

2006

Critical literacy in a global context: Reading Harry Potter

Jill Reading
Edith Cowan University

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ABSTRACT

Millions of adolescents across the globe eagerly await and read each new *Harry Potter* fictional novel. As a series, the novels can be assumed to participate influentially in the production of adolescent literacies and subjectivities. Situated in politically conservative times, however, the texts may support readings in simple accord with culturally pervasive conservative views which favour conventionally masculinist, martial views of the individual and of society. Such readings potentially confirm ancient prejudices built out of differences which themselves may be associated with the socio-cultural reproduction of violent conflicts. Nevertheless, contemporary conditions such as planetary climate change and globalised political fear demand resolutions based not in conflict but in unprecedented degrees of global and local co-operation. This thesis, then, explores ways in which the *Harry Potter* texts may be approached from a critical literacy perspective to support readers to contest conservatively-aligned readings and to question the role of the texts in preparing students for a world of peace and co-operation.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my father, Syd Peters, who died just before its completion. Had he not been subject to the most violent movements of 20th century globalisation – economic depression, forced migration and world war – he would have studied at university with the aim of improving the lives of ordinary people.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the various *Harry Potter* novels using the following abbreviated forms:

(*PS*) for *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone* (Rowling, 1997)

(*CoS*) for *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets* (Rowling, 1998)

(*PoA*) for *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999)

(*GoF*) for *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire* (Rowling, 2000)

(*OoP*) for *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix* (Rowling, 2003)

(*HBP*) for *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince* (Rowling, 2005a)

FOREWORD

The *Harry Potter* series attracted my interest initially because of the responses of adults, not children, to the texts. Many adults seemed to be euphoric, almost ecstatic, partly because children – especially boys – were ‘reading again’, and partly because the adults themselves loved the books so much and found little to criticise in them. Children were reading, and they were reading ‘good’ literature: what is there to criticise? I had not yet read the books, and the sceptic in me thought: ‘What’s going on here?’

Next, I was astonished to hear about a comment made during a curriculum discussion by an education academic whose specialty was language and literacy. ‘People are even writing PhDs on Harry Potter!’ she reportedly exclaimed. ‘What on earth do they have to write about?’

Later, when I had progressed in my research and had things to say about Harry Potter, I presented a critical theory paper to a group of 30 teachers at an International Federation for Teachers of English conference in Melbourne. The reaction of about half the audience, mostly the younger teachers, dumbfounded me. They effectively objected that a critical perspective might destroy young people’s pleasures in the texts, and they expressed reluctance to take such an approach in the classroom. ‘Wait a minute,’ I thought to myself. ‘Isn’t critical literacy part of a teacher’s job description?’

Finally, having worked an interest in the then hot topic of boys’ literacy into my thesis, I organised a professional development workshop around that theme for secondary teachers in my district. The workshop failed to meet some teachers’ needs and they let me know in graphic terms. The intensity of their feelings reflected the intensification of their work practices, in which they considered that not a moment could be spared unless it was of immediate practical assistance within the classroom. For them, theorising was not helpful.

From these vignettes, I drew a story which has guided me in preparing this thesis. The once-upon-a-time primacy of print along with the tentative approaches to new technologies by many adults is one of its themes. Other themes include attitudes of resistance by many adults (including the Prime Minister of Australia) to the curricular inclusion of children's popular cultural texts, and the implications of this for young people; the loss of critical capacity as a democratic resource, described popularly as the problem of 'dumbing-down' in reference to both the academic and school classroom; and the socio-political problem of funnelling demands for change onto teachers without capital provision to the wider socio-cultural milieu which also generates literacy; that is, the denial and disregard of wider systemic deficiencies while scapegoating a particular occupational group for the consequences of those deficiencies.

My story claims that many adults, raised on print – since the mid-eleventh century, the most globally dominant and highest status form of communication – are frequently disconcerted by young people's immersion in new communications technologies which look and behave so differently to the old paper and print-based alphabetic documents. Indeed, Brian Cambourne (2004, p. 16) illuminates the distinction between old and new by describing the new technologies as screen/paper-based, print+image+alphabetic multi-semiotic hypertext. Ray Misson adds that the portability, volume and speed of text communication has set up the conditions for the new world order, the information age, and that has changed everything:

It is not that the nature of reading and writing itself is all that different, or indeed that the fundamental purposes for which it is used have changed. It is that the world we live in is different: it is we who have changed. (Misson, 2005, p. 39)

My story wonders if children's returning to print in a form familiar to adults signals security and safety *for adults*: it appears to signal that the prize of print literacy, once the signifying mark of the educated person, of the ability to grasp the world and deal with it, of the ability to make your *mark* in the world, has been accepted by these new generations – many already so far in advance of their elders in the literacies of new technologies as to seem like a new, perhaps incomprehensible, human species (as Marc Prensky (2002b) terms it, 'digital natives'). Perhaps keeping young people connected to familiar print forms keeps them connected in some way to the previous generations.

Manufactured securities alter nothing, however, and I will argue that the adult premonition is correct; print literacy alone no longer makes the world legible. As Misson states, the world really is too different. And it may be many adults who fear that the world, and along with it, their children, are becoming illegible: thus the pleasure in children's turn to the print texts of the *Harry Potter* series.

Relatedly, old ways of attempting to control and direct children – read with and as the future – maintain currency. If curricula treat children's popular texts as beneath notice, or as though they have no importance or impact, the lived literate experience of young people is denied. Not taking children's mass textual pleasures seriously is akin to ignoring the outcome of a national (in the case of Harry Potter, global) election, a Burmese junta of adult-child relations; human and democratic rights are implicated. On the other hand, of course, it is another abrogation to privilege a Leavisite perspective, which foregrounds the pleasures of the text ahead of critical analysis. What does it mean when children read Harry Potter from the uninterrupted standpoint of everything they already are, know and value as products of Western individualistic enculturation? As Wayne Sawyer states,

Australians live in a land where a Federal government can simply write off electoral promises as 'non-core', can bring in a regressive taxation system that would 'never ever' be brought in, can lie about refugees throwing their children overboard – and still win elections. We cannot afford a curriculum that does not include developing critical citizens through the study and practice of English. (Sawyer, 2005, p. 17)

In the conservative academic magazine *Quadrant*, Kevin Donnelly takes issue with Sawyer about the above comments. In that spectrum of cultural discourse commonly referred to as 'the literacy wars', the contributions of Sawyer and Donnelly illustrate the polarities of debate which will be explored in subsequent chapters in this thesis. Donnelly (2005a, pp. 57-60), wants the English classroom to study 'worthwhile literature', such as Shakespeare, Patrick White, Joseph Conrad and Jane Austen. He rejects the 'explosion' of the canon to include popular cultural foci such as the fashion industry, daytime television, cyber-feminism and plastic surgery: that is, he resists as proper fields of study the lived experience of the young and the elements of dynamic life-worlds in and with which they must negotiate their being.

To rescue boys from the ‘feminist-inspired gender agenda [which] has been forced on Australian schools’, Donnelly (2005a, p. 61) advocates reading to boys from traditional fairy tales and legends, such as *Jack and the beanstalk*, *Robin Hood*, Norse legends and the tales of Greek heroes such as Odysseus ‘in order that boys understand and value those personal qualities that are distinctively male.’ A former teacher and previous chief of staff to a Federal coalition employment minister, Donnelly is the author of *Why our schools are failing* (2004), a conservative revisionist text which takes recourse in the hegemonic masculinities implicated in the poorer literacy performances of some groups of boys.

It is worth noting that Donnelly was appointed to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of Australian primary school curricula in mathematics, science and English (Donnelly, 2005b) by the then Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson (2005c, September 23), who states in a media release: ‘Moves away from classical literature to emphasise contemporary texts is [sic] causing concern to many parents.’¹

In Donnelly’s curriculum analysis, alleged shortcomings in Australian students’ results in the 2003 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)², which did not test English, provide the rationale for recommendations for changes in English teaching. Among other suggestions, Donnelly (2005b, pp. 11-12) advocates the institution of a national primary school English syllabus based on age rather than the developmental levels which ground Outcomes Based Education (OBE). In addition, recommends Donnelly, the syllabus should de-emphasise critical literacy, emphasise phonics in the early years of reading³, accentuate the technical aspects of literary appreciation such as metre, rhythm and rhyme, and use standard readers to develop ethical and moral values through a rich variety of myths, fables and legends. Without discounting the need to modify some aspects of OBE, it is a persistent theme of this thesis that taking recourse in a 1950s industrial age curriculum, which is suggested by

¹ This statement rather unfortunately continues that a study of high performing year 12 students enrolled at the Australian Defence Force Academy found that only one in six could achieve a 70 per cent rating in grammar.

² Now Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

³ Phonics is recognised in Chapter Six as a critical, but partial, element of reading literacy.

these recommendations, is unlikely to cope with information age subjectivities and communication needs.

In my study of the *Harry Potter* texts, classical literature is indeed important. For example, I will allude, in Chapter Two and at other points throughout the thesis, to the usefulness of the canonical context in assisting us to read the *Harry Potter* novels as crucial contemporary texts set in times of conservative revisionism. In this respect, my readings of the texts, in which Harry increasingly and uncritically takes on the mantle of traditional martial hero armed with profanity to curse and spells to kill, reverberate with Caliban's poignant plaint:

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. (Shakespeare, 1623/1987, p. 121)

In addition, the *Harry Potter* texts directly address other contemporaneous themes of disturbing dimensions. For instance, in the representation of Voldemort's constant umbrous absent-presence, they speak directly to increasingly pervasive fears about terrorism. They also refer to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the possibility of random unpredictable mass deaths:

What d'you reckon it is?' said Harry.
'Could be anything,' said Fred.
'But there can't be anything worse than the Avada Kedavra Curse, can there?'
said Ron. 'What's worse than death?'
'Maybe it's something that can kill loads of people at once,' suggested George.
'Maybe it's some particularly painful way of killing people,' said Ron
fearfully....
There was a pause and Harry knew that the others, like him, were wondering
what horrors this weapon could perpetrate.
'So who d'you think's got it now?' asked George.
'I hope it's our side,' said Ron, sounding slightly nervous. (*OoP*, pp. 93-93)

The rise of extremist politics, resonant with contemporary global political movements, is implicit throughout the series, but becomes more explicit with the Minister of Magic's refusal to countenance the possibility of Voldemort's return:

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. He had always thought of Fudge as a kindly figure, a little blustering, a little pompous, but essentially good-natured. But now a short, angry wizard stood before him, refusing, point-blank, to accept the prospect of disruption in his comfortable ordered world – to believe that Voldemort could have risen. (*GoF*, p. 613)

Recursive revivals of industrial era education follow at Hogwarts as Fudge's willed denial is followed by Voldemort's infiltration of the school, particularly in the person of Dolores Umbridge who wastes no time in 'dumbing-down' Defence Against the Dark Arts by applying a back-to-the-basics curriculum (*OoP*, p. 216), and announcing further vague, unspecified and ominous-sounding Ministry reforms (*OoP*, p. 274). The prospects of totalitarian governmentalities rise as Voldemort intensifies his campaign to return and the Ministry begins to organise itself to resist terror (*OoP*, pp. 745-746).

