europe (Perry et al. 508-09)—but also, as I argue, with the self-help literature of the 21st century.

i. The social self of the school story

The school story can be dated back to the 1749 publication of *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (Fielding)—a British work that is also widely considered the first Anglophone novel for young adults (Clark 324). British publishers released as many as 90 school stories over the century after Fielding's book (Steege 142). Nevertheless, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes), published in 1857, is the novel that set the standard. Among other things, this novel established the British boarding school, as argued by Steege in "Harry Potter, Tom Brown, and the British

School Story: Lost in Transit,” not simply as ‘setting’, but as nearly a character itself (141-142). Indeed, in Britain the school story continues to be referred to as the “public school story” (Steege 141).

As Steege has noted, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* “opened the floodgates” for school stories, leading to the eventual publication of thousands of such works, including a substantial number set in girls’ boarding schools (Steege 141-42). Nevertheless, as Clark argues persuasively, after the publication of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* the narrative form remained an essentially masculine one, relating the minor scrapes, triumphs, and travails of the central character as he matured into a person of sound moral judgment and appropriate masculinity (325-26). The school story expanded in certain important ways upon migrating to North America. In the US, it underwent a process of re-gendering in works by Louisa May Alcott (Clark 323). In Canada, it departed the confines of the boarding school for the public school in Ralph Connor’s *Glengarry School Days*. However, it retained a number of key characteristics, including the vision of school as the crucible for the moral development of young adults. Adolescence, as Roberta Trites points out, is all about power, and school is one of the key institutional sites where adolescent explorations of power unfold (Trites 6). At school kids learn their places in power-laden social hierarchies, and even more so in narratives set in public or boarding school contexts; they test how far it is possible to challenge authority figures; they are forced to seek workable balances of power with peers; they are bullied and bully others. Consequently, school stories can offer particular insight into the social imagination of teens, power, and social change.

In the school story as developed in Britain, the boarding school becomes a microcosm of society, “largely a world all to itself,” and we see little of students’ families, communities, or

other important social organizations (Steege 148). Within this relatively self-contained social universe we watch the central male protagonist progress from boyishness to hero, from:

...his anxious but excited arrival at the school to his eventual triumphant but regretful leave-taking years later, after he has risen through the ranks to become a leader, a hero, and a protector of first-years. (Steege 142, citing Reed)

As such, the plot formula almost demands that the central protagonist be a rambunctious sort of boy, quick to engage in various pranks, fistfights, or other mischief, so that we might see a process of growth and reform. For instance, midway through *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Hughes' iconic work, Tom is asked to take under his wing a younger boy named Arthur, who, the matron explains, is "very delicate, and has never been far from home before" (ch. 1). Tom, who is used to getting into all manner of fights and scrapes, feels "rather put about" by this arrangement, reckoning that, "this new boy would most likely never go out of the close, and would be afraid of wet feet, and always getting laughed at, and called...some derogatory feminine nickname" (Hughes ch. 1). That very night, young Arthur kneels by his bedside to pray before sleep (Hughes ch. 1). Some of the older boys begin to laugh, and one "big brutal fellow" hurls his slipper at the younger boy, calling him a "snivelling young shaver" (Hughes ch. 1).

Despite making a solemn boyhood promise to his mother never to abandon his prayer, Tom himself had stopped praying immediately on reaching Rugby and realizing how unmasculine and—in contemporary parlance—how 'uncool' the other boys considered it (Hughes ch. 1). Still, instead of abandoning Arthur to the bullies, Tom suddenly takes on a protective role and hurls one of his boots at the boy who threw the slipper (Hughes ch. 1).

Confound you, Brown! what's that for?" roared [the other boy], stamping with pain.

"Never mind what I mean," said Tom, stepping on to the floor, every drop of blood in his body tingling; "if any fellow wants the other boot, he knows how to get it." (Hughes ch. 1)

After a night of soul-searching, Tom himself kneels to pray the next morning, setting off a chain of events that frees most of Rugby's young men to say their prayers undisturbed (Hughes ch. 1).

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that Tom had suddenly remembered the values his mother instilled, or tapped into a native concern for vulnerable boys like Arthur. Instead, there is a critical intervening event: right after being introduced to Arthur, Tom receives his first invitation to take tea with the Headmaster, "just as if he were a sixth or fifth form boy, and of importance in the School world, instead of the most reckless young scapegrace amongst the fags" (Hughes ch. 1). There in the Headmaster's drawing room, Tom encounters a level of civilized grace—a "gentle and high-bred hospitality"—he finds powerfully attractive (Hughes ch. 1). Tom is mesmerized by the figure of "the Doctor," the Headmaster, who meets his young charges with a greeting that is "frank, and kind, and manly" (Hughes ch. 1). In the Doctor's presence, Tom finds that every student "was at his ease, and everybody felt that he, young as he might be, was of some use in the little School world, and had a work to do there" (Hughes ch. 1).

At tea the Doctor suggests that Tom's new young charge, Arthur, would benefit from long walks in the country air. The suggestion seems offhanded, but the reader is meant to realize that there is a form of sly and purposeful guidance at work. Just hours ago Tom had been "put about" by the idea of looking after Arthur. Now, suddenly, his abundant energy and restless craving for the countryside is channeled into a sense of responsibility. As Hughes suggests in the

chapter opening, “[t]he turning-point in our hero's school career had now come” (Hughes ch. 1). Tom is on his way to gaining a mature and solid sense of self as a mentor and, perhaps, a hero to Arthur.

This formula—of a young person coming into his or her own under the influence of a wise and empathetic adult role model—is central to the early school story (Steege 143-49). Even as the narrative form shifts and evolves in the North American context in the late nineteenth century, the formula remains. Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Men*, set in a modest American boarding school for boys, reshapes the boundaries of the school story in several important ways. For one thing, it tracks the development of several young people and their interweaving paths, instead of focusing on one central protagonist (see, e.g., Alcott, chap. 2). It includes more fullydrawn characters from outside the school, pushing against the trope of the boarding school as an isolated, self-sufficient, bourgeois social microcosm (Steege 148). There is also a clear re-rendering of the school story at work in *Little Men*, as Clark points out (323). Plumfield Academy is run by Professor Bhaer and his wife (better known to audiences as Jo, the tomboy heroine of *Little Women*). Like the Doctor in *Tom Brown’s School Days*, the professor exemplifies a firm-but-gentle masculinity to which the male students intuitively respond (see, e.g., Alcott 77). Nevertheless, the school was originally Jo’s vision, her “pet plan” (Alcott 60), and she too plays a central role as mentor, in contrast to Mrs. Arnold of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, whose chief function is to create a gracious parlor setting (Hughes n.p.).

Despite these departures, *Little Men* ultimately embodies the same idea of selfhood and ‘coming into one’s own’ as *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* does. This becomes clear from the interaction between Jo and one of her most troubled charges, Dan. Dan is so rough, so

rambunctious, and so unwilling to show remorse for his infractions that he is expelled from Plumfield early in the narrative (Alcott 37). After running away from his next home and living rough for a time, Dan eventually returns, injured and limping, still gruff and sharp-spoken, but grateful to be taken in by “Mother Bhaer” (Alcott 52-3). From that point on, Jo is determined to help Dan settle into himself more fully and channel his wild impulses. She gains his trust by focusing on their mutual love of the natural world (Alcott 54-56). Dan comes to understand that Jo, who had also been unruly in her youth—unusually so for a woman—empathizes with his own impulsiveness and need to challenge authority; thus, eventually he comes to accept and incorporate her guidance. He is set, finally, on a course toward adulthood and a mature sense of self when—moved by the example of Jo’s young son, who kneels by Dan’s bedside one night and prays, “Please Dod bess everybody and help me to be dood” –Dan also begins to pray for guidance, thereby fulfilling a promise to Jo (Alcott 58).

This basic story line, present in both Alcott’s and Hughes’ works, resonates strongly with the early 20th century model of selfhood described above (Edles and Appleroth 350-51). For Mead, for example, according to Edles and Appleroth, selfhood emerges through a dialogic process, a “conversation of significant gestures,” in which the individual continually takes on the attitudes of other, external actors, and uses their imagined standpoints to monitor and shape his or her own behaviours and sense of self (Edles and Appleroth 351). Similarly, Cooley speaks of the “looking-glass self,” which emerges through the interaction of three elements: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Schubert 22). In other

words, we not only imagine how others respond to us but, according to Schubert and Cooley, we respond emotionally to the “fact” of their imagined responses (Schubert 22).

It is critical to note that the inclusion of others in the dialogic development of self is not haphazard: certain ‘others’ matter more than most. For Cooley, the “significant other” is a person whose judgments and perceptions are particularly important to the individual in his or her own looking-glass development of self (Aboulafia n.p.; O’Brien 113). For young children, the significant other is most often a parent; for teens, a teacher; for adults, a spouse (McNair 29). Mead similarly accepted the importance of significant others (O’Brien 113), but he theorized, as well, the existence of a more abstract, “generalized other”:

The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called “the generalized other.” The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters—as an organized process or social activity—into the experience of any one of the individual members of it.

(Aboulafia n.p., quoting Mead).

In other words, as the individual grows, he or she begins to synthesize views of how the community might respond to various actions and behaviours and incorporates these imagined judgments into an evolving sense of self.

In the school stories discussed, wise adults such as the Doctor (Hughes n.p.) and Mother Bhaer (Alcott 53) function as significant others in Cooley’s terms. They are touchstone figures whose projected thoughts and attitudes the young protagonists take on and use to begin to assess

and shape their own evolving personalities. These adult mentors also help their young charges to orient themselves in terms of the demands and sensibilities of Mead's "generalized other" (Aboulafia n.p.; O'Brien 113). We see this, for instance, when the Doctor subtly pushes Tom to think of his place in the community of boys—to act not simply as an individual with unbridled urges, but as a part of a larger whole, a person of "some use in the little School world" (Hughes n.p.). We see it, too, in the way Jo guides Dan to envision a specific role for himself within life at Plumfield. Prayer becomes important in both stories, with at least two important outcomes in Mead and Cooley's terms. First, accepting the importance of prayer helps to harmonize Tom and Dan's evolving personalities with the norms and expectations of the generalized other of the adult worlds they will enter. It may also signify integration of the 'ultimate' significant other—the deity—into their dialogic emergence of selfhood.

The social psychological model fits well, moreover, in terms of tone and temperament. It is clear in both tales that the quest for an adult sense of self entails accepting and taking one's place in the existing social order. Tom and Dan's acts of defiance do not antagonistically target broad and hegemonic forms of injustice and do not overturn the existing social order of their schools or communities. Instead, each learns to channel his impulses into a more productive and normatively appropriate form of sociability. Similarly, Mead and Cooley's model of selfhood emphasizes social continuity. This is not to imply there is no room for variation or change. As O'Brien reminds us, in Mead's conceptualization, "the self is an *ongoing conversation*" and we "do not allow the imagined 'voices' of significant others to dictate our internal lives" (118; see also Aboulafia n.p.; da Silva 19-25; Schubert 22). Nevertheless, there is a way in which the incorporation of both particular and generalized others in the dialogic emergence of self pushes

toward the reproduction of existing social norms and hierarchies—or at very least, they suggest that real social change is slow paced, as self and society co-evolve (Edles and Appelrouth 352). For instance, as O'Brien explores, the dialogical production of self can be seen as tending to reproduce class expectations and hierarchies (113-117). And this model accords well with the worldview of early school stories, which emphasize how proper schooling and mentorship allow boys and girls to become productive members of a generally bourgeois-identified social order.

Even Connor's *Glengarry School Days* fits well into the scheme. Set in rural Ontario in the period of Confederation, the school story becomes a bit more rough-and-tumble as it escapes the confines of the boarding school altogether. Rather than school-as-microcosm (Steege 148), the rural school is firmly anchored in and connected to the larger community—and the schooling and mentorship offered are sometimes far from ideal. For instance, early in the book, Thomas Finch and several other students rebel against a sadistic schoolmaster and physically restrain him to stop him from hitting one of the younger boys (Connor ch. 2). Thomas's father is outraged at his son's lack of respect for authority. But soon another townsman speaks up for the boy, praising his bravery and willingness to protect the younger boys; the father softens toward his son (Connor ch. 2). Ultimately, the adults are the ones to settle the matter—the rebellious boys are disciplined, but the Master is relocated—and the students are left to absorb the standpoints of both particular and generalized others, as they come into their own.

ii. Neo-realist school stories and the assembled self

The grittier, more realistic school stories that began to emerge in the 1960s in both Canada and the US anticipate a radically different model of selfhood that is far more resonant with postmodern thought than that of the social psychology of Cooley and Mead. This is an idea

of selfhood achieved *despite* and *against* social forces that threaten to undo any cohesive sense of self and identity. I refer to this as the *assembled self*. According to this model the path toward adult selfhood is a highly individualistic one. Adult role models and institutions often act as barriers and threats to this model of self, although they may also provide important bits of support and advice that teen protagonists incorporate into their search for self. Above all, achieving selfhood according to this view is a creative act, one often aided by the craft of writing.

The mode of the assembled self can be aligned with the concept of individual as “bricoleur.” In a 2012 doctoral thesis, Mark Dolson reflects on a year of fieldwork he conducted in downtown London, Ontario, with young, “street-involved” men who participate in Ontario’s workfare programme. Suffering from various forms of trauma and its after-effects, Dolson’s informants find themselves at odds with the assumptions of self-sufficiency and self-direction that lie at the core of the workfare programme. As such, the programme represents one more barrier in their lives and their quest for a sense of stable self and identity, in that it allowed his informants...

... to be improvisational, inventive, and pragmatic about their lives, choices, decisions, and orientations to the future, both in terms of their everyday subsistence and their approaches to their own existential health as reconciliation between past and present.

(Dolson 21).

For these youth, Dolson argues, the process of developing an adult sense of self resembles the work of the bricoleur, someone who “[fashions] new things from old or seemingly static resources” (18). Although he borrows the term from the structural anthropology of Claude

LeviStrauss, he connects it to a postmodern worldview, juxtaposing the self of the bricoleur with the neoliberal idea, implicit in government social programmes, of self as a stable resource (21). Often forced to work at cross purposes to their communities and social institutions, the bricoleur finds “ways of making do from the available bits and pieces of practical knowledge and system opportunities” (Dolson 26).

One school story to exemplify this alternative model of selfhood is an American classic of young adult (YA) fiction, S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*. Published in 1967, the book is widely credited with establishing the contemporary field of YA literature (Crowe 116; Jenkins 290; Nilsen and Donelson 8; Staino n.p.). It also initiates a trend in stories for and about teens that Clark refers to as “neo-realist,” suggesting these works tackle tough subjects like sex and violence in ways that reproduce contemporary emotional reality for teens (328). *The Outsiders* focuses on the way that class shapes and constrains the lives of teen boys in a Midwestern American city. The central protagonist is Ponyboy, a working-class “greaser” caught up in the violence between greasers and upper-class “socs” (socials) from the other side of town (Hinton ch. 1).

In comparison to early school stories,³ two things stand out about *The Outsiders*. The first

³ Much of the action in *The Outsiders* takes place outside a school setting; however, I read it as a school story, since the narrative is bookended by school and references to it. The first chapter makes clear that Ponyboy is a gifted student whose oldest brother pressures him to stay in school

is that this is no story of boyhood scrapes and tussles. Indeed, Hinton wrote the book as a teen, because she felt existing novels did not adequately reflect the problems teens faced:

Teen-agers know a lot today. Not just things out of a textbook, but about living. They know their parents aren't superhuman, they know that justice doesn't always win out, and that sometimes the bad guys win. They know that persons in high places aren't safe from corruption... (Nilsen and Donelson 8, quoting Hinton).

The Outsiders insists on facing tough issues head on. In the course of a brief novel, Ponyboy watches his best friend, Johnny, struggle emotionally after a brutal beating by the socs. Ponyboy gets caught up in a rumble, during which Johnny acts to protect him. Johnny winds up killing a soc; Ponyboy spends several days on the run with him as a result. Ponyboy helps rescue young kids from a fire while on the run. Ponyboy witnesses Johnny's death, and he returns home to recuperate and face criminal charges (Hinton).