The texts also allude extensively to posthuman biotechnologies. These may be understood as experimental laboratory-based supra-evolutionary changes applied to the human body and mind. They may include cloning, genetic engineering, xenotransplantation, and personality-altering drugs, all of which are allusively and metaphorically explored in the *Harry Potter* texts. For instance, Harry engages in startled conversation with a boa constrictor in the snake language, Parselmouth, without previously having encountered the tongue (*PS*, p. 26); an embryonic-relictual Voldemort is hosted in Professor Quirrell's body (*PS*, p. 212); Polyjuice potion lets Harry and Ron impersonate Draco Malfoy's henchmen, Crabbe and Goyle, while Hermione accidentally turns into a cat (*CoS*, p. 162); Professor Lupin transforms into a wolf, Sirius into a dog, and Pettigrew into a rat (*PoA*, p. 279); and Voldemort is suspected of splitting his soul into seven parts (*HBP*, pp. 463-470).

The *Harry Potter* texts make plainly available to their readers a modern world and its anxieties. The texts can invite literal readings compliant with the recursive, revisionist politics of the times, but they are also open to the perspectives of critical literacy. A desire to protect young people from the grim realities of the world, to wrap them in fantasy so that it all only happens in books, a failure to collectively validate the

pleasures, illuminate the terrors and educate for justice, is tantamount to ‘dumbing down’ – that is, acquiescence to the loss of critical capacity as social and democratic capital.

In the end, education systems, and through them teachers, who can be used to individualise and personalise the anxieties of a whole society, bear the weight of the confusion and constitute an arena of struggle. They stand guardians at the headwaters of the future, scapegoats, whipping posts, objects of political desire; even while, as both Sawyer’s and Donnelly’s contributions demonstrate, teachers as an heterogeneous occupational grouping also participate in scaping, whipping, desiring and politicking. This study, as cultural critique, seeks to take part productively in that debate.

Organisation of the thesis

Following the foreword, the thesis consists of six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, Methodology, establishes the methodology as a blend of cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy, strands of which play out both in concert and separately throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two, Production, concentrates on how the *Harry Potter* fantasy texts are generated from a generic historical field including folk tale, fairy tale, myth and legend. It also considers the occurrence of the novels at the increasingly soluble border of fantasy and reality (exemplified in social history by the simultaneously actual and fantastical World Trade Centers attack).

The abounding genre descriptions of the *Harry Potter* series characterise it as a modern fantasy with elements of fairy tale, folk tale, legend and myth, but also acknowledge classical, biblical and medieval strands. A short list of incorporated sub-genres includes stories of the school, the English boarding school and the wizard school; the hero, the romantic hero and the gundam hero; the orphan; the Boys Own adventure, ‘whodunit’, mystery and crime thriller; horror and gothic fiction; comic farce and

adventure-romance. The chapter hypothesises that fantasy genres are particularly influential during times of rapid social change when populations are faced with seemingly insoluble crises.

Globalisation, the third chapter, considers globalisation and its effects on literacy, literacy pedagogy, and the life-worlds of teachers and students. It pursues the theme that literacy must be considered from both a local and global perspective and in context with the impacts of neo-capitalism. The thesis of this chapter is that literacies – meaning the ways the word/world is read – construct the future.

Chapter Four, *Apocalypse: That-which-must-not-be-named*, addresses the modern Armageddon as the immanence of threat in modern lives. The chapter considers the ways in which apocalypse is always with us, in Judaeo-Christian narrative and in the stories of other cultures. In the 20th century, however, apocalyptic narratives have reflected scientific, social and environmental change in centring on nuclear war, the Holocaust, liberation (feminist, black civil rights, and postcolonial fronts), postmodernism, and ecological change. In this new century, the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centers in New York in 2001 and the Asian tsunami in 2004 metaphorise global warfare and ecological crisis.

The *Harry Potter* texts are effectively a series of apocalyptic narratives in which Voldemort's intention to return and rule, killing whoever stands in the way, is pitted against Harry's life. The final chapter of the fifth novel announces 'The second war begins' (*OoP*, pp. 745-766) and the sixth novel establishes the seventh as a series of mysteries which Harry must solve (*HBP*, pp. 473-479) to finally reach Voldemort and kill him before he destroys the wizarding world. This chapter considers the ways in which the *Harry Potter* series participates in apocalyptic narrative.

The narrative of the traditional hero is the focus of Chapter Five, *Hero*. The traditional hero story is presented as essentially the story of the 'male' journey through

adolescence, a journey matched to Harry's progress as he ages in the series from 11 to 17. The qualities of the hero are equated with the qualities of the adolescent 'male' invested with a self-aggrandising gloss. I hypothesise that the hero story assists to socialise the population into ways and means, rituals and proprieties around killing, including induction into a meritocratic economy of life and death that directs the hierarchies of entitlement to kill.

Part of Harry's charm, however, is that he is not wholly a macho hero. In fact, he is a hybrid hero: sensitive, kind, caring, moral, loyal and likeable; but also a warrior, willing to kill and likely to be adulated for killing. I theorise that an acritical reading of Harry Potter as hero repudiates the importance of active global peacemaking: understanding, negotiation, compromise, and a commitment to the non-violent resolution of conflict. I conclude that to oppose neo-capitalist globalisation and its anti-life effects, a new kind of hero and a new kind of reading is necessary.

Chapter Six, Literacy wars, tackles literacy pedagogy, referring to literacy as a changeable, mutable set of cultural practices formed and reformed by different, often contradictory and competing, social and cultural interests. Teaching literacy is seen as a political, cultural and moral decision about the kinds of literacy needed to give young people agency in their own lives and futures, and to increase communities' literate resources in a multi-media, internationalised environment, thus implying the teaching and learning of a broad repertoire of textual practices in new economies and new cultures.

I track Harry's progress as a literacy learner, noting his growing adherence to the word as spell rendered martial, and his practices of traditional hegemonic masculinity conventionally associated with some boys' poorer literacy performances. This further implicates the necessity to deconstruct compliant readings of the *Harry Potter* texts, applying a broad reading to consider their impact and placement in a global context. I further the hypothesis that readings of the *Harry Potter* texts are easily compliant with anti-democratic globalisation because of the ideological pull of the traditional Anglo-

Celtic imperialising 'male' hero, and advocate for readings that take a global perspective of social justice.

In conclusion, I argue that the global immanence of political and religious conservatisms constitutes ominous portents. For instance, in Australia, conservative changes to education appear to be gaining pace. The political project instituted by Friedrich Hayek and others to abolish the managed Keynesian balance between private and public interest, and the tendency of the competitive economic market model to attempt to infiltrate every facet of social life, exerts profound restructuring effects on education. Neo-liberal preoccupations with 'choice', voucher systems, charter schools, and alleged declining literacy standards engender pedagogies with a pull towards contracting and narrowing the vision of what it is to be human, and towards increasing the privilege of wealthy students and the disadvantages of the poor.

At the same time, actual and potential global conflict over the sharing of natural resources demands the pedagogical production of political, critical, dissenting, creative and just subjects. I conclude, therefore, that a critical understanding of the *Harry Potter* narrative can assist young people to move towards such subjectivities.

CHAPTER 1

Methodology

To engage in critical postmodern research is to take part in a process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 303)

***Harry Potter* in a globalised world: Interrogating meanings**

The overwhelmingly enthusiastic mass reception accorded the *Harry Potter* series of fictional novels provokes the hypotheses on which this thesis is constructed. I read the novels' high degree of acceptance by millions of essentially middle-class, literate adolescents – those who, as individuals or through connections, could buy or otherwise acquire the texts – in the globalised context of contemporary international power flows. The story of Harry Potter is not just global, of course; it is also read and inflected as a local narrative. German reviews, for instance, often compare the young wizard to Goethe's culturally influential Sorcerer's Apprentice (1799); in Japan, the books have been marketed to appeal to the high cultural acceptance of the manga genre; a widespread belief in animism is said to create cultural receptivity in Indonesia; in China, magic and fantasy are thought to constitute an attractive turn from traditional didactic texts; while the tradition of magical realism, the pervasiveness of Disney and cartoon superheroes and the paucity of local children's literature is said to influence readership in Europeanised Latin America (Hooper et al., 2002). Wherever read, however, if they are read from an uncritical perspective as mass popular texts, the *Harry Potter* novels may have the potential to validate the conservative socio-political tenor of the times that can be associated with violent conflicts built on ancient prejudices.

Such prejudices may be constructed in *Harry Potter* out of the interleaved representations of, for instance, socio-economic status, such as the wealth/fame/education/technological resources nexus attached to Harry; gender (the boy hero); age (the infantilised, enslaved elves; the gundam hero; Dumbledore's final confessions of incompetence); and ethnicity (the Dark Lord; Mudbloods versus Purebloods). In the contemporary context, such prejudices are epitomised in the representation by the President of the United States of America (USA), in his State of the Union address of 2002, of certain nations as the 'axis of evil' (Bush, 2002). This Manichean approach constructs the West as unproblematically Good and the Other as unproblematically Evil. Such views both constitute and encourage conventionally masculinist, martial perspectives of society and culture. From a corrective standpoint, I further theorised the necessity for a critical literacy, or text analytic perspective, to disrupt and problematise readings which may readily comply with martial subjectivities.

The importance of alternatives to martial subjectivities is suggested by prevailing contemporary global conditions⁴. Such conditions include a context of stimuli to permanent states of war within and between nations (Machel, 2001; Winslow, 1997); a looming crisis of non-renewable energies; a crisis of global fear (including flows of terrorism and anti-terrorism); potential and actual unpredictable deployments of WMD; environmental instabilities including climate change; occurrences of actual and potential pandemics (such as HIV/AIDS and avian influenza); the simultaneous concentration and intensification of both wealth and poverty within and between nations, generations and even families; and the multilevel challenges of rapidly intensifying neo-capitalist globalisation.

All of these suggest the necessity for remediation through globally dominant co-operative and collaborative social relationships, rather than through aggressive confrontation and bellicosity. By this, I do not mean to minimise the work of global

⁴ Representing the world in this way accords the appearance of compliance with the world views characteristic of mainstream media in Australia, which has a vested interest in emphasising global problems for the production of consent in times in which business and conservative think-tanks profoundly influence governments, the labour market is progressively deregulated and workers' rights are degraded. Effectively, my position acknowledges the public dominance of conservatism within which this thesis is set, without conceding that such hegemony is objectively justified. The uses of political fear are contextualised in Chapter Four.

organisations like the United Nations and the many counter-hegemonic forces active in the work of environmental and social justice: rather, I point to the kinds of human subjectivities which need to be widely explored by young people in education's work of world-making.

A further context in which contemporary subjectivities are acquired relates to the task of education to prepare young people to enter economies shaped by globalisation, in which relational rather than oppositional global citizens are envisaged (Cogan, 2001; Curriculum Corporation, 2002, p. 1; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2000; Tudball, 2005). Conservatively aligned readings of the *Harry Potter* novels may foreground dualistically conceived contradictions as inherent and indurate in a globalised world, giving rise to an untenable paradox: pervasive fear of the Other alongside expectations of the ability to work co-operatively with that same Other.

By this position, I do not mean to erase or minimise the problem of terrorism while berating the West for a culpable economic, military, and cultural hegemony; indeed, I see concordances between the USA and its Islamic opponents: 'fraternal twins, not identical, locked in a battle over wealth, imperial aggrandizement and the meanings of masculinity' (Petchesky, 2002, p. 40). However, I do hold that the West can, and should, take charge of its own history in more powerful, peace-oriented ways, and that education can, and should, so position young people.

From a progressive standpoint, for instance, critical readings of the *Harry Potter* novels as intercultural texts offer opportunities of the kind exemplified by Tudball (2005, p. 23), through which schools engage local and overseas students in the mutual construction and exchange of international knowledge in order to develop empathetic world views. Thus, a further hypothesis of this thesis states that the gathering crisis of conflict as portrayed in the sixth *Harry Potter* novel – metaphorising global political conditions of the early 21st century – demands of both Harry and his readers not martial confrontation but rather, unprecedented degrees of ethical engagement across difference (Christie, 2005, p. 238).

Three methodological tasks

Out of the foregoing intentions – that is, to interrogate the meanings of the *Harry Potter* novels, to situate them globally and to utilise them pedagogically – three tasks evolve: firstly, to elicit a cautionary, however partial, reading of the novels; secondly, to consider the novels as cultural artefacts in a particular global and historical setting; and thirdly, to exemplify some pedagogical stances towards the novels. Approaching these tasks from the perspectives of both literary and educational theory, I chose – as is common in postmodern qualitative research – an eclectic methodology, drawing from cultural studies, critical literacy and critical pedagogy.

At the risk of over-generalising, each of these approaches holds certain assumptions in common: that people's access to power and privilege is unevenly distributed; that socio-cultural mechanisms may both ordain and resist unequal access to power; and that people as individuals and as collectivities can learn to 'read' texts (broadly conceived) as socio-cultural constructions such that they can detect, understand, and potentially act against, socially and culturally inherited or acquired disadvantage and injustice.

In what follows, I foreground the production of theory generally before dealing with more detailed theoretical positions.

The production of theory

The recent history of theory is well-known. Under the once-dominant research orientation of logical positivism, the purpose of theory was to explain, predict and control. Under this regime, research emphasised the use of quantitative methods of analysis. However, subjected to challenge from the emerging paradigms of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the latter half of the 20th century, the dominance of logical positivism faltered. More or less settled notions of unimpeachable objectivity, rationality and certainty gave way to debates around interpretation,

evaluation and representation (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 879)⁵. The modernist/positivist idea of value-free science was challenged by a demand for coherence between fact and value.

The apparent ascendancy⁶ of poststructuralism/postmodernism is associated with acceptance of a number of crucial concepts. These include the rejection of the idea of theory-free observation or knowledge; the invalidation of subject-object duality; the inability of any particular method or set of methods to claim epistemological superiority; and the loss of objective access to an external, extralinguistic referent by which diverse knowledge claims might be settled (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 879). In the new paradigm, the 'objective observer' of positivist science is confronted with relativism, including the idea that human beings are, after all, not omniscient, and that their representations must be considered partial and perspectival.

The new paradigms brought with them an emphasis on qualitative inquiry orientated towards interpretative and criticalist practices, and a turn towards practical and moral considerations in choosing appropriate criteria for instituting and judging research (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 894). Typically, such research includes and celebrates plurality, multiplicity and difference, but relatedly, may suffer from poorly-defined boundaries and blurring of the possibilities for social change.

The axiom that qualitative inquiry is laden with values means theory is acknowledged as cultural product, seen as socially and politically constructed and aligned with particular interpretive communities: open, therefore, to critique (Punch, 1998, p. 140). For instance, structuralist theories (such as Jung's) have been reproached with the errors (among others) of essentialism, positivism, sexism, racism, colonialism, Orientalism and the reproduction of stereotyping. Poststructuralist theories have been chastised for negating the lived conditions of society by privileging certain philosophical positions, such as resistances to authority, to signification, and to human

⁵ I have used encyclopaedic references for a succinct contemporary synopsis where the information required is background rather than central to my methodology.

⁶ This thesis takes as one of its grounds that the socio-political conservative restoration has particular expressions and effects in the academy (see, for instance, Henderson, D. (2005). What is education for? Situating history, cultural understandings and studies of society and environment against neo-conservative critiques of curriculum reform. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(3), 306-319).

agency (Giroux, 1998). Sociology, communication and cultural studies have been taxed with their ecological ignorance: that is, with failing to integrate into academic discourse – alongside the traditional concerns of gender, race and class – knowledge of the material and discursive effects of the ‘fourth dimension’ of space, time and the biophysical sphere (Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997, pp. xii-xiii; McLaren & Houston, 2004). Such objections effectively repudiate a fact-value dichotomy.

The fact-value dichotomy which tends to distinguish logical positivism is considered to rely on a mistaken dualism which fails to account for the many possible meanings of values, the value-ladenness of all facts, and the ways in which values implicitly and directly impact on research (Punch, 1998, p. 50). In addition, research claimed as value-free is nevertheless situated between value judgments implied in the choice of research area and value judgments applied in the discussion, interpretation and recommendations arising from research findings (Punch, 1998, p. 51). Claims of distinction between facts and values may therefore act to disguise the role of conservative values. Instead, Punch implies, assuming the intimacy of fact and value may lend strength to research: at a minimum,

we should be prepared to admit that values do play a significant part in inquiry, to do our best in each case to expose and explicate them... and, finally, to take them into account to whatever extent we can. Such a course is infinitely to be preferred to continuing in the self-delusion that methodology can and does protect one from their unwelcome incursions. (Lincoln & Guba, cited in Punch, 1998, p. 50)

Since values in a criticalist orientation are, in contrast to a positivist position, expressed rather than repressed (Y S Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 169), the purposes of theory become pluralised and problematised. The purposes of theory from a criticalist orientation, then, may include the delivery of structural or historical insights, the attrition of ignorance and misunderstandings, the stimulus of revelation through moral stances, the valuing of empowerment and the utilisation of propositional knowledge towards equity, social justice and social emancipation (Y S Lincoln & Guba, pp. 170-173).

Qualitative research of the kind in which this thesis engages typically generates, rather than seeks to confirm, hypotheses; that is, it deals in provisionalised explanation, the purpose of which is to generate transformation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 172) within the field of pedagogy, which requires continuous sensitivity and responsivity to particular contexts. Thus, my chosen methodology, placed within both literary and pedagogical contexts, works to generate theory/explanations with pedagogical effects in transforming certain potential literacy outcomes of adolescents' interactions with the *Harry Potter* fictional novels.

Validity

The 'goodness' or quality criteria of postfoundational qualitative research remains an important consideration in research methodology (Y S Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 164). With the loss of the concept of the objective observer, the recognition that interpretation is unavoidable and value-imbued, and the demotion of logical empiricism's influence in research outside 'hard science', a highly provisional, processual stance is indicated:

(R)elativism... requires that inquiry be seen as an act of construction that is practical and moral and not epistemological. Likewise, as must follow from this requirement, any judgments about the goodness or badness of research must themselves be practical and moral judgments and not epistemological ones. For the nonfoundationalist, to move away from epistemology is to recognize inquiry as a social process in which we, at one and the same time, construct our criteria for judging inquiries as we go along. (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 886)

In the end, making judgments is about maintaining a moral stance which asserts what is meaningful and important for the researcher, and represents both her grounding as a human being and the sum total of her prejudices (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, pp. 888-889). The questioning of silences, care in representation, caution in judgments and willingness to publicly justify them remain crucial (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 891). As Lincoln (1995, p. 280) suggests, all texts are partial, all are situated historically, socially, culturally and by race and gender, and all come to represent those truths which exhibit the same characteristics. Nevertheless, Lincoln (1995, pp. 277-278) states, the necessarily limited human may practise research within a context of

ethics, retaining a vision of social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse, and caring, an approach to which this thesis aspires.

Choosing theoretical standpoints

The *Harry Potter* fictional novels operate on several dimensions. They operate as artefacts of culture: that is, as popular cultural products, produced at and from particular socio-historical junctures. They reference a particular view of a particular local and national culture in relation to education, simultaneously standing as both normative and expressive global cultural products in a globalising marketplace (Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004, p. 6263). The texts disseminate certain ideologies of the construction of subjectivity, and of class, gender, race and age. They participate in the formation of numberless adolescent identities, imaginaries, and collectivities. At the turn of the 21st century when Western economic, military, and cultural dominance appears to be global, they speak so powerfully to so many young people that they are credited with ‘turning kids on’ to reading; especially apparently reluctant boy readers. They are potent economic products, massively enriching both their author, J. K. Rowling, and their publishing companies, Bloomsbury and Scholastic Inc, and contributing liberally to the export earnings of the United Kingdom (UK). They are canonical texts to a massive parallel semiotic cornucopia which includes movies, games, toys, clothing, foodstuffs, beverages, electronic products and a fan fiction industry of incalculable proportions.

Predictably, then, given its prominence as a manifestation of popular culture, the series has been examined from many perspectives. In relentless traverse and travail over the texts, critical, cultural, literary, sociological and even scientific theoretical traditions have rendered up a cornucopia of readings, from conservative to progressive (for examples, see Anatol, 2003; Baggett & Klein, 2004; Blake, 2002; Colebatch, 2003; Gupta, 2003; Hallett, 2005; Heilman, 2003b; Highfield, 2002; Nimbus, 2005; Schafer, 2000; Whited, 2002; Zipes, 2001). The critical canon seems conspicuously unaware, however, of the potential for work involving an extended consideration of Harry and his adventures in relation to contemporaneous currents of globalisation.

Thus, my task suggests the necessity to mobilise conceptual breadth, incurring therefore the potential of the loss of specificity available to a more particularised theoretical approach. However, the tenor of the early 21st century encourages a wide, holistic or ecological theoretical perspective capable of taking into account certain global pressures in relation to the global phenomenon of the mass popularity of the *Harry Potter* fictional novels. Given that it is part of my mission to demonstrate a certain coherence between the texts, their widespread celebrity with young people, and the encompassing political conservatism of the times, my choice of approach must assist me to theorise and interrogate relationships between young people and their literacies, the popularity of the *Harry Potter* novels, practices of political conservatism, and the intensification of globalisation.