The second glaring difference from other school stories is that 'wise adult mentors' are nowhere to be found. Indeed, adults are almost entirely absent. In part this hinges on a plot device: Ponyboy is an orphan being raised by older brothers (Hinton chs. 1-3). But the parents of other teens make no appearance either, and other adult figures are marginal. A kindly doctor tends to Ponyboy in the hospital, but he does not attempt to counsel the teen directly, instead advising Ponyboy's older brother to let the boy recover emotionally on his own (Hinton 107). At

and do well: "If I brought home *Bs* he wanted *As*, and if I got *As* he wanted to make sure they stayed *As*" (Hinton 13). At the end of the book, after a grueling personal odyssey, Ponyboy is confined to hospital for a time, at which point his own thoughts and conversations with his friends begin to refocus on school; the last chapter, meanwhile, is anchored by Ponyboy's return to school (Hinton chs. 11, 12).

the end of the book, Ponyboy does receive an important assignment from his English teacher: he must write a personal narrative. “I want your own ideas and your own experiences,” the teacher stipulates, and this opens the space for Ponyboy to reflect on the events he has just survived. But the choice of subject is up to Ponyboy, whose first thought is to write on a trip to the zoo (Hinton 133).

It is important to note that the tone of *The Outsiders* neither suggests nor reflects an obvious personal disintegration or fracturing. The story is narrated in a straightforward way, with a steady voice. However, the sum portrait is of a young man forced to deal with extraordinary pressures and barriers that easily could derail his life. It is up to him to piece together the support systems he needs (e.g., by committing to a better relationship with his oldest brother), and to begin to sort through his own emotions, as indicated by his eventual determination to write the story of Johnny’s death (Hinton ch. 12). It is Ponyboy’s choice to use the class assignment to reflect and heal; there is no “turning point” comparable to those experienced by Tom (Hughes) and Dan (Alcott), under the benevolent influence of adult guides, because said figures are the products of and educated in more bourgeois environment. Instead the close of the book acts as a beginning, the start of a process of consciously cultivating a mature sense of self.

Although *The Outsiders*, an American YA novel, initiated a grittier line of works for and about young adults, Canadian literature offers particularly incisive examples of school stories that highlight the model of the assembled self. Marie-Claire Blais’s *Les manuscrits de Pauline*

*Archange*⁴ represents a case in point. Published in 1968, the post-war period in which the book was set helps to set the tone for how this feminist writer looks back at a particularly constraining set of societal norms in an earlier period. *The Manuscripts* was not written for young adults—and its densely poetic language may render it inaccessible to many teens.⁵ Nevertheless, the book offers an exceptionally unflinching and explicit portrait of teen life on the margins.

Church-run schools, as depicted in this book, were relevant in the formation of identity in Quebec due to their ubiquitous nature, and the way in which they shaped social values. Nonetheless, for a young woman, these social values during the era of change after the Second World War were likely to seem not only restrictive, but suffocating. To this end, in a narrative based loosely on Blais's own life, school emerges not as a sanctuary, but as a place of despotism, coupled with a violent and covert sensuality:

Along the whole length of our path through childhood, until we reached those lucid shadows that mark its end, two powers held continual sway: the first, disciplinary and destructive, that of the whip; and the other resulting from it, in a remorse-soaked sweetness, the power of pursuit, of seduction, of the rape of bodies—and souls, perhaps—against which judgment is powerless.... Wounds inflicted, wounds closing up alone in silence, or too deep to heal at all, or too shameful to be admitted... (Blais 40).

The traumas of Catholic school, where Pauline is repeatedly disciplined and shamed by the nuns, bled into home life, where a Catholic monk visits to confess her mother, then rapes the 12-year-

⁴ *Les manuscrits de Pauline Archange* is the original French title ; the English translation from

which I will cite is *The Manuscripts of Pauline Archange*, translated by Derek Coltman. From this point further the book will be referred to as *The Manuscripts*.

⁵ There do not appear to be sources that track young readership of the book. Anecdotally, I have spoken with several teens aged 16-18 who are advanced readers and who found the book engrossing and compelling. They seemed to appreciate how uncompromising it is in depicting the “shocking” and difficult aspects of the central protagonist’s life.

old Pauline. “If I wept or moaned while in his grip, my mother, as she lay vomiting on the other side of the wall, was in too much pain herself to hear me” (Blais 41).

The Manuscripts represents a narrative where adults fail to offer the central protagonist what she needs to move toward a stable, integrated sense of selfhood, and where they often represent direct threats to her wellbeing. Pauline herself evinces a determined will to survive, and over the course of the book she cobbles together a strategy for self-understanding. As a Quebecois feminist writer, Blais contemplates, in particular, the way that Pauline must come to terms with her mother. After all, Pauline represents a vulnerable ‘other’ not simply as a Francophone in Canada, or a child living in challenging socioeconomic circumstances, or a rebellious teen coming of age in Catholic school, but as a young woman subject to sexual violence. Consequently, as Mary Jean Green suggests, Pauline’s journey toward an adult sense of selfhood is complicated by rejection of her mother. Pauline is

... determined to avoid repeating her mother’s life, and she even consciously rejects the invitation to identify with her as a woman: “craignant, plus que tout, de rompre notre fragile lien du pudeur et de silence, par ce geste de consolation qu’elle attendait de moi, lui confirmait ainsi que nous n’appartenions pas à la même race meurtrie.” (25) (Afraid, more than anything else, of breaking our fragile bond of modesty and silence by this

gesture of consolation that she awaited from me, thus confirming that we did not belong to the same ravaged race). (Green 73, quoting Blais; translation by Green).

Where the early school story positions a wise adult as a straightforward mentor, able to guide the young protagonist toward an understanding of his or her place in the moral order, Blais's harsher and more fragmented account pays tribute to the fact that—for oppressed and marginalized populations—both physical and psychological survival may demand the young person reject key “significant others” (McNair 29). This story represents a very interiorized reflection on identity formation, unlike the action-oriented plot discussed with the previous example of *The Outsiders*.

Ultimately, as Green also points out, Pauline does come to terms with her mother and recuperates a valuable identification with her mother's suffering and self-sacrifice (Green 72-3). However, Pauline achieves this only through a long period of trial-and-error, eventually coming to understand that the act of writing and self-narration offers one way to recuperate a workable sense of self from the disparate and difficult fragments of her introspective experience. “Whereas [Pauline] had previously defended herself against a threatening identification with society's victims, she can now express her natural empathy with them in her art” (Green 73).

On the surface, it may appear challenging to move from a discussion of *The Manuscripts* to a discussion of a second, pivotal Canadian school story, Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepeetza*. Stylistically they could not be further apart. Sterling's work is targeted at young adults, and embodies the straightforward style of narration common to YA fiction. Nevertheless, there are critical underlying similarities, including the model of selfhood and ‘coming into one's own’ upon which both works rely.

Published in 1992, *My Name is Seepeetza* follows the tradition of neo-realist fiction for and about the lives of teens that began in the late 1960s. However, the central subject matter of the book—the residential school experiences of First Nations youth—would not emerge fully in national discussions until the late 1980s and ‘90s. The first apology by a Church denomination responsible for running residential schools was not issued until 1986, and the first full, critical review of the residential school system would not appear for another decade. The last residential school closed in 1996 (CBC News “Residential schools” n.p.). As Renate Eigenbrod notes:

It was only with increasing public awareness about the schools, public testimonies by survivors, the emergence of an apology and reconciliation discourse, and the closing of the last school in 1996 that more attention was paid [to residential school stories]... (CBC News “Residential schools” n.p.).

Like *The Outsiders* and *Les Manuscrits*, *My Name is Seepeetza* is narrated by a young person. It takes the form of a series of journal entries tracing 12-year-old Seepeetza’s year at residential school, interwoven with accounts of life at home. Early on, Seepeetza recalls her first day at the Kalamak Indian Residential School (KIRS) as a six-year-old—how she was made to change into a uniform and had her hair cut short, and how she first saw Sister Superior use a leather strap for discipline (Sterling 16-18).

After that Sister Maura asked me what my name was, I said, my name is Seepeetza. Then she got really mad like I did something terrible. She said never to say that word again. She told me if I had a sister to go and ask what my name was. I went to the intermediate

rec and found Dorothy lying on a bench reading comics. I asked her what my name was. She said it was Martha Stone. I said it over and over. Then I ran back and told Sister Maura. (Sterling 17)

Notably, in this passage, she describes Sister Maura's emotions but not her own, suggesting a sense of dislocation and dissociation as the six-year-old Seepeetza is forced to respond to this radically new and terrifying world, without the framework to reflect on it. Although the 12-year-old Seepeetza is more adept at navigating life at KIRS, the text continues to convey her detachment and lack of agency. For instance, she is placed in the school's performing dance troupe (Sterling 73). This is considered an honour, but the nuns are the ones to enjoy the troupe; Seepeetza's role is to do what is asked, as best she can:

Sister Theo is all excited about the Irish concert. She stomped into the rec with a big smile on her face today, and told us we are the last ones on the program. It's the best place to be.... This year my group has learned how to do the Fairy Reel, an Irish dance with fancy footwork. We do square, line and star patterns as we are dancing. We have to keep straight backs and lift our legs high to do it well. (Sterling 72)

When a newspaper praises the troupe, it is Sister Theo who clips and keeps the story (73). This impression of detachment contrasts sharply with accounts of life at home. For instance, Seepeetza describes a family outing to pick berries and remarks, "There is something really special about being mountain people. It's a feeling like you know who you are, and you know each other. You belong to the mountains" (91).

Nevertheless, over the course of a year it becomes clear that Seepeetza's life in both locations is becoming more complex. On the one hand, she begins to use whatever resources are available to her at school to find pleasure or solace. She takes great pleasure in a new swimming pool; and after learning of a friend's death, she even takes a kind of solace in the constant demands of the dance troupe, and the fact that she is often forced to teach: "Cookie said it isn't right for Sister to say she's the dance teacher but I don't care. I just want to keep busy" (98). Eventually she finds her greatest moment of comfort not in thoughts of home, but in a dream of St. Joseph:

I asked [St. Joseph] how come I had to get into trouble so much. In class I get in trouble for daydreaming. In the rec Edna wants to beat me up because I have green eyes. White people don't like us because our clothes are old. Sister clobbers me for making dancing mistakes. The worst is that I get scared to walk to the bathroom in the dark. In the morning I feel just sick when Sister yells at me and hits me and makes me wear my wet sheet over my head in front of everybody." (Sterling 84)

The Catholic saint then comforts her like a parent: "St Joseph looked right into my eyes and told me that I had to learn humility.... He held me close, and I fell asleep" (Sterling 84). As Catholicism offers her comfort in the form of an imagined, fatherly saint, it complicates Seepeetza's relationship with her real father at home. She is embarrassed by her father's behaviour when a priest comes to visit, and she confronts her father over his drinking, saying, "Dad, bad people go to hell" (Sterling 117-18). In terms of education and the self, the dream and the anecdote about her father indicate Seepeetza's acculturation to non-indigenous values and both have a shaming effect on the self.

With the title of the book, *I am Seepeetza*, the narrator reclaims the aboriginal name she was stripped of on her first day of residential school. Nevertheless, Sterling makes clear that Seepeetza's road forward will be anything but easy. She has been forcibly divided between two cultures, two sets of norms and demands. Sterling makes this clear in her Dedication:

To all those who went to the residential schools, and those who tried to help, may you weep and be made free. May you laugh and find your child again. May you recover the treasure that has been lost, the name that gives your life meaning, the mythology by which you can pick up and rebuild the shattered pieces of the past.... In celebration of survival I dedicate to you this book. (Sterling n.p.).

Once again, we see survival in the work of the bricoleur, the attempt to “rebuild” from “shattered pieces.” And just as with Ponyboy (Hinton) and Pauline (Blais), the act of writing provides a slender but vital thread that allows Seepeetza to begin to stitch together a sense of self and a way forward. This becomes clear from the very format of the book, a series of journal entries. Journal writing is something she learned at KIRS, and she pursues it every day at the risk of being teased by students and siblings. At the close of the book, she imagines a way to—very literally—combine this writing form, learned at residential school, with her culture of origin:

I think I'll leave the journal at home in the attic inside my dad's old violin case. If Yayah is in the mountains when we go to pick berries, I'll ask her to make a buckskin cover for it. I'll ask her to bead fireweed flowers on it. (126)

In sum, as school stories produced by and for teens began to delve not only into tough social problems, but to claim the vantage point of teens who speak from marginalized positions, a new

model of self began to emerge in a number of works. This is selfhood as an ongoing project, as something that must be claimed and cultivated, often in the face of massive barriers to feelings of autonomy, agency, wholeness, and self-worth. It is selfhood as something willfully assembled from diverse sources and resources, an act of creation.

In developing this second model of self largely through Canadian texts, I do not mean to indicate that it is a primarily Canadian phenomenon, or that Canadian culture has made it easier than in Europe or the US for marginalized groups to flourish literarily. The social foment of the 1960s and '70s linked to the civil rights movement, student strikes and unrest, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and many other concomitant social phenomena, may largely explain the emergence of stories that push the “wise adult mentor” to the margins and complicate for youth the idea and processes of coming into one’s own.

By the same token, Canadian authors may have contributed in particular to the idea of writing as a form of self-fashioning. Quebecois feminists such as Blais emphasized the role of writing in claiming their own subjectivity (Green), and First Nations authors highlight cultural survival as a creative act. With respect to this second group, the term “survivance” has come into use, indicating “a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihilism, and victimry” (Eigenbrod 277); it is a practice that hinges on imagination, on the creation of new stories and the skillful recuperation of old traumas, including through strategic uses of silences (Eigenbrod 296-97). As Eigenbrod points out, by using a 12-year-old voice to narrate the residential school experience, Sterling allows the reader to imagine traumas behind the surface of the narrative that a 12-year-old might not want to or be able to articulate (296-97). This, too, is the work of the

bricoleur par excellence, choosing to leave materials half-hidden or unexpressed in the process of shaping and projecting the self.

Chapter Two: Power and Agency

In her important work on the narrative form of the family story, Anne Scott MacLeod suggests that “[c]hildren’s books do not mirror their culture, but they do always, no matter how indirectly, convey some of its central truths” (viii). In my own work with school stories, I similarly begin with the idea that school stories do not hold a mirror up to the experiences of students and schooling, but that they do offer access to widely-circulating representations of students’ lives and concerns and the ways that young people navigate power structures and institutions. In particular, as a longtime teacher of teens and ‘tweens’ I am concerned with representations of agency in school stories, and how it is that young protagonists come to feel they can exert their own influence on social processes, make their voices known, and be effective actors in the world.

In this chapter I argue that a qualitatively new motif concerning power and agency has emerged within a number of school stories produced over the past two decades. I refer to this as the “kids-take-charge” (KTC) motif. As I identify it, the KTC motif is characterized by three key defining features, whether it appears in works of fantasy or realistic fiction. First, the central protagonist must confront a problem or crisis of systemic importance; how this challenge is resolved will affect an entire school, community, or even—in works of fantasy—the fate of entire worlds. Second, stories that feature the KTC motif generally de-emphasize the importance of adult mentors in preparing teens for and guiding them through challenges. Well-meaning or wise adults may be present, but their own powers are typically limited enough to render their roles peripheral. Third, the KTC motif enshrines a particular notion of the authentic self as the source of personal power and agency: victory is assured only insofar as the central protagonist

becomes and remains ‘true to himself’ (or *herself*, as the case may be, though the majority of stories I group under the KTC motif do feature male protagonists, a circumstance that is itself a subject for future inquiry).

Aspects of the KTC motif are present in stories about, and, often, for, young people from various time periods and genres, as noted in previous chapters. Here, however, I limit my inquiry to the school story. By thus limiting the scope of sources, albeit the genre's breadth and diversity, it becomes easier to establish the novelty and salience of the KTC motif and to illustrate how the motif both builds on and departs from prior storytelling conventions. In the early school story—as defined by British works such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes), as well as by North American variants such as *Little Men* (Alcott) and *Glengarry School Days* (Connor)—the challenges that the central protagonists face are typically construed as individual and personal, rather than systemic, social, or political (see also Clark 323-33 on the transference of the school story narrative form from the British to the US context and its “domestication” at the hands of Alcott). Wise adult mentors play pivotal roles in guiding the protagonist toward a higher understanding of social behaviour; and personal agency is achieved when the protagonist takes his or her place within a pre-established social hierarchy.

As discussed in the last chapter, a neo-realist wave of young adult (YA) school stories emerged, particularly in the U.S. and Canada, in the 1960s, including numerous new stories about school and education that challenged the narrative conventions of the early school story in fundamental ways. Works such as *The Chocolate Wars* (Cormier) and *The Outsiders* (Hinton) portray young people as taking on tough social issues, and the role of positive adult mentors shifts to the margins. YA books such as *The Chocolate War* (Cormier) cast schools as places of

despotism and corruption rather than crucibles of moral development; central protagonists are tasked with finding the internal strength to reject the reigning moral and institutional order (see Clark 327).⁵ *The Outsiders* casts adults as fundamentally out-of-touch with the class-based violence teens must confront in an Oklahoma town (Hinton). And in *The Pigman*, two teens carelessly destroy the single adult relationship that offers them real guidance and mentoring (Zindel).