Three brief examples from the range of academic exploration may assist to elucidate the navigation of theoretical standpoints guiding this thesis. Grynbaum (2001), for one, approaches the texts from a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective. She bases her approach on Jung's argument that an archetype activated in a group's collective psyche will emerge in the group's stories, so Harry and company symbolise an archetype of resurrection and redemption:

The psychological climate in much of the rapidly changing technological world is one of spiritual depletion, emotional alienation and personal isolation. Harry and his friends represent a new image of human cooperation and hope required for redemptive healing. (Gail A Grynbaum, 2001)

In her turn, Roberta Seelinger Trites (2001) takes a poststructural, Foucauldian perspective to explain *Harry Potter* as a classic exemplar of adolescent growth constructed in terms of both the enabling and oppressive nature of power. Trites utilises this perspective as a principle critique of adolescent literature in general, and the *Harry Potter* series in particular. She also utilises Peter Hunt's reminder that the terms children and childhood, and adult and adulthood, are dynamic, complex and deceptive. Reflected as such in children's books, on the one hand childhood can be seen with adult eyes as a desirable space of innocence, and yet also constructed as a state a child wishes to mature away from (Hunt, 2001, pp. 4-6). Critiquing the role of Dumbledore, then, Trites states:

That a textually-constructed adult (rather than a teenager) serves as the source of all this parentally-approved wisdom reminds the reader that adults have more knowledge than adolescents, so they must have more power. It follows logically that the only way for adolescents to empower themselves is to quit being so adolescent. Grow up. Get over yourselves. (Trites, 2001, p. 481)

In his turn, Jack Zipes (2001) notes, from a Marxist and feminist position, the domination of the series by male characters which, in his view, transmit traditional patriarchal and capitalist values and norms. Zipes holds that these values and norms, in the public reception of the *Harry Potter* texts, have become erroneously allied to a comforting notion of improved literacy for newly-enthused child readers. In his view, such a notion assists to obscure alternative (or additional) hypotheses, such as the textual construction of children as commodities and their use as pawns in the business of stimulating consumerism (see also Gibbons, 2005, p. 94; and Sangil, 2005, who evidences readers' robustly agentive resistances to such positioning). Zipes questions why readers are so gripped by the 'Potter phenomenon' that the texts become regarded with reverence and awe, and thus encourage discipleship instead of critical analysis (Anatol, 2003, p. xxiii).

These few examples serve to indicate the attractions and value of particular perspectives on the texts. It is tempting to consider how, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the ways in which Harry's identity – such an important issue in adolescence and in the series – is under formation. Similarly attractive is the consideration of a Foucauldian distribution of power across the meaning-weighted, culturally constructed borders between adults and adolescents. Such approaches are capable of delivering valuable, highly specific and intensive renditions of textual meanings.

Nevertheless, Zipes' theoretical antecedents invoke a broad explanatory capacity and have influenced my choices. Marxist theory invokes the critical tradition stimulated by the Frankfurt School's revisionism, and its productive engagements with poststructuralism and postmodernism. Feminism's development includes its dialectics with postcolonialism, along with its inevitable critiques of economic policy within patriarchal capitalism. The idea of the development of children's subjectivities in

relation to a particular economic system invokes the critical authority of cultural studies, while notions of a literacy grounded in patriarchal and capitalist values, and what this might mean for readings and readers of the *Harry Potter* series, suggests the aid of critical theories of pedagogy and literacy.

As mentioned, such mixing is by no means unusual. Contemporary postmodern inquiry participates in eclectic *jouissance*, taking part in the often ludic compilation and blurring of genres:

Indeed, the various paradigms are beginning to “interbreed” such that two theorists thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another’s arguments. (Y S Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 164)

Thus, the constellation of cultural studies, critical literacy and critical pedagogy, and to a lesser extent, feminism and postcolonialism, facilitates productive avenues through which to explore the placement of the *Harry Potter* texts in a global dimension of apparent Western economic, cultural and military hegemony. This placement is contemporaneous with global, national and local rehearsals of anxiety focussed on young people’s literacy competencies, and their allegedly related abilities to participate effectively in rapidly changing global economies. Theoretically, this is a complex undertaking which calls for careful attention to the circumstances under examination: as Henry Giroux’s (2003, p. 5) statement serves to emphasise, ‘Any critical theory both defines and is defined by the problems posed by the contexts it attempts to address.’ Giroux adds:

Such a task demands new theoretical and political tools for addressing how pedagogy, knowledge, resistance, and power can be analysed within and across a variety of cultural spheres, including, but not limited to, the schools. (Giroux, 2003, p. 13)

Similarly, Allan Luke urges the necessity to knowingly complicate research methodologies to engage with the research demands of new times. Although his comments constitute a specific critique of critical discourse analysis and a general

critique of critical applied linguistics, he acknowledges his comments as equally relevant to other critical approaches. Observing that the conditions of globalised capital are made possible by discourse-saturated technology and environments, Luke (2002a, p. 98) offers the term ‘semiotic economies’ to capture the way language, text and discourse have become the principal modes of social relations, civic and political life, and economic behaviour and activity. In semiotic economies, means of production and modes of information become interwoven in analytically complex and challenging ways. Thus, Luke contends that research for new times must cope with

blended and hybrid forms of representation and identity, and new spatial and temporal relations generated by the technologically enhanced ‘flows’ of bodies, capital, and discourse that characterize economic and cultural globalization. These are likely to require new, hybrid blends of analytic techniques and social theories. (Luke, 2002a, p. 98)

The integration of diverse theoretical approaches into an intellectually and politically coherent project becomes a key task for the critical researcher, Luke observes (2002a, p. 98).

Idiosyncratically compliant with such a grand order, then, this thesis aims to be in dialectical relationship with an overarching set of theoretical practices which it utilises in order to generate its own explanations, or theories, for phenomena associated with readings of the *Harry Potter* novels. As popular culture is the key element which coheres my critical methodology, in the following section I will initially theorise popular culture. After that, I will describe each theoretical perspective in greater detail and attempt to indicate where certain perspectives may dominate in the thesis. However, the reader is cautioned to bear in mind Luke’s concerns with the eclectic and hybridising tendencies of the techniques of postmodern qualitative research as its forms attempt to develop social theory in times of rapid change, and to prepare to recognise the common, emancipatory thrust of these approaches as they play in concert throughout the thesis.

Popular culture and *Harry Potter*

As the objects of this study, the *Harry Potter* fictional novels are manifestations of popular culture; that is, the texts engage large audiences in a powerful libidinal economy. Indeed, a crucial task of critical literacy in the classroom is the preservation of children's pleasure in popular culture texts in the face of disciplined critique (Comber, 2001, , 2002); or, as Misson and Morgan (2005) advocate, utilisation of the creative synergy of pleasure and reason to develop the full power of a critical literacy. Understandings of the concept of popular culture are influenced by Marxist theories, which contribute several important premises (Mankekar, 2001, p. 11735). Firstly and most obviously, cultural production can take the form of commodities: that is, it can appear in material, marketable form. Secondly, popular culture is inevitably tied up with social relations, and is a site where social differences are articulated and contested. Thirdly, popular culture can enable groups to define and realise their needs, and simultaneously reproduce imbalances (Mankekar, 2001, p. 11735). Thus, popular culture can be seen as a site through which dominant discourses and forces of resistance activate.

Even with this guidance, the term 'popular culture' characteristically evades easy definition: nevertheless, the concept of magnitude is important, as in 'mass entertainment', 'mass media' and 'mass populations'. Historically, the term has tenacious associations with conservative theories of mass society in which advanced societies were considered to possess features such as growing internal homogeneity; control over a high proportion of the population through a combination of élite and bureaucratic authority; a specific kind of predominant culture linked to 'mass media'; and relatively intolerant forms of politics (Giner, 2001, pp. 9368-9369).

Attached to such ideas is the spectre of 'mass man', a supposedly proliferating human personality embodying mindless social and moral uniformity, in opposition to the liberal humanist idea of the free, autonomous character of which a truly civil society could be composed (Giner, 2001, p. 9370). Contemporary theories of globalisation are compatible with ideas of 'mass society' since the notion includes a view of the

expansion, interdependence and general globalisation of the hypothesised mass characteristics of late industrial Western civilisation (Giner, p. 9372).

Thus, the term ‘popular culture’ retains denotative nuances of homogeneity, conformity, illiberality and mindlessness in relation to global sociality. Residues of such meanings are retained in derisory attitudes to popular culture, examples of which find voice in some responses to the *Harry Potter* novels (see Chapter Two). However, in a more material sense, the term also refers to the finance and production of semiotic texts and their widespread dissemination to large, or mass, audiences. Such audiences are facilitated by the availability of infrastructures, both material (such as road, rail, air and sea transport) and cybereal (such as the Internet, and email) which may support mass distribution (Mankekar, 2001, p. 11735).

In addition, the term also refers to the audience effects of popular culture texts, especially in the way people see themselves and society. Generally, capitalist and post-capitalist societies are held to refract the processes of subjectivity construction through mass media, such as film, television, popular music and mass market fiction. Relatedly, the public realm is held as constituted and represented to itself in cognitive, moral, and emotional terms (Mankekar, 2001, p. 11734).

In the contexts of popular culture’s libidinal/informational flows, then, popular culture presents audiences with particular views of the world, responding to and creating points of identification within large communities or national groups, constituting and representing publics to themselves and configuring ‘the public’, ‘the nation’, ‘society’, ‘culture’, ‘family’, and other collectivities. While Marx expected capitalism’s demise, felled by its own contradictions, critical theorists assert that this demise is forestalled both by the State’s intervention to assuage economic crisis, and by the way popular culture forestalls psychic crisis (Agger, 1991, p. 123; Frankel, 2001, p. 18). In this light, chapters Four, Five and Six consider the *Harry Potter* series as social palliative, with the power to induct the acritical text participant into compliantly conservative readings.

Cultural studies

Now a world-wide discipline, the mid-20th century emergence of cultural studies is associated with British theorists Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggett, E. P. Thompson and Stuart Hall (Denzin, 2001), and with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded in 1964 (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 331). Its early associations are with the Frankfurt School of western Europe, whose luminaries include Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock and Leo Lowenthal (Bohman, 2001; Ray, 2001).

Critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno were influential early interrogators of popular culture, exploring relationships between capitalism and mass media and focusing on the ‘production’ of subjectivities by the ‘culture industry’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). Subsequent British cultural theorists, however, emphasised materialist perspectives through the agency of the individual vis a vis popular culture. That is, they considered what people *do* with daily cultural commodities and therefore what they *make* as culture, and highlighted the necessity to explore individual agentive responses in understanding the material effects of popular culture on the way people see themselves and their lives (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 331).