However, in this group of school stories, young protagonists must live through serious periods of self-doubt and struggle in order to build a sense of meaning and identity, and their success in facing up to forces of unfairness or injustice is by no means assured. The same holds true for school stories such as *Les manuscrits de Pauline Archange* (1968), coming out of the Quebec feminist literary tradition around the same time. By contrast, stories featuring the KTC motif depict teens as capable of resolving grave social crises almost single-handedly and with relative ease—largely by trusting their instincts, eschewing prior patterns, and remaining true to themselves.

What does it mean for such a motif to emerge across works and stories as diverse as the Harry Potter (Rowling) and Percy Jackson (Riordan) novels, the *High School Musical* (Ortega)

⁵ MacLeod suggests that “Cormier is a maverick in the field of adolescent literature, because he is writing what are, at bottom, political novels,” as opposed to stories that are “wrapped tightly around the individual and the personal” (74). I would, however, strenuously reject the characterization of Cormier as a loner in his shift to more social and political terrain with novels such as *The Chocolate War* (1974). S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967), often considered the first true YA publication in the US, is squarely focused on issues of class conflict (Staino n.p.). Fantasy works such as Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) show young people grappling with grave matters of political despotism and social conformity. Cormier may have been more ‘thoroughly political’ than many of his contemporaries, but he was far from alone in shifting fiction about and for young people away from issues of personality and interpersonal conflict.

videos, and more early YA novels such as *Schooled* (Korman)? Notably, this new stream of work emerges largely from English-speaking nations and authors in the West (Korman; Ortega; Riordan; Rowling), but rather than national tales they take the form of stories with global marketing power, whether we look to the ubiquitous fantasy franchise of Rowling, which revives a number of conventions of the early school story (Steege), or to the non-fantasy (if not entirely realistic) school story offered by the *High School Musical* global juggernaut.

As Margaret Steffler points out, in an age of globalization Canadian works published for young adults and children have moved toward enshrining the idea of a “globalized child, based on the problematic assumptions surrounding the supposed existence of the universal child” (111). Steffler focuses on books published for young Canadian readers that highlight victimization and suffering of children in far-off and ‘exotic’ contexts (through war, famine, etc.). These works take for granted that children everywhere are the same, with the same needs and desires, and they create a fictional equivalency between the Canadian child reader and the suffering child protagonists of the stories (Steffler 113-15). A related trend presumes the universality of teens and ‘tweens’ worldwide, by taking narratives built around the lives of predominantly middle class or wealthy North American kids and marketing them aggressively worldwide. For instance, the *High School Musical* (Ortega) series, targeted to tweens, grossed 106,308, 538 USD in domestic box office take, but 279, 277, 272 USD in worldwide box office sales (“Movie Franchises”). These figures, meanwhile, represent only a small portion of total sales, domestic and worldwide, of *High School Musical* videos, music, live shows, and related merchandise, including “a stage show, a concert tour, reality shows, a book-publishing series (50 million copies sold in 24 languages) and scores of tie-ins from breakfast cereals to Bible study guides”

(Power n.p.). Although merchandising and marketing strategies are adapted to local markets, and the film is sometimes dubbed and-or re-recorded in local languages such as Hindi, the visuals and script remain the same for the basic videos themselves (Power n.p.). This extremely stereotypified story of American teens from a large suburban high school has claimed great market success, from Europe to Asia to the Middle East; in Saudi Arabia, for instance, the *High School Musical 2* soundtrack went gold (Power n.p.).

The larger question I would like to address then arises: why, at this particular historical moment, are young people aggressively being sold stories with the KTC account of power and agency, at this particular historical moment? From a literary perspective, Flynn's suggestions about the nature of children's agency demonstrate that the writing of narratives around children who take charge may be grounded in "culturally powerful adult ideas about childhood", as Perry Nodelman (158) describes. Nodelman's and Mavis Reimer's concepts of "plaisir" and "jouissance"⁶ can also help one to understand why this is the case; "plaisir" is linked to the idea of getting comfort from reading a book, in other words, staying within one's own comfort zone and cultural context (22). On the other hand, "jouissance" is the idea that there is a way to push pleasure beyond pure comfort towards a place where there is a significant personal change evident in reading the book (Nodelman and Reimer 25). This could include the idea of identifying with the characters in the book to such an extent that one is transported into the story. When adult writers engage with children's agency, there is the jouissance in imagining a world where adult ideas about childhood shift towards a need to imagine and reimagine kids taking

⁶ This notion probably comes from Roland Barthes' *Le plaisir du text* (1973).

charge, especially in school settings. But why is this the case? These are the questions I ultimately wish to pose.

In the present chapter, my goal is, first and foremost, to establish the contours of the KTC motif and argue for its newness and salience. I begin by introducing a specific strategy of close reading that I apply to interpretation of works written, by and large, for young adult and child readers. Next, I discuss each of the three defining features of the KTC motif as I have identified them, drawing upon several recent narrative works for teens and 'tweens,' including both written work and video. In each case I compare the conventions of the KTC motif as it emerges in these works to earlier patterns found in school stories both in Britain and North America. I engage questions of ideology, asking what the vision of power and agency implicit in the KTC motif could mean for young people as they move toward becoming adult actors in a complex and globalizing world.

i. Close reading and young adult fiction

A preliminary challenge that confronts the literary scholar working with YA texts is crafting an analytical approach appropriate to the texts; in particular, it becomes important to confront the question of close reading and its aptness for the language of YA literature. Despite a prolonged wave of criticism leveled at the technique of close reading, it remains a primary, arguably indispensable tool for literary and comparative analysis (Bardzell, n.p.; Love 373-74). As Roy Johnson advises, “[c]lose reading means not only reading and understanding the meanings of the individual printed words; it also involves making yourself sensitive to all the nuances and connotations of a language as it is used by skilled writers” (6). This, in turns,

demands attention to the linguistic, semantic, structural, and cultural aspects of a text (Johnson 43).

Within various branches of literary studies, reliance on the technique of close reading has been sharply contested at various points over the last two decades. Writing in 2000, for instance, Franco Moretti suggested that the hegemony of close reading was a particularly American phenomenon, and that the technique was ill-adapted to the shift toward a more nuanced and inclusive approach to world literature:

But the trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premises by now, but it is an iron one nonetheless: you invest so much in individual texts only if you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it; it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously....
(Moretti 57)

In place of “close reading,” Moretti champions a deliberately “distant” one, in which distance becomes “a condition of knowledge” and allows the scholar to focus “on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems” (57). This is important to the way in which the texts in my thesis are assessed and addressed. Only by concentrating on patterns that (by being so small or so large) eclipse the text itself, Moretti believes it becomes possible to resist and push against national historiographies (57-61).

Following the dominant scholarly trend, close reading is a fixture of Language Arts classrooms at the secondary level (Papola, 46-7; Porter-Magee n.p.; Shanahan 6-8; Wiggins, n.p.). Nevertheless, the technique of close reading does not initially appear well suited to analysis of works such as *High School Musical* (Ortega) or *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling), for the simple reason that close reading privileges textual complexity and ambiguity.

For instance, in defending his ability to use close reading productively, cultural critic Jeffrey Bardzell notes that he has "read Virgil in Latin, Proust in French, Dante in medieval Italian" (n.p.). He assumes, that is to say, that complex works of 'high art' train the mind for close reading--and that, conversely, close reading requires the practitioner to ferret out hidden analogies to the early stories. "Not all texts are worth close reading," suggests an American teacher of high school English (Wiggins n.p., quoting Shanahan). Indeed, much of the Common Core debates over close reading at the high school level revolve around complexity of texts (Porter-Magee n.p.). Works from the adult literary canon are assumed to contain layers of symbol, allusion, and psychological motivation that will only yield themselves up through close interpretive efforts. At a minimum, close reading is meant to be something more than "the marshaling of [textual] evidence" (Bogel 22). It is meant to get to a reality underneath the text (Bogel 22; see also Love 373).

Young adult fiction, by contrast, tends self-consciously to feature transparent language and explicit motivations, and it tends to minimize allusions to other works or non-explicit symbolic schemes. Where allusions are present, YA authors generally work explanations and definitions into the fabric of the text. For instance, *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan) brims with allusions to traditional Greek mythology. However, the narrative is framed explicitly around the

central protagonist, Percy Jackson's, lack of knowledge concerning the world he is entering. This allows Rick Riordan to explain even references such as Athena, "[g]oddess of wisdom and of battle" (17), to teen readers, who may not be equipped or inclined to seek out explanations on their own. In this regard, even the best works of YA fiction tends to be far 'flatter' than works from the adult literary canon. Where works from the adult literary canon are valued for their "opacity" (Love 373), YA texts tend, as a whole, to self-consciously favour transparency.

Why and how, then, should the technique of close reading apply to the relatively 'flatter,' less layered and nuanced texts of YA literature? A recent article by Heather Love has been influential in establishing my own approach. Love proposes an alternative form of close reading that is descriptive rather than interpretative (375). To be sure, Love's central problematic is far afield from my own. Her concern is with exquisitely crafted works of adult literature that nevertheless may resist attempts to uncover hidden layers of meaning and intention. Specifically, Love has in mind literary renderings of historical and personal trauma, in which the author intentionally flattens the text in order to reflect the affective flattening that trauma can entail; a passage from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* serves as her prime example (387). In cases such as this, to seek for hidden interpretations might suggest a logic or ultimate meaning to deeply horrific events, when the author's purpose is in fact to deny any sense of closure or logical coherence. Hence, Love advocates a form of interpretation that treads lightly, favouring description over interpretation (375).

Although Love's project is clearly different from my own, she sets up a parallel problematic and offers a highly productive solution. Love's premise is that even the finest authors in the adult literary canon may have good reason, at times, for offering relatively flat passages

that resist interpretative efforts focused on mining textual depth and decoding opacity (375).

Similarly, I believe, we should begin with the premise that YA authors often have good reasons for creating relatively flat, straightforward texts--that the relative transparency of YA text is not about pandering to 'lazy readers' or 'dumbing things down.' For instance, YA authors tend to emphasize action and dialogue more than extended meditations or description, and they create situations highly charged with emotion. Arguably, this approach is aligned with the lifeworld of teens themselves--whose very brains may be structured to rely more on the need for stimulation and whose executive functioning may be slower than that of adults (Blakemore and Choudhury 304-6; Steinberg 58-9; Williams n.p.).

Consequently, in my own work with YA texts, I have developed a style of close reading that remains intentionally on the surface of things. Rather than delving for buried allusions, meanings, or motivations, this analytical approach privileges observable actions and choices and the consequences of those actions and choices. It also attends closely to relationships (friendships, family bonds, alliances, romances) and to the way that specific resources are accessed and deployed. In the latter regard I include both resources unique to the individual, such as intelligence and physical prowess, as well as external resources, such as money, community space, or (as in fantasy stories) magical items. Ultimately, this form of close reading is less about delving for hidden motivations and meanings, than *reconstructing a sense of how the world operates* according to the text, and how the “kids” perform as social actors within that world. Such an approach yields, I posit, both an enhanced sense of what the story at hand 'is about,' as well as a richer base for comparing cross-textually. This is the analytic approach that has allowed

me to identify what I describe here as the KTC motif and to recognize its emergence in seemingly dissimilar stories.

ii. Taking charge: Three defining conventions

A number of recent YA school stories feature a particular, recurrent pattern concerning how teens manifest power and personal agency in the course of problem-solving. I dub this the "kids-take-charge" (KTC) motif because it highlights the capability of teens to resolve social problems and crises, often in isolation from, or opposition to, adult mentorship and pre-existing social mores. Here I introduce and argue for the salience of the KTC motif as a novel and important phenomenon in YA school stories by focusing on three key components.

First, there is a specific quality to the type of challenges that central protagonists face in KTC stories: these challenges appear broadly social in nature. Even where the primary dilemma may seem highly personal – for instance, the decision of a 'jock' protagonist to audition for his school play in *High School Musical* – it is clear that there will be systemic consequences as to how it is resolved. These teens are not simply navigating their school and community environments; they are reshaping them for the better in significant ways. Indeed, in fantasy novels such as *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan), the challenges that teen protagonists face are cast as having world historical importance.

Second, although KTC stories sometimes feature important adult mentors—the wise Dumbledore of the *Harry Potter* novels (Rowling) comes to mind—they nonetheless tend to decenter adults and minimize the importance of their guidance. In some cases, as I detail below, adults are painted as almost farcically lacking agency, as essentially well-meaning but ineffectual

bumpers. In other cases, adults are portrayed as powerful characters who nevertheless find their hands are tied when it comes to assisting teen protagonists. This seems particularly to be the case in fantasy novels, where, for instance, there may be magical limits to adult assistance. The net result, in either case, is to move adults to the margins and heighten the singular importance of the teen protagonist's agency. Generally speaking, the kids do not take charge in KTC stories because they *want* to, but because they *have* to; they lead ably, but they lead by default.

This relates to a third and final defining feature of the KTC motif as I am identifying it in contemporary YA school stories: it enshrines a particular notion of the authentic self as the source of personal power and agency. Victory in these stories is assured insofar as the central protagonist becomes and remains true to himself or herself. The corollary to this is that, whether the story hinges on supernatural powers or something more mundane, there is a sense in which the protagonist is 'the only one who can get the job done.' These kids are not only in charge; they are, by their very natures, irreplaceably so.

In each case, I compare the way this aspect of the motif is handled in recent texts to the way it is handled in previous incarnations of the school story. My goal, it should be noted, is by no means to argue that these elements of the KTC motif are entirely new. However, there is something powerful, novel, and distinct in the way these three features come together and recur. Taken in sum, as I will argue in conclusion, they convey a distinct message about what power is in terms of personal agency and how it should be used—a message that I believe deserves careful scrutiny.

The first defining feature of the KTC motif within contemporary school stories is that central teen (or sometimes pre-teen) protagonists face tasks with consequences of signal importance for the rest of the social order. Often the issues they face are cast at the school level. For instance, in the 2007 YA novel *Schooled*, penned by Gordon Korman, an unlikely hero named Capricorn emerges to undermine and eliminate one school's culture of bullying. Capricorn, or "Cap," is a shaggy-haired boy who has been raised by his grandmother in neartotal isolation from mainstream culture and other teens, on the remnants of a hippies-era commune in upstate New York (Korman 4-5). When his grandmother falls and breaks her hip, Cap is temporarily placed in a foster home and forced to fend for himself in the cruel world of Claverage Middle School (or "C Average," as students call it, with something less than fondness (Korman 14). C Average is home to some of the most thoroughgoing and inventive pranksterbullies in all of YA literature, and the oddly-dressed, socially-clueless Cap quickly becomes their chief target (Korman 15-17).

There is no sense in which Cap believes he is waging a campaign on behalf of all the bullied or marginalized kids in his school. Indeed, Cap represents a "heroic figure" who is almost entirely unaware of his own heroic quest: he simply deals with problems, one at a time, the best way he knows how. Yet by dint of his 1960s-era peaceable approach to problem-solving and conflict, he slowly attracts and disarms other students, and Korman makes clear that Cap transforms the entire school order as he does so. Students who have long felt marginalized slowly begin to see a place for themselves at school; kids who used to ally themselves with the bullies begin to consider the feelings of their fellow students a bit more. Ironically, by the end of the story, the school's self-appointed bully-in-chief *and* his former chief target join forces to try to

restore the original social order since both of them perceive themselves as needing to shift the status quo (Korman ch. 19).

Similarly, in *High School Musical*, the central teen protagonist, Troy, has a dilemma that seems personal, rather than social, at face value: he is a popular “jock” and captain of the basketball team, but he is attracted to a studious girl who wants him to audition for the school play—and he is tempted to try out. But quickly it becomes clear that the dilemma is really a school-wide one, so that how Troy decides will have repercussions for the student body as a whole, and even for the faculty, is at odds. Early in the movie a song-and-dance number, “The Status Quo,” emphasizes that “jocks,” “nerds”, theatre kids, skateboarders, etc. are all limited by their respective social roles, and that each has other dreams and potentials they would like to realize. By the movie’s closing scene—after Troy has successfully figured out how to be *both* a jock and a drama club member—a party ensues, and kids and teachers alike sing about the fun of breaking out of confining stereotypes. They dance with each other in unlikely pairs, singing, “We’re all in this together.”

In fantasy-based school stories, meanwhile, teen protagonists face dilemmas with consequences for the entire world. For instance, in Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* we meet Percy Jackson, a young teen who has trouble staying in school, due to intense problems with ADHD and dyslexia. Shortly into the narrative Percy discovers that he is, in fact, a demigod—half-human, half-Greek god. His brain is wired to read ancient Greek, which explains the dyslexia, and his instincts are honed for battle, accounting for his ADHD (Riordan 80). At first Percy’s problems also seem largely personal in nature, despite their mythic proportions: he must flee from ancient monsters who seek out demigods as they come of age, and he must find a way

to rescue his mother, who has been swept away to the underworld (Riordan ch. 4). But soon the personal becomes the world-historical. Percy is assigned a quest to find and retrieve the master lightning bolt that someone has stolen from Zeus; if he fails, Zeus will wage war against the gods and demigods he blames for its theft, unleashing a World War III-sized calamity for both the godly occupants of Olympus and unwitting mortals on the earth below (Riordan ch. 9). By achieving success in his quest by the end of the book, Percy achieves many things at once. In addition to avoiding catastrophic war, he saves his mother; he allows his two best friends to prove themselves; he teaches a lesson to the unruly god of war; and he brings the gods of Olympus important news concerning the rise of the malevolent titan, Kronos (Riordan). Percy also manages to give his mother both the moral strength and the mythic weapon (the severed head of Medusa) to allow her to finally get free of her abusive mortal husband (Riordan 306-07).

In the Harry Potter books, meanwhile, we see a similar pattern unfold over the course of the novels. In the first novel of the series, Harry must save the immortality-granting sorcerer's stone from falling into the hands of the evil Lord Voldemort, who is attempting to rise again (Rowling *Sorcerer's Stone*). Still, his task is a fairly contained one, affecting primarily the safety of Harry's friends and school. But across the narrative arc of the seven books, it becomes ever clearer that Harry will have to be the one to defeat Voldemort once and for all—and that in doing so he will save both the wizarding and mortal worlds (Rowling *Deathly Hallows*).

Of course, these are by no means the first YA books to place young people in pivotal roles where their actions will have far-reaching consequences. Nevertheless, these books mark, as a whole, a noticeable departure from the early school story. In the school story narrative form the central conflicts are largely personal in nature, whether in the early formulation of *Tom*

Brown's Schooldays (Hughes) or “New World” variations such as *Little Men* (Alcott). These are stories of how young people grow and mature into more adult selves within the crucible of their schools; where conflicts arise, these conflicts tend to facilitate the maturation process of central protagonists, rather than transforming the social order. And while the original school story—*The Governess*; or *Little Female Academy* (Fielding)—focused on a school for girls, the narrative form came, most famously, to grapple with the process of turning rakish boys into competent and responsible young men.

For instance, in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes), Tom faces bouts of bullying that are occasionally severe—far worse than nearly anything in contemporary YA school stories. In one of the early defining moments of the tale, the inveterate bully Flashman forces Tom to be held in front of a fire, causing him to pass out because the pain is so severe (Hughes n.p.). The bullying, we are led to understand, is a systemic, school-wide problem. Until Flashman's gang gained the upper hand, Hughes' narrator suggests, the school was an idyllic setting for boisterous young men:

So, though they were fagged more or less, and occasionally kicked or cuffed by the bullies, they were, on the whole, well off; and the fresh, brave school-life, so full of games, adventures, and good-fellowship, so ready at forgetting, so capacious at enjoying, so bright at forecasting, outweighed a thousand-fold their troubles with the master of their form, and the occasional ill-usage of the big boys in the house (Hughes n.p.).

In this sense, when Tom orchestrates a minor rebellion by the younger students to oust Flashman and his group, it would seem he is doing something akin to what Troy does for his school in *High School Musical*, or what Cap achieved in *Schooled*: change the social order for

the better. However, the narrator of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* does not focus on the gains for the school or community; he focuses on the gains Tom makes as an individual. Indeed, the narrator of the novel makes clear that, in the end, individuals who are brave enough to seek such systemic change are usually doomed to fail. What counts is their honour and their character—and, in this vein, the narrator enjoins his readers to refrain from putting down any idealistic man they encounter, and to remember “at any rate...that he has found something in the world which he will fight and suffer for” (n.p.). Ultimately, that is to say, the focus is not on how Tom faces personal challenges and transforms his school or community in the process. Instead the narrative focuses on how the challenges Tom faces in the school setting transform him as a person. The early school story is about cultivating stronger, more moral young adults, so that they can take their places in the existing social order. The KTC motif, by contrast, features exceptional young adults who change the social orders they inhabit.

A second way in which school stories bearing the KTC motif depart from early school stories concerns the role of adults—parents, teachers, and mentors. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes), as with other early school stories, especially those written prior to the last two decades in particular, adults are by no means omnipresent in the lives of the students. However, the journey that the central protagonists take in this British novel is inevitably a journey towards an adult ideal, and key adult figures model and point the way, providing decisive guidance. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, for instance, the role of the doctor headmaster becomes increasingly important in the last third of the book. After fighting Flashman (and getting into plenty of his own scrapes with no help from bullies), Tom eventually comes under the influence of the doctor's appealing version of masculinity, which is at once strong and empathic (Hughes). After his worst transgressions, Tom

goes home for break; when he returns, he is invited to tea with the doctor and some of the older students. There he finds himself mesmerized by the doctor's mien:

How frank, and kind, and manly was his greeting to the party by the fire! It did Tom's heart good to see him and young Brooke shake hands, and look one another in the face; and he didn't fail to remark that Brooke was nearly as tall and quite as broad as the Doctor. And his cup was full when in another moment his master turned to him with another warm shake of the hand, and, seemingly oblivious of all the late scrapes which he had been getting into, said, "Ah, Brown, you here! I hope you left your father and all well at home?" (Hughes n.p.)

The doctor goes on to be the key mentor figure in Tom's life, helping him develop toward an adult form of masculinity, and inspiring Tom to take a younger and more sensitive boy under his wing—cementing a friendship that, in turn, helps “civilize” and soften Tom (Hughes n.p.; see also Nelson 531).

In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (1871) we gain some of the most fully-drawn examples of wise adult guidance and mentorship of the early school story narrative form. This American novel follows a group of young men at the boarding school for boys run by Jo, the inveterate tomboy sister of *Little Women* (Alcott) and her husband. Dan is one of the most unruly of the crew, and he is in fact forced to leave Plumfield for a time. When he returns, Jo finds a way to bring him into her confidence and under her tutelage, by focusing on their mutual love of the natural world. As they engage in a conversation about his love of birds and lizards, Jo guides Dan gently on matters large and small, including Dan's grammar (Alcott 56). She offers him a cabinet in which to store the treasures he finds out of doors, and in doing so

helps Dan see that she understands the wildness within him, but has his best interests at heart (Alcott 56-57). At one point, Alcott writes, Jo “slyly” insinuates a mild criticism of Dan’s behaviour (56). That single word, “slyly,” communicates a great deal: it indicates that the adult, here, is firmly in charge. She can see Dan’s struggles; she understands where he needs to head; and she has the wits to guide him in a way that will not force him to rebel.

Not all adults in the early school story form are wise mentors, and the style of guidance is offered is by no means uniform. For instance, in the early Canadian school story, *Glengarry School Days* (1902), students are subject to a cruel schoolmaster who uses corporal punishment to humiliate and terrorize students into submission (Connor). Eventually several of the students rebel, physically, and subdue the schoolmaster as he strikes one of the younger kids. Far from validating their rebellion, it appears the town’s adults will be on the wrong side of the conflict—valuing order over justice—and the father of Thomas Finch, the boy who led the rebellion, prepares to give him a “wheeping” (Connor n.p.). However, before Thomas is punished, a townsman named Long John Cameron steps in:

"Man alive!" he exclaimed, "it's a quare father you are. You may be thinking it disgrace, but the section will be proud that there is a boy in it brave enough to stand up for the weak against a brute bully." And then he proceeded to tell the tale . . . with such strong passion and such rude vigor, that in spite of himself old Donald [Finch] found his rage vanish, and his heart began to move within him toward his son. (Connor n.p.)

Soon a town meeting sways opinion toward the merit of the boys’ rebellion, and the master is sent to teach elsewhere (Connor n.p.). Nonetheless, there is another schoolmaster who is admired in this work, both for his masculinity and as a model for his students, paralleling the narrative in

Tom Brown's School Days. In both works, however, the adult framework of order and balance, and the positive modelling of behaviour for children ultimately prevails. The boys who rebelled are chastened, but the adults do see the light—and they act through institutional mechanisms to protect the students.

Contemporary school stories that follow the KTC motif continue to have a moralizing or didactic bent, in keeping with a trend in YA literature that emphasizes the underlining of the agency of youth protagonists over that of adults (Cart; Keane; Lewis and Dockter). This trend in books exhibits the KTC school stories suggests that the role of key adults as ultimate moral agents has been decidedly overturned. At best, in KTC school stories, adults figure as wise mentors with conspicuous limitations—figures whom central teen protagonists are destined to overtake with respect for their moral clarity. More commonly, well-intentioned adults figure as bumblerers or as people who are detached from decision-making processes.

Korman's *Schooled*, a YA novel published in 2007, is particularly telling in this respect. Because the story, written by this Canadian-American author, is related by multiple, consecutive narrators, we gain the opportunity to hear the thinking of key adults, including Mrs. Donnelly, Cap's social worker, who takes him in while his grandmother is in the hospital. Mrs. Donnelly is also closely tied to the school and its administration, and she muses on how difficult it must be for Cap to be dropped into the "snake pit" of Claverage. But she hesitates to even broach the subject with Cap, lest she "[poison] his one-and-only experience of the real world" (Korman 46). She declines even to step in when her own daughter, Sophie, dumps cold water on Cap to keep him from practicing tai chi on their front lawn (Korman 48). She possesses the same sort of wisdom and insight as the mentor figures that figure so prominently in the early school story, but treats the

world of adolescents as so particular and foreign as to make adult intervention beside the point. Meanwhile, the Vice Principal at Claverage, Mr. Kosigi, is so caught up in his own professional aspirations that—well-meaning though he might be—he makes himself blind to the bullying going on at his school (Korman). He also fails to consider the challenges a boy who has been raised in near-isolation from the rest of the world might face, and blithely hands a series of blank school checks over to Cap in order to cover expenditures for the party, resulting in serious problems by the end, when it turns out Cap has no idea how to handle money (Korman ch. 23).

In *High School Musical*, the teachers themselves are so caught up in spats between their own respective spheres (such as theatre vs. sports), they are not able to offer much guidance with regard to Troy's central dilemma. Indeed, by being the popular boy who successfully blends his sport and theatre aspirations, Troy ends up creating a better environment for the adults as well—as suggested by the final scene, in which the theatre teacher dances delightedly with the school mascot. This echoes the way in which Cap's dogged problem-solving in *Schooled* disrupts a rampant culture of bullying that adult figures have barely understood or recognized, let alone worked to dismantle (Korman). Cap accidentally does their job for them.

In the context of fantasy stories, there is often a magical or otherworldly barrier preventing adults from assuming a straightforward, guiding role. For instance, early in *The Lightning Thief*, Percy flees to a camp for demigods that functions, essentially, as a sort of demigod boarding school. Camp Half-Blood is run by the wise Centaur Chiron, who has been mentor to demigods and heroes for millennia (Riordan). In many respects, Chiron seems to reflect the ideal of a wise boarding school mentor from the early school story; unfortunately,

Chiron must often refrain from sharing his wisdom and insights in a straightforward way, lest he somehow interfere with the course of fate and prophecy (see, e.g., Riordan 128). The other “mentor” figure available to Percy is none other than Dionysus—or “Mr. D.”—who has been consigned to the camp for a century as a sort of godly punishment for misbehavior. At specific points in this book and others of the Percy Jackson series, Dionysus provides important bits of help. But Mr. D.’s protective role is, in the main, so negligible and negligent as to make him a caricature of the wise mentor figure. “If I had my way...I would cause your molecules to erupt in flames. We’d sweep up the ashes and be done with a lot of trouble,” he says before Percy sets off on his quest (Riordan 117). When Percy returns victorious, all Mr. D. manages to say is, “Yes, yes, so the little brat didn’t get himself killed” (Riordan 305).

In short, the role of adult mentors and guides shifts significantly in school stories over the more than a century between the publication of *Little Men* and YA works like *The Lightning Thief*. In the 1960s and ‘70s, a dedication to grappling with the darker realities of adolescents’ lives becomes apparent. S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* represented a seminal publishing event in this respect, and is also widely credited with establishing the contemporary field of YA literature (Crowe 116; Jenkins 290; Nilsen and Donelson 8; Staino n.p.). Hinton started work on the novel as a teen herself, seeking to portray the pressures caused by class tensions and proto-gang activity (Staino n.p.). Hinton explained her strategy this way: “Teen-agers know a lot today. Not just things out of a textbook, but about living. They know their parents aren’t superhuman, they know that justice doesn’t always win out, and that sometimes the bad guys win. They know that persons in high places aren’t safe from corruption...” (Nilsen and Donelson 8, quoting Hinton). Her book offers exceptional insight into how groups of young working class men are shaped by

the perception of them as violent, and how they become subject to violence because of it. Her protagonists confront a tough world, moreover, seemingly on their own, with almost no adult oversight or intervention; the central protagonist, Ponyboy, is an orphan being raised by two older brothers, while the parents of the other teens make no appearance (Hinton). At the end of the novel—after surviving a brutal attack, having to flee his town as a murder suspect, and watching his closest friend die—Ponyboy begins to write his story as a “greaser,” and we realize that the book he will write is the book we have been reading all along (Hinton ch. 12). Writing in this sense becomes an act of survival and self-fashioning—and it is a teacher who moved Ponyboy to channel his emotions in this way. Thus, the role of an adult thus becomes pivotal at the end, but largely as a spur to the process of self-awareness and recollection.

Not long after *The Outsiders* (Hinton) YA books like *The Chocolate Wars* (Cormier) began to focus on the abusive roles that adults sometimes take on, as well as adult collusion in patterns of bullying and abuse. In these books, kids must act to assure their own wellbeing, a shift that pushes adult mentorship to the margins, even when it is present. Around the same time, school stories by Quebecois feminist writers achieved an exceptionally vigorous de-centering of wise adult mentorship. For example, in *Manuscrits de Pauline Archange* (which, though written for adult audiences, functions in substantial part as a school story), school, home, and church become sources of grievous emotional, physical and sexual abuse (Blais). To the extent that the heroine is able to recoup a sense of selfhood and wholeness moving forward, it is through her own sense of determination—as well as, once again, through the act of self-creation inherent in writing (Green 73).

Thus, school stories evidencing the KTC motif are by no means the first to push the role of adult mentors to the margins; rather, they build on the decentering that occurs through school stories of the 1960s and '70s. During this time period, protagonists of YA fiction were becoming more autonomous, likely in response to broader cultural shifts taking place at the time that recognized diversity and requisite social changes. But there is one important point of differentiation: in stories ranging from *The Outsiders*, to *The Chocolate Wars*, to *Manuscripts*, the central teen protagonists fight tough battles whose outcomes are not assured. They are left emerging into adulthood without the steady hand of adult advisors whose roles they learn to model and replicate—but also without assurance that their own personal quests will be successful. Their achievements are both intensely personal, and a matter of messy, incomplete, ongoing negotiation—indeed, in *The Chocolate Wars*, it appears the central protagonist may not survive the beating he has taken at the hands of bullies, with adult collusion (Cormier ch. 38; Trites, 43-57).

In KTC stories, by contrast, no matter how tough the going gets, readers are assured that central teen figures will prevail. Because the adults around them are often hapless—or are prevented for various reasons from guiding young people in the fullest ways they know how—these young people must prevail on their own. Their ability to do so connects to a third and final distinguishing feature of school stories that incorporate a KTC motif: success is achieved insofar as young people learn to trust and rely on their authentic selves and personal instincts, rather than by assuming conventional roles within the existing social order.

The challenges that kids confront in KTC stories are cast as broadly social in nature: kids change the rules of stereotyping at their school. They thwart the bullies and build school-wide

solidarity; they defeat monstrous dictators in the making. Somewhat ironically, however, they become successful by hewing to their own, most instinctual and unique sense of self. This is not to say that KTC kids do not build friendships and alliances or grow by helping one another. But in each KTC story there is a decisive way in which success (and, to a certain extent, adulthood) is achieved because the central protagonists come to rely on their *authentic selves*.

For instance, over the course of the three installments of *High School Musical* it becomes increasingly apparent that Troy can look only to himself for solutions—and that he must look deeply inside himself to find them. In *High School Musical 3*, the final decision Troy faces concerns, fittingly enough, what college to attend (marking both an end to the high school setting of the story and an end to life with his virtually absent parents, since his college choices will take him away from home). Troy’s breakthrough moment is marked by a solo, in which he races through the empty halls of the high school at night, flinging himself against walls, tearing down a banner bearing a towering image of himself as a ball player, and belting out a testament to the idea that moral guidance can only come from within. “Just trust your heart,” he advises himself meditatively at first, then builds into a frenzied soliloquy:

I'm kickin' down the walls

I gotta make 'em fall

Just break through them all

I'm punchin', crashin', I'm gonna

Fight to find myself

Me and no one else... (Ortega, *High School Musical 3*).