Importance

This emphasis enables a redefinition of popular culture not as strata (the ‘low’ against the ‘high’) of aesthetic practice, but as a ‘zone of contestation’, a phrase from Stuart Hall indicating the ground over which various interests struggle for hegemony (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 331). Thus, to approach *Harry Potter* from a cultural studies perspective is to identify the operation of specific practices reinscribing the line between popular culture and ‘legitimate’, or élite, culture (Frow & Morris, p. 330). In both Britain and the USA, for instance, the books’ immediate acceptance in popular culture by children, as opposed to literary culture as the province of adults, was overwhelming. Within the first six months after publication in Britain the first book won the Nestlé’s Smarties Gold Award, chosen by an adult panel but ranked by children’s votes. In the

following year, 1998, the book won all of Britain's major children's book awards chosen by children (Eccleshare, 2002, pp. 12-13).

In the USA, *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*, as the first book was renamed for North American readers, won a multitude of awards within a few months of publication. Subsequently, the first three books dominated *The New York Times* bestseller list to such an extent that the newspaper took the unprecedented step of distinguishing adult from children's literature with a new Children's Bestseller List (Anatol, 2003, pp. ix-x). Similar cultural shifts were signified on the British side of the Atlantic in 2000, when the rules for the prestigious Whitbread Book of the Year Award were modified to allow children's books into consideration.

These initiatives provoked ideological clashes over the seriousness with which a culture should regard children's literature (Anatol, 2003, p. x). Conservative critic Harold Bloom, in an article for the *Wall Street Journal* titled 'Can 35 million book buyers be wrong? Yes.', styled himself as Hamlet arming himself against a sea of troubles, the *Harry Potter* phenomenon being that sea (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 352). British Marxist critic Philip Nel (2001, p. 59) was one of many who took issue with conservative critique, dismissing responses by Bloom and others as fundamentally prejudiced against the value of children's literature, and alleging ignorance about the place of children's literature in culture. Effectively, the series' early emergence was marked by many children's apparently uncritical acceptance of the books, contrasted with what amounted to brawls between adults of different literary generations and opposing political orientations as to whose critique ought to be considered most valid and valuable. Further influences emanated from both the religious right, particularly in the USA, and from the books' rapidly evaluating position in the global market economy; the latter seems to have retained the greatest power.

The 'zone of contestation' can also be exemplified within schools. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, p. 296; also McLaren, 2003, p. 216) hold that the primary cultural narrative that defines school life is the resistance by students to the school's attempts to marginalise their 'street' culture and 'street' knowledge; in other words, teachers

attempt to transmit legitimated culture against the ‘native’ culture of the students. Kincheloe and McLaren suggest that this conflict routinely generates struggles in the form of ritual dramas over symbolic capital. In the *Harry Potter* series, Hogwarts’ curriculum content – with its correspondences between magic, technology and electronic forms such as the video game (see Chapter Three) – situates some of Harry Potter’s attraction for adolescents by tending to validate and therefore legitimate the multimodal culture of ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2002a), a libidinous culture replete with hints of special knowledge sequestered from adults.

Within the novels themselves, however, we also see played out popular discourses of the good/evil child. Such binaries oppose the idea of the innocent, naïve and innately good child, deriving from the 17th and 18th century works of philosophers John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, to the wild, animalistic, untamed, threatening and troublesome adolescent, deriving from psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s two-volume 1904 opus, *Adolescence*. In *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix* (pp. 723-744), readers witness Harry’s incandescent rage directed at Dumbledore; but Dumbledore, as the principle of rationality, calms, educates and inducts Harry into a particular form of heroic servitude to the conservative State. The chapter exploits the notion that adolescents, and therefore others around them, are at the mercy of their own physical, embodied changes with a role in mediating literacy outcomes:

The raging hormone model fosters an image of the wild, troubled, sweaty, and lustful teen just looking for action, which promotes a fear of adolescents among parents, researchers, and teachers. (Moje, 2002, p. 109)

Engaging a zone of contestation over representations of the child, the submission of adolescent ‘raging hormones’ to the martial desires of the hegemonic State may well deliver comfort to Harry’s adult readers while modelling, for adolescent readers, an acceptably heroic process of subjection to the demands of the State (a notion further explored in Chapter Five).

Description

Cultural studies obviously takes culture as its object. Definitions of culture abound, but a preliminary explanation combines material, intellectual and behavioural aspects as they are reproduced, inherited and transformed by an identifiable population in the course of daily life. Material artefacts may include tools, works of art, or buildings; intellectual and spiritual goods may include ideas, values and beliefs; and characteristic ways of behaving include distinctive organisational modes, accepted ritual forms and identifiable groups and their conduct (Bullock, Stallybrass, & Trombley, 1988, p. 195). Sociological definitions may emphasise discourse, representing culture as a set of contested, conflictual, representational, interpretive practices, both divisive and unifying, bound up with the formation and re-formation of social groups (Denzin, 2001, p. 3121; Frow & Morris, 2000, pp. 317, 328). The concept of fluidity is important: as Kincheloe and McLaren state,

Rather than fixing culture into reified textual portraits, culture needs to be better understood as displacement, transplantation, disruption, positionality, and difference. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 299)

In the *Harry Potter* novels, the school story is a dominant influence, representing certain distinctive material and intellectual, organisational and ritual, and overall discursive practices by which the novels lay claim to the realist genre (see Chapter Two for a discussion of the significance of genre).

Cultural studies, then, positions itself to take account of both the subtleties and certainties of change. In particular, the field tends to emphasise questions or problems in circulation between various media⁷ and other spaces and times of social life (Frow & Morris, 2000, pp. 322, 329). Thus, an ‘object’ of study – such as the *Harry Potter* fictional novels – may receive the kind of ‘close’ study characteristic of literary criticism, which typically examines the significance of literary conventions and forms. In Chapter Two, the concept of genre is mobilised to conduct such a discussion, while in Chapter Five, the construction of dominant practices of gender come under review.

⁷ Although Frow and Morris use the term ‘media’ to refer to electronic media, I am adapting their discussion to include print media. Given that the *Harry Potter* fictional novels are powerful progenitors of electronic media such as films, DVDs, games and weblogs, and now exist in close intertextuality with many such forms, I consider this to be appropriate.

In addition, however, the object of study will also be considered in its extended or ecological positioning within wider networks of social and cultural activity. Thus, positioning this study of the *Harry Potter* texts, cultural studies engages in the critical investigation of media

as a *force* that not only acts upon existing social conflicts, desires and power relations, but continuously helps to produce them and sometimes to change them. (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 333)

Early cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams (1976) adopted the principles (among others) that culture is political, and that nothing exists outside textual representation. Popular, everyday cultural practices were therefore treated as social texts available to interpretation. In so doing, they acknowledged the way texts involve material practices and structures, and flows of power, money, and knowledge. In turn, these are anchored in historical processes infracted by divisions such as class, gender and race (Denzin, 2001, p. 3121). Further, Frow and Morris (2000, p. 332) argue, particular currents in feminism have influenced cultural studies by assuming that a politics of the everyday involves confronting the impact of sex and gender, and class, racism and colonialism on intellectual life and education. Cultural studies, they assert, develops as both a critique of education and as a pedagogical experiment.

From this perspective, the *Harry Potter* texts – like the subject envisaged by Foucault – lie at the intersection of multiple discursive practices such as writing, reading and authorship; of editing, publishing and distributorship; of commodification and consumerism; of power, money and knowledge; of what may and may not be represented and who may or may not produce representations.

Although cultural studies is associated with the study of popular culture, it is not, however, primarily about popular culture. It also considers such matters as rules of inclusion and exclusion that guide academic evaluations as they shape and are shaped by relations of power (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 294). Such rules are inseparable

from the rules of knowledge production and research, so that cultural studies also functions broadly as a mode of disciplinary critique; that is, consonant with a critical perspective, as stated previously, it keeps an interrogative gaze on both its own activities and those of other disciplines, remaining hopeful of subverting its own and other disciplinary hegemonies in the act of their construction.

Cultural studies and English teaching

In the classroom, a social view of literacy inevitably illuminates socio-political contexts and issues in literacy pedagogy, positioning teachers as cultural workers (Comber, 2002). Practices associated with a socio-cultural approach invalidate deficit models of the learner and correspondingly increase the value of learners' diverse cultural and discursive resources.

As a thought experiment along these lines, in 2003 the eighth conference of the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE) charged a workshop of senior educators with the responsibility of detailing how contemporary English teaching could respond through cultural studies to accommodate and orchestrate the challenge of shifting understandings in the relationships between language, literacy, identity and culture. Such changes were seen as a result of conceptual work largely undertaken in cultural studies and curriculum theory. In framing English teaching as a form of cultural studies, the workshop acknowledged the complex ways in which the work in English classrooms creates opportunities, not just for the reproduction of culture, but for its construction. Moving cultural studies, critical pedagogies and critical literacies into a hierarchy of relationships, the workshop concluded that:

A cultural studies approach to English teaching suggest(s) that the teacher of English is one who is knowledgeable about the historical and cultural emergence of the subject English and who understands both the possibilities and constraints of that historical trajectory. The teacher of English is knowledgeable about social, cultural, political, and learning theories that support critical literacies and pedagogies. As well, the English teacher is expert in some of the forms and structures that have and that might constitute this field. (Sumara, 2004, p. 47)

Thus, cultural studies influences classroom practices through the positioning of the teacher as a social, cultural and political worker (that is, as a critical pedagogue)

who, in utilising critical literacy perspectives, recognises that literacy is culturally and socially situated. Such a conceptual frame assists to foreground the relationships between language, culture and teaching, so that the school site can be seen as both reproductive and productive (Sumara, 2004, p. 45); that is, as stated above, teaching and learning in the English classroom not only represents culture, it also produces it. In response, the English teacher's role includes assisting students to develop interpretive tools and practices which examine other forms of cultural production beyond the print text, expanding notions of what counts as literary text and literary experience. As new experiences of identities co-emerge with what is studied, so theories of learning must adapt from a focus on the individual as the locus of cognition to emphasise the co-emergence of individual and collective learning (Sumara, p. 46).

From this perspective, and again at the risk of oversimplification, cultural studies may be said to position the teacher, critical pedagogies to direct the curriculum and critical literacies to direct the lesson. Through a cultural studies approach, the teacher is positioned as researcher/ethnographer, remaining invested in a meta-analytic approach to the purposes of schooling. However, the fluid nexus between cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy also implies the necessity to continuously interrogate pedagogical practices for the ways in which they both create and limit possibilities for learning; for example, the products of both teacher and student engagement with various forms of text can be seen as profoundly creative means of cultural expression. It is therefore unavoidable, from a cultural studies perspective, to subject theories of learning to thorough and informed critique, as Frow and Morris (2000) describe above.

Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, a largely American impetus, is strongly influenced by teachings on the associations between democracy and education of the early 20th century North American educator John Dewey. In the second half of the 20th century, Dewey's work influenced South American Paulo Freire's emancipatory work, in which Freire famously linked the ability to read the 'word' with the ability to read the 'world' (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Shor, 1999, p. 23; Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 136).

The first use of the term ‘critical pedagogy’, however, is attributed to Henry Giroux in 1983, the field being developed subsequently by Giroux and other theorists such as Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Apple, Maxine Greene, bell hooks, Martin Luther King, Jr, Peter McLaren, Donaldo Macedo and Malcolm X (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 2; McLaren, 2003, p. 185).