One Disney executive summarized three of the movie's four key themes as "express yourself," "believe in yourself," and "follow your dreams" (Sisario n.p.).

Over the course of nearly a century, from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes) through to *The Manuscripts* (Blais) of the 1960s, the school story demonstrated that building personal maturity largely entails locating or being mentored by the right role models within the existing social order. This is not to imply that maturity is cast, in the early story, as a matter of sheer conformity. When Jo takes Dan under her wing in *Little Men*, for example, the relationship works because Jo is able to understand Dan's personality having had many of the same impulses when she was young (Alcott 56-7). Thus, Jo is poised to help bring Dan through to the other side of adulthood, and, in effect, "civilizing" him and channeling his sense of selfhood into a more respectable and efficacious form. The innate contents of selfhood are, in this sense, subtly placed in some tension with an empowering sense of adulthood. It is not enough for Tom Brown, or Dan of *Little Men*, or even the unruly boys who rebelled in *Glengarry School Days* to continue to trust themselves when making decisions. To become moral actors with a chance at having an impact on the adult world, they must learn to balance their own unique sense of self with the established social world's expectations of them.

When the kids take charge, by contrast, personal agency and power is enhanced by relying ever more steadily on one's own sense of what is right, what will work, and how to behave. In the case of Cap, the shaggy-haired hero of *Schooled*, this process occurs almost by default. Having been home-schooled by his eccentric, "hippie" grandmother in near-isolation from mainstream culture, Cap has no vocabulary or tools for confronting the brutal social world at Claverage Middle School. Meanwhile, the adults around him are either reluctant to offer these

tools, or too oblivious to realize he needs them. Thus, Cap faces challenge after challenge in the only ways he knows how. When, for instance, Cap finds himself trapped in a small courtyard with no exit, thanks to a prank orchestrated by the school's central bully, Zach, Cap proceeds to sit in the lotus position and meditate, remaining there for the better part of the day (Korman 65). Zach and his sidekicks, Naomi, secretly monitor Cap through this episode and are amazed to find that Cap does not react as they would expect: beating on the doors, screaming, melting down. Zach is beside himself with frustration that the stunt has failed to get a rise out of Cap, but Naomi muses:

Cap was weird, but there was more to it than that. There was something inside him that nobody else understood, something mysterious and strong. Not muscle strong or fighting strong—a kind of strength that gave him the self-control to meditate instead of falling apart. (Korman 66)

This moment begins the reversal of Cap's fortunes at Claverage and sets the stage for a new order, where bullied kids begin to come out of their shell, and bullies begin to relinquish power. The more closely Cap hews to "who he is," to an authentic form of self, the more respect he generates and the more power he wields.

Harry Potter offers a particularly strong example of how KTC stories emphasize the power inherent in tapping into an authentic self. Throughout the Harry Potter series, Harry is described as uniquely suited to fight the evil wizard Voldemort because of the protective magic his mother conferred on him as a baby, when she sacrificed her life to save his (Wolosky 137). However, in the final book we learn a deeper reason why Harry—and only Harry—is capable of defeating Voldemort: Harry's wand is the only other wand that shares a core magical material

with Voldemort's, allowing him to turn Voldemort's spells back on the evil wizard when they duel. This is no mere happenstance, however, since, as we have read since the first volume of the seven-book series, "the wand chooses the wizard" (Rowling *Deathly Hallows* 397). Hence, we are led to assume, there is something unique deep inside the core of Harry's own self that enables him to wield the one tool capable of defeating the Hitler-like Lord Voldemort. To be sure, a great many other kids and adults are involved in the final battle against Voldemort's forces, but only Harry can actually defeat the evil wizard. As he moves toward the final battle, Harry digs more and more deeply into the innate knowledge and wisdom he possesses just by dint of being himself; this yields the wisdom he needs to make the decisions that allow him to triumph (Rowling *Deathly Hallows* 710-23).

Symptomatically, moreover, in both the Harry Potter and Percy Jackson series, the central protagonists are utterly unaware of the supernatural powers they harbour until they are adolescents. These are not powers they have sought through patient work, or that others have sought to cultivate within them. They are powers that simply well up inside them and cannot be denied, and therefore are representative of the development of the authentic self through selfactualization. This demonstrates that the social values that we create are endemically linked to what is believed to be authentic self. Although many societal norms have been developed to protect the so-called innocence of young people, the reality in which they operate demands that the stresses and challenges they face change the way that they negotiate their agency.

iii. Why now?

Taken as a whole, school stories bearing the KTC motif do not simply tinker with the conventions of the school story; they offer a significantly new pattern by which teens may come

to interpret and actualize the nature of agency, selfhood, and social change. Literature for young adults has almost always carried a didactic or moralizing streak (Cart; Keane). In KTC stories as I have identified them, several key messages are conveyed: that it is up to kids to change the world; that social change is forged, first and foremost, by unique individuals; and that the personal agency needed to effect social change springs from the unique and authentic inner self (though friendship and community may be accorded importance too).

Trites suggests that, in order to help teens consume tales of power in empowering ways, it is necessary to decode the messages being conveyed in these novels, primarily through the application of social theory (158-66). The reason that this is the case is that adolescents are traversing new psychosocial boundaries in extant power-laden social hierarchies, which leads them to establish and re-establish the social and personal contexts of friendships, kin ties, and teacher-student relationships, and therefore this is reflected in the narrative form as well as the dialogue in novels where adolescent explorations of power unfold. Trites makes a convincing case, but her work begs the question: what theoretical lens is called for with regard to the KTC motif? Assuming there is a reason these stories are emerging now, what are the reasons? What is their ideological salience and valence?

While in the past child development was accepted as the perspective through which children were understood, recent scholarship has determined that children may be actors in their own right, and are socially cognizant of their roles within different contexts (Matthews). There is, therefore, a need to understand how these contexts are created, and how children's roles and their own perceptions of their identities are affected. As Fass notes, our awareness of these multiple contexts can enrich our understanding of historical norms "as we examine how earlier

periods of major changes in employment and consumption may have altered youth's experience of power in families and outside families, as well as how this may have led to conflicts that were political as well as personal" (28). This notion of power is important because, despite the fact that children may be able social actors in their social space, they are also constrained by prevailing power structures. Even though, as Hegel once noted, children are not the property of their parents or of others in society, adults have the ability to shape reality for children. Children's instinctive, physical responses are to trust and love their parents, according to Hegel, in order to allow them to operate within the social construct. Without subsuming these arguments into a discussion of determinism, however, we can see that it is possible that adults underestimate the capacity of children to make sense of their worlds, their identities, and to act based on the information that they receive.

Hegel has put forward another interesting point: "the play theory of education assumes that what is childish is itself already something of inherent worth and presents it as such to the children" (118), but at the same time, children need something more substantial than play in order to shape their reality. Play can signify the practice of adult normative values in an insubstantial context, but it can also mean whatever the child intends it to mean. This dichotomy indicates that it is the context of the action which is relevant, rather than the action itself. Zelizer takes this contextual argument further, and posits that the youth as actor can be situated in a socioeconomic context. It is this construction of youth, linked to the inherent value of the child, which may be an overarching variable. Because adults hold power over children, children become objects of that power. Attributing value to youth means that that power can be traded and shifted according to normative values. Whereas in the past, children were able to provide

financial aid to their parents through their ability to work and add direct economic value, in the present the conception of childhood has changed to almost fetishize the idea of a child in his or her pre-work years. Individuals want to be able to imagine childhood as something separate and ideal from adulthood, whereas, in the context of YA literature, they become empowered to effect change and difference.

Although one might argue that this represents a shift in values towards egalitarianism and recognition of the rights of the child, there is also the social context to consider. Youth are now able to be appropriate power and rights from adults because of the fact that in Western, Northern communities, they are not as widely needed as they were before to provide economic value. The heightened emotional status of children is accorded because of the fact that parents are now having fewer children, and are often not able to take the time to procreate until much later in life (Zelizer). The child as actor has been transformed from the profane wage-earner to the sacred embodiment of adult wishes for the future. Youth might also be imagined as having had a different social value within a different cultural context of community where lives were shorter and working hours longer. There is, therefore, a contextual element to youth. The experience of being a child or having a child has changed significantly over time, and within different cultures. Being a child does not equate to with one experience, nor one tautological type of social action. The normative environments of youth, situated in YA literature written by adults, may therefore in whole or in part be determined by adults, because of the relative power differential between these social actors. At the same time, however, youth are likely able to choose to fulfill or not fulfill the role of an object in their parents' lives, and that process of development can and will be altered by the society in which they are situated.

In particular, it is curious to note the ascendance in KTC stories of a vision of an intrinsic, authentic self as the seat of agency. This is curious on two counts: first, because it reverses the story of self so forcefully presented in school stories from the 1960s and '70s, in works as diverse as *The Outsiders* (Hinton) and *Manuscripts* (Blais), which emphasize selfhood as a product of conscious work, discovery, and self-fashioning, often through the task of writing; second, because it strains against the messages conveyed by the rise of a post-industrial economy characterized by precarity, which calls for the individual to engage in successive acts of selfrecreation and self-promotion in order to succeed (Horning n.p.).

A third and final option for exploring the ideological dimensions of the KTC motif would be via Foucauldian analysis, which configures power not simply as a coercive force, but as one widely distributed through the social body. Trites remarks that, "...as Foucault points out, power can be both repressive and enabling; it is from within the confines of powerlessness that people rebel and discover their own power" (93). However, she may be underselling the extent to which Foucault revises the Marxist notion of power as a coercive force. Foucault's notion of governmentality is key in this respect, because it "offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centres either on consensus or on violence [and] it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state..." (Lemke 2). What these stories suggest about larger social shifts can be tied back to Marx and his concept of alienation. Marx expressed his discomfort with the role of individuals as cogs in the industrial machine and the compulsion to produce. In essence, workers, like these YA heroes, are

alienated from their true human selves, from their social beings, as their time and efforts are coopted by the processes of their work, which is meant for consumption.

Becoming part of the means of production, children become part of the machine. They become separated from who they are because they have no control over what they are doing on a daily basis. This relates to the work of Neufeld and Maté who suggest that children can become alienated and emotionally shut down; although these authors suggest that this is due to the increasing importance of peer groups and youth subcultures in their lives, it can also be a result of our increasingly disparate society. This is, in some ways, dehumanizing, as children are meant to become meaningless commodities rather than social contributors, which reflects Pollack's idea that trends of alienation, depression, violence and suicide mark youth relationships and personal experiences. There is a fundamental difference, therefore, between contributing work towards a separate, private entity, and contributing towards a common social goal. Only through doing the latter, Marx believed, will individuals be able to fulfill their human nature. Workers, however, may, under Marx's theoretical ideology, see themselves in the guise of worker before they see themselves as an individual, thus increasing the potential for alienation from their fundamental social and personal values.

As Marx illustrates, if people are placing a higher value on their contribution to their economic role than to their social obligation not to cause harm to other human beings, then there is a fundamental challenge to the development of a sane, healthy, and egalitarian society. This reflects Marx's theory that those who are controlled by social norms and institutions cannot become self-realized, and his fear that they will fail to build real social relationships. Marx's concept of vulgar materialism does not come into play within this framework, in that the reason

for individual action within a capitalist work environment is not tied to knowledge which is simply a reflection of economic or political interests. Instead, there is an intrinsic push because of the need of the individual to survive and the need to transform their reality, which is illustrated through these YA novels and most significantly through the KTC motif. Marx asserts that when an economic structure fails to develop these productive forces among its members, it will be revolutionized and there will be a change in value, organization and endeavour, as exemplified by the actions of the KTC. Marx's idea that alienation could make us all less human is likely true, as we are forced to follow the schedule and the values of corporations rather than our own interests. At the same time, the KTC motif shows readers how to use these ideas to make better choices over the long run. It is our responsibility, as these novels demonstrate, to take the opportunity to make the world what we want to make of it, so that we can provide a better future for society as a whole.

As Lemke explains, central to governmentality is the idea that governing the state and governing the *self* are projects that go hand in hand and complete one another (3). In this process of mutual completion, the state sets the general framework and ruling logic by which individuals enact their lives (Lemke 4-5). A good example in contemporary contexts might be the way individuals define and experience their *selves* as virtuous and worthwhile for things like paying taxes, taking care of bills on time, and not carrying excess credit. Here, a positive sense of self is achieved through personal practices that reinforce the goals of the state and market economy; this, in turn, also helps maintain a broader social understanding, in which others experience a diminished sense of self if they do not live up to the same standards. Ultimately, through this type of linkage, "social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc." are transformed into a

“problem of ‘self-care’” (Lemke 12). Potentially, the KTC emphasis on teen protagonists who must solve important social problems; who cannot rely on adults; and who must tap into their deepest, most authentic selves in order to succeed in their tasks pushes the problem of “self-care” one step further. Now even the failure to undo oppression—whether by bullies or by the evil wizard Voldemort— emerges as a problem of self, rather than a problem of power.

Chapter Three: Calling for a Different World

From Paris, Athens and London to Montreal and New York City, young people are challenging the current repressive historical conjuncture by rejecting its dominant premises and practices. They are fighting to create a future in which their voices are heard and the principles of justice and equality become key elements of a radicalized democratic and social project. . . . In short, youth have dared to call for a different world and, in doing so, have exhibited great courage in taking up a wager about the future made from the standpoint of an embattled present.

Henry Giroux “Days of Rage” 1

In December 2010, a democratic protest movement erupted in Tunisia that quickly spread to nations across the Arab world, and in every country where protests emerged, young people were at the forefront of calls for change (Haddad and Atassi 1). In May 2011, inspired by the momentum of the Arab Spring, youth-focused protest encampments sprang up in urban centres across Spain, swiftly garnering support and participation from other demographics (Beas 1; Casteñedo 309-310). That July, the Vancouver-based, anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* published a blog post calling for a mass occupation at Wall Street in the United States; two weeks later the Occupy Wall Street website was launched; on September 17, an occupation

encampment began in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park (Chappell 1). With a median protestor age of 26, young people once again took the lead in the Occupy movement (Cassidy 1). Less than two months later, nearly 20,000 students marched on the Premier's office in Montreal to protest tuition hikes for public universities (CBC "Montreal Students Protest" 1). In February and March 2012, continued discontent with educational policy led to massive rallies and strikes, and university-age students found themselves leading a movement that Guardian commentator Martin Lukacs called "the most powerful challenge to neoliberalism on the continent" (1).

The new era of youth protest and mobilization is ongoing and can be witnessed, for instance, in the many Occupy offshoots across the globe, as well as the unprecedented success of Bernie Sanders' socialist candidacy in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Gabbatt 1). Intriguingly, however, scholars of Young Adult (YA) literature—literature intended chiefly for readers aged 12-20 (Alsup 1)—have devoted little attention to the question of how social change and social movements are imagined and represented in texts about and for young people. A rich and growing body of scholarship treats issues of gender and sexuality in YA books (e.g., Cart and Jenkins; Fuoss; Jenkins; Moeller; Silver; Wickens). Likewise, issues of race, ethnicity, colonialism, and identity are increasingly explored, often with emphasis on both intersectionalities with gender and/or the lived experience of literacy and YA texts (e.g., Alsup; Boston and Baxley; Bradford; Loh; Louie; McGillis, treating fiction for both children and young adults; White-Kaulaity). Ideology and power are also topics of real importance in the study of YA works, (e.g., Bradford; Hollindale; Nikolajeva; Trites). Yet there is near silence on the issue of social change and social movements in the same literary context.

Exploring representations of social change in YA texts is by no means a ‘merely’ theoretical imperative. As Janet Alsup argues persuasively, engaging with narratives is almost always an interactive process. Narrative discourse functions, in her words, as an “identity spark” that is liable to promote reflection on the “connection (or disconnection) between discourse, subjectivities, and identity strands” (Alsup 2). Nowhere is this more evident, she suggests, than in the lives of adolescents, who are involved in a rapid and volatile process of change and identity-formation (Alsup 2-3). Indeed, the very brains of adolescents are in a period of rapid development. Citing to work by Canadian researcher David S. Miall, Alsup points out that the prefrontal cortex, which is still maturing during adolescence, is central to the human capacity to engage with narratives, including the ability to decipher plots and predict outcomes (Alsup 3-4, citing Miall). Likewise, narrative texts appear to trigger emotional responses in this portion of the brain (Alsup 4). Thus, teens may well benefit from adult guidance as they seek to interpret the narratives they read, but they also may be particularly affected by such narratives and particularly sensitive and responsive to them.

Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that researchers have begun to focus on questions of identity in YA works, along with related issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and power. But attention to narratives of social change represents a logical “next step.” Arguably, the idea of social change is immanent in attempts to grapple with identity and power. For instance, every assertion of a marginalized identity—whether fictional or real—is itself an act in service of social change, and every such attempt articulates, implicitly, with movements for change that have preceded it. Likewise, every attempt to understand social power has the potential to provoke myriad questions of fairness, equity, and justice, which in turn promote—consciously or not—

reflections on the rightness of the social status quo. If we accept, with Alsup, that YA narratives are a prime site where adolescents may come to know and define themselves and develop their identities, we should likewise accept that YA narratives are a site where they may begin to understand their place in the social world; their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with social structures and cultural norms and with processes by which the status quo may be transformed. Looked at in this way, YA literature itself suggests the time is ripe for inquiry into the terms by which it proposes social change can, and should, occur. Indeed, as I argue below, the most popular YA literary franchise of all time, the Harry Potter books (Rowling), offers a panoramic vision of social mobilization against a rising oppressive force.

In her path-breaking work on power in YA fiction, *Disturbing the Universe*, Trites applies a range of post-structural theoretical perspectives to reframe issues of power, gender, identity, and sex and sexuality that play out in YA works (158-59). She further suggests that teaching students to use the tools of post-structural critique should be a vital part of high school education, since these tools can enable young readers to interrogate YA texts in more sophisticated ways, implicitly allowing them to claim greater power for themselves as readers (Trites 204). However, with regard to narratives of social change and social mobilization, I propose that the work needed at present is of a more basic sort: identifying stories of social change embedded in works that are rarely read to that end, and then—through comparison to real-life cases and research on social movements—beginning to raise questions about the ideologies at work when YA texts represent processes of social change.

In this chapter, accordingly, I adopt a somewhat unorthodox comparative approach. I begin by assessing three YA texts that offer compelling stories of social change: the Harry Potter

books (Rowling) and the film, *High School Musical* (Ortega), as well as *Harriet's Daughter* (Philip). Then I compare the two accounts to a narrative of social change presented by participants in the 2012 Montreal student strikes on the website, StudentStrike.net (Savard, Charaoui, and uncredited collaborators). I approach the student strike materials as one possible narrative of the strikes, and analyze them in terms of their narrative elements and strategy, rather than treating the website as a 'straightforward record of reality' against which to compare fictional YA accounts. Nevertheless, the student strike materials grow out of students' real-world experiences in a movement for social change, one with concrete losses and concrete gains; moreover, the makers of the website specifically set out to analyze where their efforts succeeded, and where they could have been better at fostering change (StudentStrike.net). Thus, it is illuminating to identify elements that the strikers' narrative shares in common with the narratives of change in the Harry Potter series and the movie, *High School Musical*. Intriguingly, as I argue at the conclusion to this chapter, they have more in common than one might think. The differences, however, point to important questions that we should be raising not simply *about* YA books, but together with the young people who read them.

i. Youth and struggle

The YA texts I focus on here are, in many ways, vastly different works. The Harry Potter series (comprises seven fantasy novels set in a magical world that runs parallel to the world of the non-magical humans, or "muggles" (Rowling *Prisoner of Azkaban* 7). The central dilemma that evolves over the course of the series is of earth-shattering importance: struggle against a vast evil force that threatens to engulf both the magical and muggle realms of existence. *High School Musical* by contrast, is a film that appeared in movie theatres and was shown on the Disney

Channel (Power 1). Moreover, the central dilemma in the non-fantasy narrative of *High School Musical* is, not surprisingly, far more mundane. Central protagonists must confront the balkanization of social life into stereotypical groupings like ‘jock’ and ‘nerd,’ within the context of their US high school in the Southwestern US. *Harriet’s Daughter* (Philip) examines how perception is grounded in the discourse of power and language through the story of Margaret, a first-generation Canadian of Bajan descent who sees herself as the descendant of Harriet Tubman, the leader of hundreds of slaves who walked to freedom along the Underground Railroad during the American Civil War.

That said, there are certain key similarities between the YA texts that also should be noted, and which allow them to function, when considered in tandem, as a useful counterpoint to the experience-based narrative of the Montreal student strikers (StudentStrike.net). First, all of the stories share the KTC motif. Second, and more critically for my purposes in this chapter, both the Harry Potter and *High School Musical* franchises are cultural products that resonate with—and help to construct—a globalized idea, or ideal, of adolescence (Giddens 178). This globalized portrayal of the adolescent experience is by no means neutral: it tends to feature narratives built around the lives of predominantly middle class North American and aggressively marketed worldwide. For instance, the *High School Musical* series, targeted to ‘tweens,’ grossed 106,308,538 USD at the domestic box office, but more than double that in worldwide box office sales (“Movie Franchises”). These figures, meanwhile, represent only a small portion of sales of *High School Musical*-related products, including videos and music, as well as “a stage show, a concert tour, reality shows, a book-publishing series (50 million copies sold in 24 languages) and scores of tie-ins from breakfast cereals to Bible study guides” (Power 1). This extremely

stereotypified story of American teens from a large suburban high school has claimed great market success, from Europe to Asia to the Middle East; in Saudi Arabia, for instance, the *High School Musical 2* soundtrack went gold (Power 1). As sociologist Anthony Giddens points out, young people across the planet have come to inhabit emotional and cultural worlds that are “for the most part truly global” (178; see also Steffler 111 for a parallel article concerning globalization and the projection of a supposedly “universal child”).

Adolescents are seen as particularly liable to view and interpret their own experiences through a global lens, for the simple reason that they are prodigious consumers of television programming and films produced in the west but targeted to audiences worldwide (Arnett 777). Perhaps more to the point, they are leading users of the internet and social media, allowing them real-time access to conversations and ideas spanning continents (Arnett 777). They are also the consumer segment viewed as most receptive to global brands and therefore most aggressively targeted through global marketing strategies. As a net result, according to psychologist Arnett, “young people develop a global identity that gives them a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture and includes an awareness of the events, practices, styles, and information that are part of [a projected] global culture” (777). This is by no means to suggest that adolescents in other cultures uncritically adopt a projected western understanding of adolescence and its associated behaviors. They may forge bi-cultural identities that enable them to shuttle between two worlds and sets of social norms, the global and the local (Arnett 777-78). Alternately or simultaneously, they may engage in a process of “glocalization,” consuming globalized cultural products in a way that shifts their meaning and valence, according to local cultural norms (Kjeldegaard and Askegaard 231).

Even while rejecting the idea that youth are uncritical consumers of global cultural products such as the *High School Musical* and Harry Potter franchises, it is important to note the difference between narratives marketed to global audiences, and ones that grow out of decidedly local, embodied experiences, as is the case with the account produced by a segment of the Montreal student strikers for the website StudentStrike.net (Savard, Charaoui, and uncredited collaborators). Of course, while *High School Musical* was produced by Disney with the goal of global market reach, there is no evidence that the same is true with respect to the Harry Potter novels. Indeed, when British publisher Bloomsbury issued the first novel in the series, it authorized a print run of just 500 (Gunelius 51). Still, from the start of the series, Rowling established a detailed and compelling picture of Hogwarts—the boarding school for teen wizards that functions as the primary setting for action in the novels—by borrowing copiously from depictions of life at British boarding schools in the school story narrative form (Steege 141-42). In this sense, the Harry Potter stories have, from the beginning, articulated with a globalized imagination of the ideal student life, forged through colonialism. As Emma Jacobs points out in a *Financial Times* article titled, “Lessons in Britishness”:

There is nothing new about sending children overseas to such schools. In the days of the British empire, boarding schools thrived as colonial administrators and local rulers sought to imbue their children with British culture and character. They are a staple of fiction, from Enid Blyton’s Malory Towers to Ronald Searle’s St Trinian’s and, more recently, Hogwarts, the school for wizards in JK Rowling’s Harry Potter series. (Jacobs 1)

Similarly, in a study of Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s own boarding school experience, “colonial acculturation in elite boarding schools has been the subject of the memoirs and school

stories of a number of first generation Nigerian writers,” suggesting that, via school stories penned in other cultures, the British boarding school model has been communicated to non-elites as well (Ochiagha 123).

While *Harriet's Daughter* (Philip) arguably takes a different stance towards power dynamics and the intersecting issues of youth agency and social change, as it is not situated in a school story per se, it also creates a challenge to the way in which roles and structures are therefore skewed by personal contextual experiences and by endemic forces within society, as suggested in particular by Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Philip's work serves to illustrate what the performative, relational body, namely, the body as it positions itself in social space through the language it uses, can accomplish. As she writes,

‘I like the way you talk. I want to talk like that. Sometimes I hear my mother on the phone with her Jamaican friends; when they get going I can hardly understand them.’

‘Your mother talk dialect?’

‘Yep, but she likes to pretend she doesn't know how to; she thinks it's better to sound like a Canadian. In any case, after a while you begin to lose your accent you know, like you're doing.’ I nudged her and smiled.

‘Me? Never! Me never going lose me accent. I'se a Tobagonian and I'se proud of it.’

(Philip 11)

This dialogue points to how a hegemonic power structure can act to prevent diversity of knowledge, language and experience in all of its forms, but also how the language and ideas used by youth can shift the meaning of social values and call these into question. The examination of

collective Black history and its links to slavery, as well as Bajan beliefs and values, is interspersed through the story of Margaret's own experiences. The focus of the story is liberation, breaking the silence that is imposed on her by the social distancing of her immigrant voice, and Margaret's youthful need to bring attention to the ideas and values of marginalized people who live on the periphery of hegemonic culture and power, including members of her own family.

Arguably, there is a globalized aspect to the narrative presented by Montreal student strikers in StudentStrike.net (Savard, Charaoui, and uncredited collaborators). Strategies of protest have spread rapidly from one context to another over recent years, in part due to the instantaneous and interactive nature of social media. Nevertheless, the movement forged by Québec students was created in response to a specific, local condition. In this sense, a unique axis of comparison begins to emerge. On the one hand, student strikers present a narrative of social change that grows out of concrete, on-the-ground experience in the specific political and cultural environment of Québec. On the other hand, the fictional narratives drawn on and reinforce a globalized imagination of youth culture and norms, an imagined culture that, in turn, is based primarily on western ideals that are assumed to have universal merit and appeal. While this may not help elucidate lessons about "Canadianness" or the Francophone Canadian experience, it may—I hope—elucidate questionable generalizations, omissions, and elisions that appear in globally marketed narratives of how change is forged.

The central issue in *High School Musical* (Ortega)—which repeats in variations through *High School Musical 2* and *High School Musical 3*—concerns the attempt of teenager named

Troy Bolton, who defines himself and is defined largely by his role as co-captain of his high school varsity basketball team, to come to terms with his interest in the performing arts. (He must also convince others around him to accept this concern as valid.) Through most of the action unfolds at a large, fictional US high school with the tellingly generic name of East High School, it is winter break when the movie opens, and Troy is vacationing with his parents at a ski lodge and resort. Even on vacation, both Troy and his father, Jack Bolton—who coaches the East High basketball team—are as focused on basketball as ever. On New Year’s Eve, Troy’s mother tracks them down in an indoor gymnasium, taking practice shots. “Did we really fly all this way just to play more basketball?” she asks them—to which Troy and his father respond simultaneously, “Yeah.”

Being away from school, however, allows Troy to break free of his usual identity constraints. That evening, at a New Year’s party for teenagers staying at the resort, Troy is convinced to try his hand at karaoke, and finds himself singing a duet with a girl he just met named Gabriella Montez. Troy is awkward as he sings the opening lines:

Living in my own world

Didn't understand

That anything can happen

When you take a chance. (Gerrard, Seeley, and Neville lines 1-4)

Soon the two teens put their hearts into singing and deliver a show-stopping duet. A romance between them clearly is being kindled, which gives a double meaning to the words, “anything can happen/[w]hen you take a chance” (Gerrard, Seeley, and Neville lines 3-4). But taking a chance becomes a more complicated proposition when Gabriella unexpectedly transfers to East

High. Furthermore, Troy's friends and father find it hard enough to understand why he, as the consummate high school 'jock,' would date the beautiful but decidedly 'nerdy' Gabriella. Still less do they understand why he would waste his time auditioning with her for the school musical, which is the province of 'theatre types.'

Alongside this narrative of personal development, however, *High School Musical* offers a story of social change. Given that *High School Musical* is a light-hearted, romantic musical that runs all of 98 minutes, the story of social change it offers is a modest one. Still, its presence is unmistakable, beginning with the fifth song-and-dance routine of the movie, "Stick to the Status Quo" (Lawrence and Greenberg). In an elaborately-choreographed cafeteria scene, students from rigidly separate social groupings confess to having aspirations beyond their stereotyped roles. An athlete confesses: "I-I bake....I love to bake" (Lawrence and Greenberg lines 7-8). A 'brainiac' girl confesses her secret passion for hip hop dancing (Lawrence and Greenberg line 23). A skateboarder confesses to playing the cello (Lawrence and Greenberg line 42). The students mix with one another as they dance and sing, but with each repetition of the chorus, they are drawn back to their separate, socially segregated lunch tables:

No, no, no / Stick to the stuff you know

If you wanna be cool follow one simple rule

Stick to the stuff you know. (Lawrence and Greenberg lines 13-16)

Thus, as the song makes clear, Troy's personal dilemma is shared by others throughout the school. Even teachers and administrators feel the pressure to conform to pre-set social 'types,' as attested by the tension between Troy's father, the East High basketball coach, and the theatre instructor, Ms. Darbus. Ms. Darbus is so suspicious of student athletes, she confronts

Troy's father, demanding to know if his "all-star son" is auditioning as a hoax, and planning to play "some sort of a practical joke in my chapel of the arts." Coach Bolton, in turn, is openly contemptuous of the theatre program and Ms. Darbus's musical, saying: "Sounds like a winner. Good luck on Broadway." Yet by the final scene of the film, set in the gymnasium, it is clear the culture has shifted and divisions are rapidly breaking down: athletes dance with drama students; skateboarders dance with nerds; a 'brainiac' girl breaks out in the hip-hop moves she secretly loves; and the drama teacher, Ms. Darbus, dances with the school mascot. Zach, who has just led his basketball team to a championship victory, and Gabriella, who has just won the scholastic decathlon, have become a solid couple; and Troy's best friend and co-captain is dating Gabriella's best friend and scholastic decathlon team co-captain. "We're all in this together," the assembled cast sings (Gerrard, Seeley, and Neville line 14), and the ambitious and scheming drama student, Sharpay, flings herself on the 'jock' who loves to bake, declaring that his cookies are "genius."

Clearly, in this sense, the film presents its fans with a model of youth-driven change. It tells a story about what it takes for young people to gain an enhanced sense of control over their lives and build a better school community. Arguably, too, the vision of change *High School Musical* offers is all the more compelling for being wrapped in a presentation that is—visually and musically, as well as in terms of narrative style—simple, catchy and upbeat. Indeed, because the question of social change is not specifically highlighted or problematized, the film is offered as a commonsensical reflection on 'how the world works.' This makes it a compelling narrative to elucidate and unpack.

ii. Organization and mobilization

The Harry Potter books are far more detailed and involved—in terms of characters, setting and, especially, plot—than *High School Musical*. And, whereas the two sequels to *High School Musical* essentially repeat its basic formula, the Harry Potter installments add important new layers of complexity to the story as they progress. Since it would be folly to attempt a full review of the series, I focus on two of the later volumes—*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (*Order of the Phoenix*) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (*Deathly Hallows*)—which reflect the elaboration of a social movement led in the main by young people.