Importance

Democracy, as both the ideal and the actual practice of rule by the people, is the deep concern of critical pedagogy. Critical educators integrally link critical pedagogy with democratic practice. In doing so, critical pedagogy foregrounds the relationships between life-worlds and struggles for democracy, seeking to relate the micro world of students and their lives within their communities to the macro world of power, politics, history, culture and economics. Critical pedagogy is particularly concerned with the provision of identities founded on democratic principles, in opposition to identities founded in forms of competitive, self-interested individualism (Giroux, 2003, p. 10; Sardoč, 2001, p. 419).

Giroux, rethinking the position he expressed in the 1980s on resistance and schooling, ruminates on democracy and its relationship to the conservative restoration of the 21st century, reflecting on an unprecedented siege on teachers and schools by forces of neo-liberalism:

Schools are no longer considered a public good but a private good and the only form of citizenship increasingly being offered to young people is consumerism. More than ever the crisis of schooling represents, at large, the crisis of democracy itself and any attempt to understand the attack on public schooling and higher education cannot be separated from the wider assault on all forms of public life not driven by the logic of the market. Moreover, any politically relevant notion of resistance cannot be reduced to what goes on in schools but must be understood – while having different registers – in terms of wider configurations of economic, political, and social forces that exacerbate tensions between those who value such institutions as public good and those advocates of neo-liberalism who see market culture as a master design for all human affairs. (Giroux, 2003, pp. 7-8)

From this perspective, Giroux positions critical pedagogy as a crucial democratic practice in the context of contemporary democratic decline. As Giroux

(2003, pp. 7-8) explains the contemporary condition, the laws of the market now take precedence over the laws of the State as guarantors of the public good. Power and politics become progressively estranged, and the State increasingly fails to provide protection for formerly non-market, non-commodified spheres (such as schools, churches, non-profit media and trade unions) from the advance of capital. (The success of such incursions is evidenced by the vigour of neo-liberal evangelical churches, the corporatisation and privatisation of educational institutions, and the restraints applied to trade unions by industrial reform legislation in Australia, among other effects).

The non-market spheres, according to Giroux (2003, pp. 7-8), create and nurture the political, economic and social conditions which support critical citizenship and democratic public life. Thus, it becomes vital, in Giroux's view, that educators and others concerned about democratic public life provide an alternative vision of schooling that supports democratic forms of political agency and a substantive democratic social order.

A viable theory of critical pedagogy, then, must take account of curriculum and classroom practices. However, such a critical pedagogy must also emphasise the institutional constraints and larger social formations which weigh on forms of resistance by educators, students, teachers and others attempting to challenge dominant teaching practices and systemic forms of oppression (Giroux, 2003, p. 8). Critical pedagogy can be approached, then, as a fluid domain of practice which relates curriculum, classroom and the world to each other in dialectical critique directed at continuous democratic restoration. Although critical literacy and critical pedagogy may, in practice, merge imperceptibly – and Freire (Freire & Macedo, 2003, pp. 358-359) uses the terms interchangeably – the emphasis in critical pedagogy is on world knowledge, while the emphasis in critical literacy is on a language of critique and possibility.

Description

The following description by Robert E. Peterson usefully distinguishes critical classroom practice according to pedagogical orientation:

Monday morning a child brings a stray dog into the classroom. The traditional teacher sees that it is removed immediately.

The progressive teacher builds on the students' interest; perhaps measures and weighs the animal with the children, has the children draw and write about the dog, and eventually calls the humane society.

The Freirian teacher does what the progressive teacher does but more. She asks questions, using the dog as the object of reflection. "Why are there so many stray dogs in our neighbourhood?" "Why are there more here than in the rich suburbs?" "Why do people have dogs?" "Why doesn't the city allocate enough money to clean up after the dogs and care for the strays?" While accepting stray animals into a classroom isn't the bellwether mark of an elementary [Freirean] teacher, engaging children in reflective dialogue on topics of their interest is. (Peterson, 2003, p. 365)

In the following discussion, I have principally utilised Peter McLaren's widely-canvassed perspectives on the nature of critical pedagogy; mainly because I support his revolutionary and ethical emphasis even though certain elements of Marxist theory which he advances may be questioned. McLaren's position, at least at the point in his oeuvre reflected here, tends to foreground and rely heavily on an intersubjective and structural locational understanding of class, along with an idealised post-capitalist world of Marxist socialism (McLaren, 2003, pp. 30-31; Sardoč, 2001). However, in the contemporary context of rapidly expanding intensified globalisation, the concept of social class requires retheorisation. Underdeveloped notions, empiricism, ahistoricalism and reliance on notions of a class 'in itself'/'for itself' may now bespeak a naïvely linear Marxist evolutionism (Camfield, 2004-2005, p. 422, p. 442).

The contemporary context also problematises post-capitalist prophecy: for instance, the compulsory investment of workers' wages in superannuation funds lends further complexity to the existing multidimensionality of social being of which class relations are a part, and raises the question of the intrasubjective class status of a waged worker legislatively constituted also as a capitalist. In understanding class, as Camfield (Camfield, 2004-2005, pp. 437, 443) points out, relations of production are only a point of departure; feminism, anti-racism and other perspectives arising from social

movements against oppression signal the ways in which class is persistently mediated by, and mediates, multiple social relations.

Thus, while I reject a view of class as signifying an homogenous, self-identifying, conscious, monolithic collectivity, and also hold open notions of the form of post-capitalist economies and societies, I retain elements of McLaren's analysis related to the socio-historical positioning of pedagogy, and confirm his social justice ethic which powers a revolutionary and transformative impetus. In my view, critical pedagogy properly responds to the question which McLaren (2003, p. xxxiv) asserts is central to pedagogy: what is the relationship between what is done in the classroom and efforts to build a better society? Critical pedagogy applied to this question, while encouraging teaching to a properly utopian view of a society to come (Williams, 1985, p. 13), must also accept the unpredictable outcomes implicit in social transformation.

Declaring his emphasis on developing forms of revolutionary praxis and transformation rather than on the meeker politics of reform, McLaren states:

In order to ensure that all individuals have a voice in the surplus value their labor generates, critical educators argue that those responsible for our current brand of capitalism must be held morally accountable. A new class struggle is needed that will help guide and eventually reshape existing social relations of exploitation in the interests of *everyone*, one with the vision and power to counter the dehumanizing effects of modern supply-side capitalism. This can only be achieved with the overthrow of capitalist society itself in favour of a society in which the full development of the individual is the basis for the full development of society. (McLaren, 2003, p. 190)

Believing that capitalism cannot be justified on either ethical or political grounds, McLaren is therefore interested in the role education may play in developing new forms of non-alienated labour. He sees this as occurring through the dismantling of capital's social relations, and capital itself, by dismantling capital's law of value as a central form of mediation between human beings (Sardoč, 2001, pp. 418-419).

McLaren (2003, p. 7) describes critical pedagogy as a politics of understanding and action, an act of knowing that attempts to situate everyday life in a larger geopolitical context. He positions its overarching goals as fostering regional collective self-responsibility, large-scale unity, and international worker solidarity. Despite or perhaps because of its grand claims, McLaren concedes that critical pedagogy remains a minority pedagogical movement which nevertheless challenges both the academic and public school teaching communities.

As with other forms of critical practice, it is axiomatic that there are no blueprints for critical pedagogy. Rather, critical pedagogies are more likely to be united in objectives than by a formalised set of ideas. Such objectives tend to include the empowerment of the powerless and the transformation of existing social inequalities and injustices (McLaren, 2003, p. 186).

Critical pedagogues view schooling as inherently political and cultural: schools are seen as both sorting mechanisms in which certain groups are advantaged by race, class and gender and simultaneously as agencies for self and social empowerment (McLaren, 2003, p. 186). From this perspective, schooling represents an induction into, preparation for and legitimation of certain forms of social life. As such, schooling is never neutral: it is implicated in relations of power, social practices, and the support of forms of knowledge that favour a specific political vision of past, present and future (McLaren, p. 187). Rowling makes specific reference to such a function through the Sorting Hat (*PS*, p. 88), a symbolic filter which, in drawing attention to the way commencing Hogwarts students are assorted according to psychological criteria, alerts its audience to the activities of other, more pervasive, filters associated with class, race and gender – concerns omnipresent throughout this thesis.

The thesis of the partiality of education draws criticalists to subvert mainstream schooling's normative claims that it distributes equal opportunity, and provides access to egalitarian democracy and critical thinking:

In general, critical theorists maintain that schools have always functioned in ways that rationalize the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers; that reproduce inequality, racism, sexism, and homophobia; and that fragment

democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness and cultural ethnocentrism. (McLaren, 2003, p. 187)

In the critical view, rather than inducing social mobility, schools tend to reproduce privilege, meaning that economic returns from schooling are far greater for the capitalist class than for the working class, as canvassed in Chapter Six.

Therefore, critical pedagogues seek to reposition schools as sites for social transformation and emancipation where students are educated not only to become critical thinkers, but also to view the world as a place where their actions might make a difference. According to McLaren (2003, p. 188), the mastery of technical skills, which is seen as tied to the logic of the neo-liberal marketplace, should not be taught exempt of an ethical context:

Critical pedagogy eschews any approach to pedagogy that would reduce it to the teaching of narrow thinking-skills in isolation from the contentious debates and contexts in which such skills are employed. (McLaren, 2003, p. 27)

Habermas's communicative action theory has added useful, if contested dimensions (for instance, see Giroux, 2001, p. 8; and Hutchinson, 1997, who exemplifies feminism's robust critique of Habermasian theory), to the grounds of critical pedagogy. Habermas (2000, p. 12) defines communicative action as 'symbolically mediated interaction' aimed at developing mutual understanding between the proponents in a speech act. The theory diverts the grounds of inquiry from what Habermas construes as consciousness-based (as in class, gender, race, sexuality, age and ethnicity, for instance) to communication-based, in which the possibility of communicative rationality may foster the emancipatory potentials in everyday speech acts. The theory assumes that, in the sociolinguistic rules of communication, the potential for rational agreement is implicit. Endres (1997) argues that communicative action theory explicitly connects epistemology and ethics in critical theory, thereby producing both a critique of positivism's ignorance of its own value stances and a constructive ideal for social action and policy.

The theory of communicative action states that three kinds of validity claims, directed at objective, subjective and social levels of reception, effectively underlie any speech act (Carspecken & Walford, 2001, p. 9; Endres, 1997). Speech acts in themselves enfold ‘ideal’ speech situations which may never be fully realised in communicative action, effectively constituting a ‘transcendental illusion’ (Habermas, 2000, p. 103). The first of the three validity claims constitutes claims of truth and intelligibility for the propositions used in the speech act, directed at the objective, external world; the second comprises claims of rightness about the norms or values at work in the specific interpersonal context, directed at the social world; and the third relates to the sincerity implied in a person’s attitude in a speech act, directed at the subjective world. Even though each claim is simultaneously at work in each speech act, the pervasive influence of cognitive positivism in everyday interaction tends to privilege and therefore ‘thematise’ the first, objective proposition. However, the pragmatic application of Habermas’s theory surfaces the other claims to challenge.