When Harry was still a baby, Voldemort began a reign of terror that threatened to tear the wizarding world apart. He tortured and killed numerous wizards and witches who opposed him. Harry's own parents died while protecting him from the evil wizard (*Philosopher's Stone* ch. 1). Voldemort would have killed the infant Harry as well, but somehow the killing curse the dark wizard used rebounded on him, leaving him near death (*Philosopher's Stone* ch. 1; *Chamber of Secrets* ch. 2). But over the decade before the first novel opens, Voldemort has been gaining strength and seeking a new human form, and soon he begins gathering old and new allies around himself (*Philosopher's Stone*; *Chamber of Secrets*; *Prisoner of Azkaban*). By the end of the first volume, the central protagonists of the story—Harry and his two closest friends at the Hogwarts boarding school for wizards—understand that Voldemort once again represents a threat to the relatively peaceful wizarding world (*Philosopher's Stone* ch. 17). By the end of the fourth book, Harry's student nemeses, Draco Malfoy and friends—students who come from families of Voldemort supporters—proclaim openly that the dark wizard has returned (*Goblet of Fire* 723). In this sense they understand the “central problem” in the same way, if from the opposite

position. It takes longer, however, for most other students and adults to accept the news, a delay facilitated by the Ministry of Magic, which works to discredit anyone who suggests Voldemort is active again (*Order of the Phoenix* ch. 8). This circumstance does not change until a battle with Voldemort and his supporters takes place inside the Ministry itself. “[Y]ou saw proof, with your own eyes, that. . . .Lord Voldemort has returned. . .and it is time you listened to sense,” asserts Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, just after he has helped fight off Voldemort in the Ministry attack (*Order of the Phoenix* 816). From this point in the series, whatever side students or adults may take, it is understood that a momentous struggle is taking shape, and the next novel—*Order of the Phoenix*—depicts the first serious “mobilization” of young people against the forces of Voldemort.

The adult wizarding world has been compromised and thrown into some disarray by the Ministry’s unwillingness to admit that Voldemort has returned and a new battle lies ahead (*Order of the Phoenix* chs. 7-8). At Hogwarts, however, Dumbledore has already announced Voldemort’s return (*Goblet of Fire* 630). As a result, many students are beginning to share Harry’s sense of mission, yet they have been left—through a series of plot twists—without a teacher of the Dark Arts, the applied skills they most will need to battle the dark forces aligned with Voldemort (*Order of the Phoenix* ch. 18). Thus, in the fifth volume, they begin to organize and train as their own fighting group, which they call Dumbledore’s Army: ““*Yeah, the [name] DA’s good. Only let’s make it stand for Dumbledore’s Army, because that’s the Ministry’s worst fear, isn’t it?*”” (*Order of the Phoenix* 348). Harry, the only student among them who has faced Voldemort directly and who has mastered key spells needed to defeat him, becomes their teacher (*Order of the Phoenix* ch. 18). Their strategy is to create a student fighting force to face the tough

struggles they recognize lie ahead and, presumably, to combine with adult forces, such as the Order, as these become stronger and more organized.

By the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the young people's strategies have multiplied and become quite expansive, with a broad array of students pitching in with the talents that fit them best. For instance, Harry has been forced to flee Hogwarts, and dark forces at the Ministry level and in the Wizarding press are embarked on a campaign to paint Harry as being at fault for recent disasters in the world of wizardry, rather than Voldemort. To counter this, an enterprising duo of twins, Fred and George have launched an illegal, nightly broadcast, "Potterwatch," which brings together voices of youth and adult resistance to the gathering forces of wizard purity (*Deathly Hallows* ch. 22). Simultaneously, by the final book it is clear that the students of Hogwarts who oppose Voldemort have been putting actual battle strategies in place, so that by the time a final showdown is forced, they are fully prepared to cooperate with adults who have plans for the battle as well (*Deathly Hallows* ch. 22).

By the end of the final novel, Voldemort is forever banished from the world of the living, and his forces are soundly defeated. It is clear that life has changed forever in the wizarding world, becoming more secure, more peaceful, and more understanding and tolerant of difference (*Deathly Hallows* chs. 36-37). A wizard aligned with the Order of the Phoenix becomes the new Minister for Magic; Harry finds a way to ensure that future wizards will not be able to assemble the three, key magical items needed to amass great and dark powers; and eventually, with the passage of years, tensions begin to ease between families who supported Voldemort and those who opposed him (*Deathly Hallows* chs. 36-37).

There is a link between the democratization of power and transformational leadership in looking at the narrative presented by *Harriet's Daughter* (Philip), in that freedom from oppression erupts ethical and responsible engagement with decision-making and that the development of a critical consciousness is a necessary condition of freedom. As Margaret describes her drive to become her idol and effect social change,

‘No, it’s about me – my name. I want to change it – to Harriet.’

‘Why?’

‘Well, I Like Harriet Tubman. I think she was real wonderful. I want a name that means something to me – Margaret doesn’t mean anything to me at all. Also Mrs. Blewchamp wanted me to have the name, Harriet.’

‘Margaret is your grandmother’s name; your father wanted you to have it.’

‘I know that but it doesn’t mean anything to me.’

‘Why does your name have to mean something?’

‘I don’t know. Will you call me Harriet, will you? Say yes, please Mum.’ (Philip 47)

Self-efficacy in the form of personal development, which can be conceptualized by Margaret’s need to not only honour but embody Harriet Tubman, is meant to be her chosen response to traditional social and political efforts in which society underlying gender-based power structure which favours White males and governs the status quo. It takes into account her cathexis (i.e. the investment of energy in an idea or set of values; in this case, leadership), and her self-led decision-making processes, both for her own life but which can be said to be reflected in similar youth efforts in real life at the grassroots level. In this way, I feel that KTC, as representative of the poor or disenfranchised, creates a means by which literature can easily

explore these themes. What cathexis means, on a practical level, is that if Margaret has to change the way in which she presents herself and relates to others to create or retain a feeling of power, whether or not she is able to use it, then it may be perceived easier for her to succeed. She knows that she may not have the skills or social connections she needs to become part of the ‘mainstream’ of society, but she rejects these outright. Because of her race, gender, ethnicity and other factors, she may face significant barriers in attaining power, and so she takes on the guise and the role of her idol, Tubman, in order to try to become what she sees in herself. Unlike Harry Potter, she does not have an exceptional and magical skill set, but, like Harry, she can imagine herself having an impact on the world.

In the case of *Harriet's Daughter*, and also of the other novels examined in the corpus for this thesis, the course of action in the novel allows the protagonist to trade in the security of a parent's protection for the security of a set of life skills which allow for future growth through practical action. Despite the fact that the children in the novels are forced to endure hardship, there is a method in their being able to slowly extract themselves from that hardship. One can directly increase a child's knowledge through instruction, but everything one knows is in turn interpreted through our own experience base. In *Harriet's Daughter* (Philip), the character of Margaret is a young woman who epitomizes Freire's idea that oppression prevents members of dominated classes from realizing their full, authentic sense of self. She takes on the guise of another woman, Tubman, who represents the ability to take charge in order to activate and actualize her own liberation and that of others like her, in the same way as Tubman acted to liberate slaves in the past. The question then becomes “How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in the pedagogy of their liberation?” (Freire 48). While *Harriet's*

Daughter (Philip) is not set in a school, the character's life trajectory is intrinsically linked to an examination of structural oppression, like that which takes place in a school, due to her social position and how she envisions herself as breaking the rules. Margaret becomes emblematic of youth praxis as she reimagines herself as a changer of worlds and a shifter of social structures.

Turning a critical lens towards children's literature, we can therefore understand and gauge the value of engaging child readers in imagining their own personal development through praxis. The concept of praxis, or practical action, was first introduced by Marx (Freire). This idea created a shift in social justice and education theory because, unlike other thinkers on the subject of ethics, Marx believed that there was a way of measuring how ethical people are and could be in a certain societal framework. Freire's answer to the question of who should be in charge, within typical schools, was to dispense with the traditional educational model where the teacher is the expert "depositing" knowledge into students, and to posit an alternative model emphasizing authentic exchange. In order to enter this model, persons of higher status (typically the teacher) have to shed their piousness and sense of generosity vis-à-vis the oppressed and risk a truly dialogic encounter, in which teachers and students are mutually vulnerable human subjects and co-creators of the learning experience. This can lead to solidarity and hence the prospect for structural change, even as it yields greater personal authenticity for all involved. This was a hugely important point of view for examining ethics on a structural level, namely how ethics could be incorporated into different social structures and administrative coalitions. Changing social structures, such as those within schools, from Marx's perspective, could be seen to be the starting point for each individual's perception of, values related to, and ideas about the world (Freire). What can happen from that point onward is that a young person, and specifically a

student, creates his or her own path and puts his or her own ideas into praxis. In that way the individual may have the opportunity to reach beyond his or her limitations and how society defines him or her (Freire). The work of Freire noted that the actions of the poor or disenfranchised – rather than their characteristics or position in society – need to be the central point of social change. Educational change and development that takes into account the meanings of cultural and social values for those who face the challenge of living as a social outcast, such as the youth represented in KTC narratives, needs to be combined with what Freire calls a cycle of action and reflection. In doing so, young people can have the opportunity to start to build social change and have a chance to thrive over the long term.

In creating a story structure in this way, the KTC authors offer children the ability to gain a greater sense of control over their own destinies. In this way, children can construct meanings associated with their own skill sets, not only through absorbing information, but also through the contextual and social support provided by the protagonists of these stories of loss and separation. In other words, children's actions are informed by their own interests, but also by the necessity of taking on a leadership role in a time of personal and community conflict. Praxis, for the youth taking charge, allows him or her to follow the dictates of his or her unique, authentic intuition, which lead him or her to renovate and transform existing social power structures.

iii. Directing social change

In the course of this inquiry, I developed several basic questions that enabled me to access the model of social change presented in the selected narratives, without having to over-scrutinize any of the narratives for hidden clues or apply speculative interpretations that extend beyond the confines of the text. These are:

1. What is the central generational, identity, or social problem; how do the central characters understand it; and how does it emerge in the narrative?
2. What do young people in the narrative have to do in order to overcome the problem and make positive social change?
3. How much of a strategy is needed for a young person to take charge, and what kinds of strategies are employed?
4. To what extent are social forms of difference and inequality such as gender, race, and class, integrated into the presentation of the problem and its solution?
5. By the end of the text, what social changes are achieved, and how durable do they seem?

The discussion of *High School Musical* above addresses the first question in full. The central *personal* problem of the text revolves around Troy's fear of disappointing his father and friends by investing in aspects of himself beyond basketball and athletics. The central *social* problem is that many other students feel similarly trapped, and unless they are able to make a change, they may well end up like Coach Bolton and Ms. Darbus, trapped in limited social roles well into adulthood. Yet even to admit they have additional interests and needs will place them at risk of losing the clout they have achieved within their own social circles. The cafeteria scene illustrates the principle precisely: "If you wanna be cool follow one simple rule / Stick to the stuff you know (Lawrence and Greenberg lines 15-16). This makes it easier to address the remainder of the first question, as well as the second one. Even though the problem is a collective one, each young person—like Troy—is more or less bound to understand it in personal, rather than social, terms. Hence, the answer to the question, "What will young people

have to do in order to overcome the problem and make positive social change?” is far from straightforward. Since they cannot recognize the problem as a common one, they cannot begin to work together to address it; there is a deadlock. So, the narrative suggests, it will take one courageous, influential student to break the pattern and model a different approach. In this way, the Disney film suggests that solving Troy’s personal problem is identical to solving the school’s broader, social one. The question is not “What will the students of East High have to do to change their social world?” but “What will Troy have to do to make a change?”

The social problem at the heart of the Harry Potter series becomes clear from the first of the books, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*: in the world of wizards, which exists parallel to and hidden from, the world of ordinary humans, the evil Lord Voldemort is on the rise. Among other horrific intentions, Voldemort and his followers seek to persecute or possibly eliminate wizards born outside of wizarding families who nonetheless possess wizarding powers. Followers of Voldemort refer to such individuals as “mudbloods” or “filthy mudbloods” (Rowling *Chamber of Secrets* 167) and desire a wizarding world that is *toujours pur*, or “always pure” (Rowling *Order of the Phoenix* 111). “Blood traitor” is used to defame anyone in the wizarding world who expresses support for wizards and witches born to non-magical, “muggle” families (Walters 9). At a sporting event that takes place before Harry’s fourth year at Hogwarts, moreover, supporters of Voldemort begin attacking local “muggles” (ordinary humans with no connection to the world of wizards and witches (Rowling *Chamber of Secrets*, ch. 9). These are just a few of the many signs that Voldemort’s evil is driven by a wizardly form of racism/ethnocentrism and potentially a genocidal urge (Anatol 174; Steege 368; Walters 50-52).

Questions of strategy for *High School Musical* fall in line with the idea of a courageous, influential student at the heart of the narrative. At first, both Troy and Gabriella's friends scheme to keep them apart, so that Troy can concentrate on basketball and Gabriella on academics. Yet once the other students realize how unhappy Troy and Gabriella are when forced apart, they begin to rethink their goals. The message here is unmistakable: by paying attention to the needs of your friends, even when those needs upset your own expectations, you help to make things better for everyone. Friendships, one-on-one empathy and connections: these are the building blocks of social change. Once Troy and Gabriella's friends realize they were wrong to drive the couple apart, they begin actively to strategize and collaborate on their behalf. Hence, in response to the third question, it becomes clear that the strategy for change, like the social problem itself, is conceived in personal terms. The friends must figure out how to help Troy and Gabriella, not how to shift the culture of the school (though by now, most viewers likely understand that, if the popular Troy is able to 'come out' to the school as more than a basketball player, other students will find it easier to reveal new sides of themselves as well). The main barrier they face is neither entrenched social structures, nor power imbalances, nor even institutional roadblocks, but a competitive student named Sharpay, who has starred in every theatre production since she started East High, and is determined to keep the lead roles for herself and her brother as well. Sharpay makes sure the final audition is timed to coincide with Troy's championship game and Gabriella's decathlon competition. Thus, Troy and Gabriella, together with their friends—including students from several social circles—must work together and pull off a scheme to ensure they can meet their other commitments and still make it to auditions.

Because the social problem at the heart of the Harry Potter books is such a vast and potentially world-changing one, the answers to the second and third question become more complex, unfolding over several volumes. What will young people have to do in order to overcome the problem and make positive social change? How much of a strategy is needed and what kinds of strategy are employed? In the first several books, Harry and friends see their main task as defeating the forces of Voldemort in whatever form his evil powers take (*Philosopher's Stone; Chamber of Secrets; Goblet of Fire*). A much more focused understanding of their task—and of the strategies they will need to bring to bear—emerges in the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. The Order of the Phoenix is a secret group that Albus Dumbledore formed to fight Voldemort and his forces in the days of his first appearance, ending when the killing curse Voldemort turned on an infant Harry rebounded (*Order of the Phoenix* ch. 5). The Order includes only adult wizards who have completed school. As the adult character Remus Lupin explains to Harry and his friends: “There are dangers involved of which you can have no idea.”

The fourth question reveals a decided pattern to the narrative in *High School Musical*. Gender enters the narrative obliquely, but its role is never made explicit. For instance, Jack Bolton's insistence that his son focus on sports has clear implications with respect to the perceived necessity for hegemonic forms of masculinity, and at points *High School Musical* appears to allude to the gendered component of Troy's dilemma. We gain hints of this, for instance, in the few scenes involving Troy's mother. These include the one described above, where Mrs. Bolton interrupts Jack and Troy's basketball game to remind them it is New Year's Eve, a moment that positions her as a feminine, domesticating force opposite her 'jock' husband

and son. Meanwhile, subtle implications that a masculine obsession with sports has narrowed Jack Bolton's worldview arise in the one scene where Troy attempts to confront him:

Troy: Dad, did you ever think about trying something new, but were afraid of what your friends might think?

Jack Bolton: What, you mean like going left? You're doing great! (Ortega).

Still, there is no explicit attention to the possibility that gender codes may contribute to the straightjacketing tendencies of East High social life. However, there is even less recognition that social divisions such as race and class may figure into the central social problem. To be sure, the cast of *High School Musical* is somewhat diverse. Troy's best friend is played by Corbin Bleu, a popular African American actor (IMDb, "Corbin Bleu" n.p.). In parallel fashion, Gabriella's best friend is played by Monique Coleman (IMDb, "Monique Coleman" n.p.). Sharpay and her brother, meanwhile, are portrayed as coming from a wealthy, white, powerful family, which makes them insistent on having their way. Yet this concern is expressed solely in terms of personality. At no point does *High School Musical* suggest that race and class can play a role in segregating the social lives of US high school students, though constricting social identities such as 'jock' and 'brainiac' are carefully portrayed as cutting across race and class lines.

When the final scene arrives, even Sharpay joins the crowd of East High students who reject the usual social divisions in order to dance and sing, "We're all in this together" (Gerrard, Seeley, and Neville line 14). There is no way to know whether change the change that has been forged is a durable one. However, the message is clear: the narrow social identities that seem to

divide young people can be overcome if they are (as per Troy's first sung lines in the film) brave enough to "take a chance" (Gerrard, Seeley, and Neville line 4). More to the point, according to the *High School Musical* narrative, if even one popular student, such as Troy, finds the courage to dig deep inside himself and admit he has talents and desires other than the ones that make him 'cool'—and if his friends are understanding and loyal enough to help him realize a fuller vision of himself—then social divisions will break down of their own accord, as other students find the courage to follow his lead.