For instance, to adopt Endres’ (1997) example, a teacher specifying the slope of a line for a class produces a relatively objective definition in the external world of the slope of a line. The speech act claims, therefore, that there is such a definition of slope; but the statement also makes ‘buried’ claims about the norms governing the teacher-student relationship and about the teacher’s genuineness or sincerity. Should the students (or the teacher) choose to challenge the social norm that it is the teacher who produces the definition of such a thing as slope, the act of challenging would re-thematise the speech act in terms of its claimed social norms instead of its objective definition. Challenges directed at truth claims meet the critical criterion that knowledge should be analysed on the basis of whether it is oppressive and exploitative, not in terms of whether it is ‘true’ (McLaren, 2003, pp. 210-211).

Whether Habermas’s theory is a plausible reconstruction of emancipatory possibilities in everyday speech acts, and whether such acts are cultural conventions or deeper structures constitutive of discourse, remain points of debate (Ray, 2001, p. 2986). Nevertheless, while maintaining consciousness-based critiques, in Chapter Four I theorise that Harry’s failure or inability to critique Dumbledore at the level of norms and values – that is, to wonder how there came to be such a thing as a Voldemort – and

Dumbledore's inability to reflect critically on his own teaching in making truth and intelligibility claims about Voldemort, crucially underlies Harry's compliant positioning as martialised avenger.

In the classroom

In the classroom, the usual construction of a course normally incorporates micro objectives specifying the course content. These may be narrow in purpose, binding the path of inquiry to content (McLaren, 2003, p. 195). Critical pedagogy, however, adds macro objectives, designed to allow students to make connections between the methods, content, and structure of a course and its location within the larger social reality.

For instance, in Chapter Six, the micro content of Dolores Umbridge's new 'back to basics' Defence against the Dark Arts is seen to be severely circumscribed, including the proscription of the actual performance of spells (the whole point of the unit). In the mode of the critical pedagogue, Hermione attempts to interrogate the content only to be ignominiously squelched by Umbridge. The professor, a Voldemort plant, is understandably hostile to the canvassing of macro objectives which might act to establish a dialectical relationship between micro objectives and their wider social and political implications (McLaren, 2003, p. 195).

Critical pedagogy also seeks to deal with the 'hidden curriculum', those unintended consequences of schooling such as the overt and subtle classroom cues by which teacher attention may be distributed unevenly according to gender. Curriculum is regarded as the introduction to a particular form of life, serving partly to prepare students to take up positions of dominance or subordination in the existing capitalist society (McLaren, 2003, pp. 211-212). Critical pedagogues view curriculum as a form of cultural politics, foregrounding social, cultural, political and economic dimensions as the primary categories for understanding contemporary schooling (McLaren, p. 214).

In conventional curriculum practice, hidden outcomes may remain silenced, since to acknowledge them would expose the social universe in which capitalist schooling reproduces labour power for capital (McLaren, 2003, p. 214). The critical

pedagogue, however, is obliged to reveal the structural and political assumptions which foster the hidden curriculum, and to attempt to change the institutional arrangements of the classroom so as to ameliorate the curriculum's most undemocratic and oppressive outcomes. Using a pedagogical language of possibility fosters learning as relevant, critical, and transformative:

Knowledge is relevant only when it begins with the experiences students bring with them from the surrounding culture; it is critical only when these experiences are shown to sometimes be problematic (i.e., racist, sexist); and it is transformative only when students begin to use the knowledge to help empower others, including individuals in the surrounding community. Knowledge then becomes linked to social reform. (McLaren, 2003, p. 218)

Critical literacy

Sharing the orientation towards the critical, the development of critical literacy – particularly intense during the 1980s and 1990s – also benefits in its American form from the legacies of Dewey and Freire (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, pp. 3-5), with the important influence of Russian cognitivist Lev Vygotsky's work on language and thought (Shor, 1999, p. 11). Luke (2000, p. 451), however, asserts that Australian practice is distinguished by its foundational insistence – beyond individual skill practices connected to higher order comprehension – on the engagement of students in the analysis and reconstruction of social fields. Thus, according to Luke, Australian practice also drew early on Voloshinov and Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida, and Bourdieu.

Other commentators point to the influence of systemic functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis on various forms of critical literacy practice, while Luke (2000, p. 451) points to the ways in which particular curricular and pedagogical approaches tend to coexist in classrooms, blending and creating hybrid approaches 'that no textbook developer, researcher or bureaucrat could have conceptualized.' Contemporary contributors to the development of critical literacy include Elsa Auerbach, Bill Bigelow, Linda Christensen, Barbara Comber, Peter Freebody, Pam Gilbert, Henry Giroux, Hilary Janks, Donald Macedo, Peter McLaren, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Jennifer Gore and Carlos Torres (Fehring & Green, 2001; Shor, 1999, p. 11).

Importance

Luke ponders the possibilities when a radical approach to literacy education moves into the secular State education system, questioning:

the sustainability of a socially-critical, discourse/text based approach to literacy in [a] conservative educational climate, one characterised not only by moral uncertainty and cultural redefinition, new and renewed forms of economic exclusion and disadvantage, but also by tight-fisted, managerialist responses to diminishing government resources... (Luke, 2000, p. 448)

A key lesson from the history and sociology of literacy, Luke (2000, p. 449) states, is that literacy education is always a situated response to particular political economies of education: that is, to institutional and governmental arrangements, and the distribution of discourses, materials and spatial resources within the governance of educational reform. Economies and cultures of 'new times', he states, are reliant on discourses and texts – historical and new, formal and informal – as principal modes of work, leisure, consumption and everyday exchange. In other words, discourses and texts are forms of capital for exchange. *The* key educational issue of the 21st century, Luke emphasises, is who will get access to them, who can construct and manipulate them, and who can refute, second guess and critique them.

Luke's concern, then, is for the vulnerability of a foregrounded critical literacy education in political struggles over who does, and who does not, access education in ways that redistribute capital in support of social emancipation. Luke's concerns have been underlined by serial attacks on the teaching of critical literacy by conservative commentators such as Kevin Donnelly (2005, p. 26), whose support for a narrow, phonics-based literacy learning against the more complex pedagogical implications of the construction of literacy as socio-cultural were published over an extended period in *The Australian* newspaper, a conservative broadsheet owned by the Rupert Murdoch company, News Ltd. The paper editorialised in alignment with the position of Donnelly ("Educational idiocy", 2005), while Donnelly's assertions of a literacy crisis in Australian schools were synchronous with the Government's emerging intentions to

hold an inquiry into the teaching of literacy in Australia. During this period, Rupert Murdoch publicly allied himself to the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard ("Murdoch lauds Howard for courage, vision", 2005).

Donnelly, a former Howard government staffer, was the recipient of an \$80,000 contract from the Federal Government, exempt of a tendering process, to conduct a cross-national comparison of Australian primary school curricula (Maiden, 2005)⁸. The unflattering report bears marked resemblances to Donnelly's book of 2004, *Why our schools are failing*, available in 2006 as a free download from its sponsor, the Menzies Research Centre, Ltd, a conservative think-tank named for a former Australian Liberal prime minister.

The inquiry into literacy subsequently recommended the use of phonics as a principal teaching technique in the English classroom, effectively equating literacy with functionalism; an equation with inevitable results in the erosion of critical literacy skills (see Chapter Six). Meantime, the Howard Government has maintained an attack on the 'dumbing down' of English in Australian schools (Grattan & Rood, 2006, April 21), in addition to continuing to participate in an ongoing campaign to reform the critical teaching of history (Brawley, 1997; Howard, 1996; Salusinszky, 2006). The point to be made here is that such struggles effectively acknowledge the power accorded to critical literacy practices in potentially developing alert, inquiring citizens with democratic sensibilities, in opposition to the production of compliant servants to a conservative State-industrial complex.

An archaeology of policy, curricular and school texts conducted by Freebody and Welch (1993) illuminates the ways in which obdurate philosophical sources of political resistance to critical literacy practices play out in education. The documents examined by Freebody and Welch acknowledge the jeopardy to equality arising from, for example, location, gender, cultural heritage, race or socio-economic status. Nevertheless, the documents fail to problematise that jeopardy, according to Freebody

⁸ *The Australian* carried the story.

and Welch, by constructing the sociality of humans in ways that do not refer to concrete structures of privilege and hierarchy.

Such documents may emphasise individual freedoms and respect for others, but the portrayal of the individual as ‘in’ society tacitly licenses voluntaristic social models in which individuals are represented as freely choosing particular educational participations. Mechanisms of critique and change directed at explaining patterned and systematic inequality are thereby weakened. Freebody and Welch (1993, p. 223) conclude:

The liberal-democratic fallacy, which justifies the conditions of patterned and systematic inequality, is disguised.... With the individual agent thus celebrated it is difficult for a curriculum ... to deal systematically with the material inequalities that characterize history in anything other than a trivial way... or through devices that blame the victim. [Ellipses added]

Australian developments in critical literacy seek to counter such tendencies.

Definitions

Critical literacies are many and diverse, reflected in the range of definitions: nevertheless, notions of flexible textuality, sceptical readings, democratic agency and social justice – or, in the terms of Hilary Janks (cited in Comber, 2002), difference, justice, power and language – are consistent. Ira Shor (1999, p. 1) gestures at the multiplicity of critical literacies through a plural lens: as Kenneth Burke’s attitude towards history that sees language as symbolic action; as Paulo Freire’s dream of a new society against the power now in power; as Michel Foucault’s insurrection of subjugated knowledges; as Raymond Williams’s counterhegemonic structure of feeling; as Gloria Anzaldua’s multicultural resistance invented on the borders of identities; or as Adrienne Rich’s language mobilised against compliance to the status quo. For Luke (2000, p. 453), critical literacy focuses on teaching and learning how texts work, on understanding and re-mediating what texts attempt to do in the world and to people, and on students’ active self-positioning with texts through the critique and reconstruction of the social fields in which they live and work.

Cervetti, Pardales and Damico (2001) trace critical literacy through its borrowings: from poststructuralism, methods of critique through understanding texts as ideological constructions embedded within discursive systems; from critical theory, continuous social critique through the understanding that texts are products of ideological and socio-political forces; and from Freire, the understanding that literacy practices must centralise social justice, emancipation and equity.

The practical aim of critical literacy, Luke confirms, is to generate vigorous classroom debates over what texts attempt to do, which ideologies are represented, and how students can use them in different social fields.