The answer to the fourth and fifth questions in the Harry Potter series are instrumental to the narrative and its effects. Although the battle against Voldemort and his forces revolves around the racialized question of wizard purity and anti-muggle sentiment, it should be noted that for the most part, other axes of difference and inequality, including race and gender, are largely pushed to the margins. A number of nonwhite students and faculty do play roles in the book, but as Gizelle Liza Anatol points out, "the inclusion of people of colour does not mean the inclusion of any representation of ethnic difference and cultural practice" (165). Equally important, it remains clear to the end that the central figures necessary to win the fight are Harry Potter, a young white man who—despite having one "muggle-born" parent—is endowed with exceptionally strong magical talents that allow him to perform feats far beyond his training. The other figure central to the fight is another white, male student of Harry's age, Neville Longbottom, who, although he is rarely looked on as a key player, comes from a strong family line of wizards. These two have been pre-ordained through prophecy as linked to the defeat of Voldemort. Because magical concerns trump the sort of social concerns usually bound up with analyses of inequality and difference, there is an implication that their leadership rests beyond

the reach of the type of multicultural concerns that are typically raised in the non-magical world (Belcher and Herr Stephenson 64).

Harry Potter's decisive victory for the forces of understanding and inclusion, namely the social changes it produces, has been achieved through a massive mobilization among the students of Hogwarts. The students have put in place a comprehensive battle plan so that when the final showdown, the Battle of Hogwarts, began, they were able to work in concert with professors and other adults who oppose Voldemort's forces (*Deathly Hallows* chs. 30-31).

However, there is another aspect of the narrative that is critical to understanding the concept of social change at the heart of the globally-popular series: no matter how well the battle is fought, victory could not have been achieved without a series of crucial decisions made by Harry Potter, who reaches them on his own, by piecing together bits of knowledge from his teachers and tapping his own deepest intuition (*Deathly Hallows* chs. 34-35). As the Battle of Hogwarts rages, Harry realizes that he must steal off, alone, to face Voldemort (*Deathly Hallows* 563-64).

In this showdown, Harry allows Voldemort to hit him with a killing curse, knowing that, due to a unique, magical bond formed between them, Harry himself cannot fully die so long as Voldemort remains alive (*Deathly Hallows* chs. 34-35). The gamble pays off, and Harry is able to rise again and duel with Voldemort one final time, in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, observed by all those who have survived the battle (*Deathly Hallows* ch. 36). Harry knows full well that he is the only wizard alive who could possibly defeat Voldemort, because he alone possesses the necessary, magical links to Voldemort himself, as well as to the wand that Voldemort wields (*Deathly Hallows* ch. 36). The final victory over forces of hate and discrimination has been in the works for several years and has required detailed planning, collaboration, and a diverse array of

strategies. Ultimately, however, all of these efforts would have been in vain if Harry Potter had not possessed unique magical powers and relationships, and if he had not gained the confidence to rely on his own, unique intuition and sense of self.

Conclusions

This thesis set out to identify a new motif emergent in school stories written and produced for young adult audiences. Dubbed the Kids-Take-Charge (KTC) motif, I have argued that it marks a fundamental departure from key aspects of the school story tradition. In KTC stories, the hero grows into his or her role not by emulating a worthy adult and taking his proper place in the existing social order, but by following the dictates of his or her unique, authentic intuition, which lead him or her to renovate and transform social arrangements, thus shifting the power structure between those who teach and are supposed to lead, and to those who learn through their own leadership and agency. In this motif, self-actualization brings power—and power from within trumps power from without. Where the classic school story ultimately affirms the existing order, the KTC motif suggests that the existing power order is corrupt and that the adults who administer it, through top-down learning structures and through the application of unearned power over students, are largely hapless. It remains for the kids to take charge and make things work.

The KTC motif stands out, as well, according to the relative ease with which success is achieved and the extent to which success depends on the central protagonist's ability to be

'authentic.'⁷ "Express yourself," "believe in yourself," "follow your dreams": these are three of the four themes one Disney executive identified as driving the *High School Musical* franchise (Sisario para. 5). In works as diverse as *High School Musical*, *Harry Potter*, *The Lightning Thief*, and *Schooled*, the message that implicitly runs throughout them all is, 'be true to yourself and you will succeed.' While it is a message that smacks of empowerment, it may well also be a message that teaches teens to accept both success *and* failure as the reflection of their own most authentic selves.

School stories lend themselves to the identification of some of the distinct models of selfhood and 'coming into one's own' that have figured prominently in works about and for adolescents in various sociocultural contexts. In early narratives of the past, a young person came into his or her own under the influence of a wise and empathic adult role model. In the school story stories selected here for analysis, the central conflicts are largely personal in nature, whether in the early formulation of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes) or "New World" variations such as *Little Men* (Alcott). In particular, the journey that the central protagonists take in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes) is inevitably a journey in conformity with an adult ideal, and key adult figures model and point the way, providing decisive guidance. These are stories of how young people grow and mature into more adult selves within the crucible of their schools; where conflicts arise, these conflicts tend to facilitate the maturation process of central protagonists, rather than transforming the social order. In this way, young people grow into a

⁷ As discussed in notes throughout, this ease is also what distinguishes the KTC motif from gritty school stories that emerged in the 1960s and '70s.

stable sense of selfhood by accepting adult mentorship and learning to tame their own instincts, so that they can take their place in the extant social order, creating what I have called the social self.

A radically different model of selfhood has, however, emerged in more recent school stories. Contemporary school stories that follow the KTC motif continue to have a moralizing or didactic bent, in keeping with a trend in YA literature that valorizes the agency of youth protagonists over that of adults. These books mark, as a whole, a noticeable departure from the early school story. In this new social context, wise adult mentors are limited in scope, and in fact adults fail to offer the central protagonist what they often need to move toward a stable, integrated sense of selfhood. Adults in this social context often represent direct threats to young people's well-being, and in cases where wise adults are present, their own powers are typically limited or curtailed in some way, so that the central protagonist must ultimately find a way forward on his or her own. Moreover, in KTC stories, the challenges faced by teen protagonists are cast as broadly social rather than personal, and the strength of adult role models is relatively de-emphasized. As a result, teen protagonists solve their greatest challenges not by emulating the established role models, but by hewing to the most unique and authentic aspects of their own personalities, their own selves. Ultimately, narratives featuring the KTC motif depict teens as capable of resolving grave social crises almost single-handedly and with relative ease, largely by trusting their instincts, eschewing prior sociocultural patterns, and remaining true to themselves, suggesting a shift in social power and agency towards young protagonists.

This thesis has demonstrated that the KTC motif is characterized by three defining features, whether it appears in works of fantasy or realism. First, the central protagonist must

confront a problem or crisis of systemic importance; how this challenge is resolved will affect an entire school, community, or even—in works of fantasy—the fate of entire worlds. Second, stories that feature the KTC motif generally de-emphasize the importance of adult mentors in preparing young people for, and guiding them through, these challenges. Third, the KTC motif enshrines a particular notion of the ‘authentic self’ as the source of personal power and agency: victory is assured only insofar as the central protagonist becomes and remains ‘true’ to himself or herself. These characteristics are useful to keep in mind, insofar as they influence and interact with representations of social change in the selected texts.

What of this vision of power and agency implicit in the KTC motif, and what could it mean on a practical level for young people as they move toward becoming adult actors in a complex and globalizing world? Why, at this particular historical moment, are young people aggressively being sold stories with the KTC account of power and agency? When the kids take charge, personal agency and power is enhanced by relying ever more steadily on one’s own sense of what is right, what will work, and how to behave. This demonstrates that the social values that we create are endemically linked to what is believed to be authentic self in the present day, and the shifting framework of school power structures offered by the child-centered teaching movement grounded in Progressivism. On the one hand, school stories offer narratives *about* teens and power. For instance, school stories offer insight into the experience of both personal empowerment and defeat at the hands of powerful interests (sometimes in the very same text; see, e.g., Trites 15-16, discussing *The Chocolate War*). They tell stories about the intricacies of power struggles—for instance, how misguided attempts to help and empower teens can sometimes lead to the opposite result (Trites 35, discussing *Nothing but the Truth*). They can speak to the experience of oppression and of “survivance”; indeed, Rauna Kuokkanen argues that

fictional school stories can sometimes portray the lived truths of students from oppressed groups more acutely and realistically than factual accounts do (Kuokkanen 698).

On the other hand, school stories also offer stories that *encode* power. By this I mean they are connected to larger social and economic circuits of power, hierarchy, and coercion. In describing the role of popular culture in education, Henry Giroux and Roger Simon argue that it is important to analyze the content of popular works (9-10), but that it is just as critical to analyze how structural forces situate the meaning of such works and operate through them. These larger, structural forces operate not by brainwashing or manipulating audiences directly, but by engaging them in the process of building consent, as that term is used by Gramsci.⁸ Similarly, school stories should be viewed not solely for the stories they tell *about* power—that is, for their specific narrative content—but in terms of how they *encode* broader power relations and how they engage readers in the process of consenting to the existing social order (Giroux and Simon 8, citing Gramsci).

To this end, while in the past child development was accepted as the perspective through which children were understood, recent scholarship has determined that children may be actors in their own right, and are socially cognizant of their roles within different contexts. Why is empowerment so important in how teachers view the agency of children in the present day? Kelly explores the history of power within school-based normative social structures and notes that,

⁸ Giroux and Simon explain: “For Gramsci, the exercise of control by the ruling classes is characterized less by the excessive use of officially sanctioned force than it is through what he calls “the struggle for hegemonic leadership” --the struggle to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order” (8).

The banking model of education ... is where the educator is assumed to have all the knowledge and “banks” it into an “empty” student. The fatal flaw, of course, is that this method gives the educators power and control over information and therefore can be selective in what is imparted. It is a simple step from this to presenting education and views of society in such a way as to reinforce existing prejudices and injustices. (Kelly 19)

In situations whereby students are naturally disempowered through structural inequities, the banking model can further community conflict and normative challenges, in that creative decision-making is rendered ineffective. What is now generally supported in the school context is an experiential and learner-centered approach with a teacher or facilitator modeling praxis rather than rote learning, no matter how challenging or dangerous this seems to educators and administrators. This point of view, and its impacts on how youth envision their own ability to take charge of their lives, has been explored from both a theoretical and a practical perspective in the education literature. For instance, Ellsworth has put forward the theoretical point of view that teachers cannot facilitate democratic dialogue because the social context of the schools in which we work is not rational, because the power imbalances in schools and our communities, even if teachers and students are both committed to social justice, mean that children will always be in conflict until we recognize the agency of children (290).

At the same time, much of the foremost educational discourse has supported the ideologies of the post-structuralist movement in the education system in the hopes that it would shift towards a more child-centered and ethical approach to caring for children, and therefore leading to their empowerment (Baker 155). The advent of educational Progressivism heavily

emphasized student self-actualization and reconfigured the role of adults as *channeling* the internal resources and abilities of students, rather than *instilling* resources and abilities in them (Elliott and MacLennan). As Baker notes, the child-centeredness philosophy of Progressivism “is thought to have shifted the treatment of children into closer harmony with their true nature and hence into more sensitive and civilized forms of rearing” (155). Baker makes the argument that this represents a shift in power from the educator to the child (156). In respecting the child and what the child needs in order to grow up with the right tools for life, the educator must reject traditional, patriarchal conceptions of the relationship between teacher and child. At the same time, this point of view is seen as threatening to those who have a more hierarchical view on the world and who want to control children (Baker 157), represented by antagonists in school stories such as Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series. In this new narrative of social change in the broader world, therefore, adolescents are liable to view and interpret their own experiences through a global lens as prodigious consumers of narratives produced in a global culture. Social forms of difference and inequality such as gender, race, and class are integrated into the presentation of the problem and how it is addressed within the KTC motif. To this end, significant social changes are achieved in these narrative forms.

Although many societal norms have been developed to protect the so-called innocence of young people, the reality in which they operate demands that the stresses and challenges they face change the way that they negotiate their agency. Scholars such as Rauna Kuokkanen may go so far as to suggest that narratives such as the ones examined in this thesis can help us to identify and interrogate the ways that systemic forms of power, privilege, and oppression are instantiated and reproduced through the educational program. By exploring such texts critically, particularly

via postmodern and poststructuralist theory and discourse, educators can help open up the possibility of truly reader-centered readings, of teens making their own meanings from texts (Kuokkanen 159). It is important, however, to recognize the fact that individuals, and particularly youth, are significantly affected by relations of power. These may strongly influence the individual's ability to deal with oppressive situations. This is true for a number of different reasons. If an individual has to change the way in which they present themselves and relate to others to create or retain power, then it may be difficult for that individual to succeed. Youth may not have the skills or social networks they need to become part of the 'mainstream' of society which means that they are cut off from discourse. For these reasons, the school story, in which experiences of power, privilege, and oppression that affect youth are challenged by their actions and agentic effects, serves as a means of discourse on the nature of power and its effects on youth self-efficacy.

The idea of the personal within concepts of discourse thereby becomes political over the long run, as illustrated in the discussion of modern youth-focused protests in Chapter Four. As noted by Thurlow, the "so called 'net generation' is popularly assumed to be naturally media literate and to be necessarily reinventing conventional linguistic and communicative practices" (1). This includes shortening words, changing the understanding of meaning, and developing new forms of linguistic engagement. This means that the way in which discourse is understood and analyzed in today's media savvy world is necessarily different from that imagined by Derrida, Foucault and Barthes. According to Thurlow, many researchers liken the idea of text and social media messaging to a new form of code, wherein what is meant by signifiers is connected back to deeply encoded ideas with an extended sense of social meaning not imagined by the paucity of the text in which it is ensconced. The sociolinguistic value of text and social

media messages is also linked to the idea of code because of the fact that the meanings within the messages are easily hidden from those who are not in the communicators' social circle, such as the fact that teens can hide their messages from adults in order to enhance their own power and agency. As Hardin notes, these new "social and cultural frameworks in which stories are communicated are not incidental, but instrumental to what can be articulated in the production of individual experience" (536).

Discourse theory therefore tells us that the values associated with the communication are linked not only to the context of messages themselves but also to the ways in which the messages are sent. For example, membership in online youth communities is often self-selected, which means that the discourse inherent within these communities is often confined, and has its own set of rules. Because it is clear that the way we understand knowledge is affected by the social context, and in this case the social context of the school story, the method by which we examine knowledge through the process of applying an inquiry into the nascent power structures that youth aim to build, must also be affected in the same way.

Further work, building on the findings in this thesis on the social context of the KTC motif, may take into greater consideration the socioeconomic context of youth power. Market forces offer one important axis of explanation: YA literature is, in many senses, the powerhouse of publishing at present (Brown n.p.; Milliot n.p.), and teens and "tweens" are two of the most powerful and fastest-growing consumer segments (El-Bassiouny, Taher, and Abou-Aish 2-8; Quart ch. 1). Moreover, YA literature increasingly intertwines with other media such as television programming, films, games, and music—and a small number of corporations such as Disney control an ever greater share of the entertainment market (Giroux and Pollock ch. 1).

Given that teens are being targeted relentlessly by marketers, it should be no surprise to find them playing central, heroic roles and saving the day in the tales written for them. Giroux and Pollock take this approach when they discuss Disney's concerted study of the teen/"tween" market segment and its drive to identify "emotional hooks" to reel in young consumers who are in the throes of identity formation (3). The social context of Western normative values, therefore, suggests that corporate influence on the production of contemporary school stories teaches "children that critical thinking and civic action in society should be far less important to them than assuming the role of passive consumers" (Giroux and Pollock 209).

To this end, drawing on Louis Althusser's concept of ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (155), it may be that the KTC motif reflects a socioeconomic requirement to fashion a new type of worker for the post-Industrial age. In Althusser's work, cultural and ideological apparatuses are built around the need to produce the types of worker that a capitalist system requires. In Althusser's time, this meant producing, first and foremost, large numbers of workers who could fit, cog-like, into industrial systems of production (Althusser 155; see also Bowles and Gintis; Willis on schooling and the production of workers for a manufacturing economy). Arguably, with the ascent of a knowledge-driven economy, a different type of worker is needed. This type of worker is self-reliant and highly flexible in the face of new challenges; ideally, he or she should be able to view labor as an act of self-definition (and re-definition), as much or more than the outcome of education and training (Benner 250-60). Optimally, the new type of worker should be willing to believe that personal success or failure depends not on the soundness of the institutions they serve, but the strength of their own unique talents and even their personal 'authenticity.' Hence the next stage of this research could more fully explore more

fully the possibility that the KTC motif reflects the need to train workers who believe in selfactualization and authenticity as sole determinants of success, and who expect or demand very little from the institutions around them.

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