(I)t is about beginning from the supposition of the embeddedness of reading and writing, of all texts and discourses, within normative fields of power, value, and exchange. It also moves toward an explicit pedagogy of critical vocabularies for talking about what reading and writing and texts and discourses can do in everyday life. The agenda sets out to teach students to read backwards from texts to the contexts of their social construction (i.e., economies of text production), and to write forwards from texts to their social use, interpretation and analysis (i.e., economies of text use). (Luke, 2000, p. 453)

The classroom application of critical literacies ought to be concurrent with other elements of literacy learning. The template for four resources of literacy pedagogy (see Chapter Six), developed by Freebody and Luke (1990) and implemented in Australia and beyond, constitutes a cumulative and socially situated repertoire to be taught systematically and explicitly at all developmental points, from early years to university. The template elucidates learner roles summarised under the four terms of code-breaker, text-participant, text-user, and text analyst. The role of text analyst, utilising critical resources, is not considered a supplementary add-on to literate development, 'but an integral part of what counts as literacy for all learners' (Comber, 2002).

In alignment with critical pedagogy, critical literacy in the classroom also seeks to honour the diverse resources and discourses learners bring to the classroom. Comber, for instance, emphasises the need to engage students in critical literacy practices through the use of literacies that are important to them, stating:

(C)ritical literacy is not the relentless pursuit of politically correct topics we think will be good for children, but involves the ongoing negotiation of sites and texts and practices that teach children about language and power.... The major driving force behind a critical literacy agenda is that it will make available to young people powerful and ethical practices for acting in and on the world.... Critical literacy clearly has a normative agenda in producing citizens who understand what justice is and how to represent themselves and their groups and communities. (Comber, 2002)

In concordance with Comber, Paul Frye (1997) demonstrates the way critical literacy is most pertinent when addressed directly to students' needs. In helping students to recover powerful writing and reading practices from their contracted views of literacies, low self-estimations of personal literacy and diminished critical 'toolkits', Frye used the Australian satirical current affairs television text *Frontline* as a meta-text. Students were able to critique several examples of authentic current affairs programs in a classroom context of co-operative learning activities and an effaced role for the teacher-as-expert.

In classroom practice, critical literacy can approach the text from multiple interrogative positions. Questions may relate to the purposes of the text (for instance, what is this text about and what does its composer want us to know?); textual structures and features (for instance, what sort of genre does the text belong to?); characterisation (for instance, how are teenagers constructed in the text?); gaps and silences (for instance, who and what is missing from the text?); power and interests (for instance, who benefits most and who least from this text?); world view (for instance, what kinds of social conditions does the text portray?); composer values (for instance, what kind of person, with what interests and values, composed the text?); and multiple meanings (for instance, what different interpretations of the text are possible and how else could it have been written?) (Education Tasmania, 2001). Such questions are activated throughout my readings of the *Harry Potter* novels.

Cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy in the classroom

Cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy approaches align companionably in imaginative and ambitious classroom practice. Comber (2002)

details a number of classroom projects, developed out of teachers' orientations to the wider world and their productive engagement with children's interests, which begin as critical literacy curriculum units and expand to include wider community contact and focussed action for change. One of those reported by Comber, titled 'Literacy and power', involved a key goal of supporting early primary school students to value their developing literacy skills and to use them to act powerfully to solve problems, voice concerns and participate in change processes at home, at school and in the wider, even global, community. In this unit, children were invited to reflect at length on their own lives within their neighbourhood, a high poverty public housing area, and to express their most heartfelt wishes for neighbourhood improvement. Finally settling on a vegetation renewal project, they researched and consulted the local government authority, an urban renewal team, and their school itself. In the course of the project, they read maps, used legends, conducted surveys, wrote letters, made telephone calls and sent faxes, organised speakers, re-designed a new park and visited plant nurseries.

The project operationalised Freirean concepts of critical pedagogy, invoking critical literacies for representation, analysis and action in the context of the children's lived experience. Freire's anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive pedagogy seeks to put power into the hands of students and place social and political analysis of everyday life at the centre of the curriculum. The children's lengthy reflections on their own lives are analogous to Freire's 'cultural circles' – gatherings of workers examining and critiquing their lives and communities. Simultaneously, it required students to engage with each component of the four resources model of literacy (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

In Chapter Six, I examine Harry's literate development from the above perspectives, finding that what is greatly at stake for Harry is his ability to read both the word *and* the world.

Limitations of the study

This thesis takes a decidedly socio-cultural, rather than individualist, view of literacy. I have made no attempt to argue for a balance or to construct a dialectic between these (synthetic) polarities. It has not been my aim to theorise society vis a vis the individual but to acknowledge that the times are politically conservative, that the intensified self-interested individualism of neo-liberalism is profoundly and negatively influential, and that arguing from a socio-cultural view of literate subjectivity is a necessary corrective.

I have confined my project to the *Harry Potter* series of fictional novels, since the field of texts which has proliferated from the novels is enormous and beyond the capacity of one study to accommodate in any depth. Similarly, I have avoided the task of quantifying the *Harry Potter* phenomenon in any significant way⁹, since many of its dimensions – particularly its cybereal manifestations – are dynamic and may escape accurate measurement.

The reader might wish to be alert to certain references to male gender which occur not as offences against gender-neutral language but because of the need to refer specifically to Harry, or to masculinities specifically.

In Chapter Two, I consider how the *Harry Potter* texts are produced from the historical field of folk tale, fairy tale, myth and legend, and how they occur as fantasies at times of increasingly soluble borders between fantasy and reality.

⁹ In 2001, the BBC noted that the *Harry Potter* novels had become the biggest publishing success the world had ever seen, selling more than 135 million copies in 48 languages since 1997. Only the Bible, the BBC claimed, has more translations. In addition, every thirty seconds, someone somewhere in the world began to read a Harry Potter story (Quick Quotes Quill, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

Production

We know now that text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.... (T)he writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His [sic] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (Barthes, 1996, p. 121)

The funny thing is that Harry came into my head almost completely formed. I saw him very, very clearly. I could see this skinny little boy with black hair, this weird scar on his forehead. I knew instantly that he was a wizard, but he didn’t know that yet.... It was almost like the story was already there waiting for me to find it... [Ellipses added] (Rowling, cited in Quick Quotes Quill, 1999b)

There’s a widespread notion that children are open, that the truth about their inner selves just seeps out of them. That’s all wrong. No one is more covert than a child, and no one has greater cause to be that way. It’s a response to a world that’s always using a tin-opener on them to see what they have inside, just in case it ought to be replaced with a more useful type of tinned foodstuff. (Høeg, 1992, p. 44)

Production of the child

At least some of J. K. Rowling’s motivation in writing the *Harry Potter* series has to do with her expressed wish to construct stories which contradict what she constitutes as the relative powerlessness of children in society; that is, she expresses a desire to intervene in a particular way – as texts representing children – in the cultural

reproduction of the young. This desire is evident in a number of interviews which record her preoccupation across time with the issue of children's social agency:

'Children are incredibly powerless'; 'Magic is a perennial theme in children's literature because children are so powerless'; 'Kids are so powerless, however happy they are. The idea that we could have a child who escapes from the confines of the adult world and goes somewhere where he [sic] has power, both literally and metaphorically, really appealed to me'; '(H)owever happy children are, however well looked after, children are incredibly powerless'; '[Children are] very powerless, and kids have this whole underworld that to adults is always going to be impenetrable'; 'One theme that's so powerful in these books is the idea of the powerlessness of kids – ordinary kids'; 'What I'm saying is that children have power and can use it, which may in itself be more threatening to some people than the idea that they would actually learn spells from my book' (The Leaky Cauldron, 2004)

Rowling's comments participate in debates about 'the child', 'children', 'childhood' and 'literature', problematic ideas which preoccupy literary theorists from time to time (Hunt, 1999; Kociumbas, 2001; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1999; J. Rose, 1994; Sarland, 1999; Stephens, 1992). From a poststructural perspective, 'the child' does not arrive empirically, immediate to observation and sense, as an homogenous, comprehensible entity. Instead, ideas of the child are socially and culturally mediated, subject to contestation and change in social, ethical and moral frameworks (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1999, pp. 18-19). Alterations in these ideas relate to profound social and cultural outcomes. For instance, in the 1930s, a shift towards positioning children as fully agentive inaugurated when markets began to specifically target children as consumers. This shift participated in sweeping transformations in the cultural construction of children and childhood, encoding and enacting an unprecedented redirection of knowledge and cultural power (Cook, 2000, pp. 487-488). Thus, the task of empowering children which the *Harry Potter* texts appear to take on is not small, simple or trivial, and is enmeshed in social and cultural contestation.

Nevertheless, writers clearly have ideas about children, whether consciously or not, which they write into their fictions, firstly in addressing themselves to an implied child reader, and secondly in representing children as characters in narrative. These are unavoidably ideological enterprises; the writer constructs a child as reader or character according to the writer's own experience, life course, background, values, and

intentions to intervene in the socialisation of the young – that is, according to the writer's own construction and positioning within socio-cultural practices, and according to the writer's own sense of personal agency. For instance, Lurie (1991, p. ix) – playing unashamedly with ideological weight – evokes an appealing, essentialist fantasy of childhood:

There exists in our world an unusual, partly savage tribe, ancient and widely distributed, yet until recently little studied by anthropologists or historians. All of us were at one time members of this tribe: we know its customs, manners, and rituals, its folklore and sacred texts. I refer, of course, to children.

The fallible notion of origin, the discontinuities of the Freudian psyche, the unreliability of language, the inscrutability of the Other and the dynamic intricacies of culture all inveigh against Lurie's representation. A text representing children in this way is of a kind with myths of origin by which, as Boas (1990) notes, woman, folk, tribe, noble savage, and the collective unconscious, among other essentialised notions, are inveigled into becoming the bearers of cultural desires which signal innocence as a cultural preoccupation. The example signifies that children, writers and texts are engaged in complex power relationships in the production of 'the child', and the implication that follows is that children's literature itself cannot be neutral or innocent (Hunt, 1994, p. 3, p. 15). The project is invariably fraught, as Hollindale (1988, p. 10) illuminates:

(I)deology is an inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children ... because of the multiplicity and diversity of both 'book' and 'child' and of the social world in which each of these seductive abstractions takes a plenitude of individual forms.

Thus, the textual construction of the child is often marked by deep critical suspicion as to the socio-cultural and self-positioning of adults writing, and critiqueing, such texts. For instance, Lesnik-Oberstein (1999, pp. 18-19) advances the idea of an adult hegemony in the production of literature for children. She contends that the familiar problems with literature for adults, such as predicting what book is good and why, tend to shift ground on the assumption that, unlike the adult, the child is a unified, consistent, readily available entity. The problems that adult literary criticism engage

with thereby seem simplified once criticism is applied to that which is signalled as children's literature. 'To put it crudely', Lesnik-Oberstein (1994, pp. 5-6) asserts,

children's literature criticism uses the idea that adults know how children think and feel to 'solve' the problems that adult literary criticism struggles with precisely because it is not sure it is easy for people to know or understand how another person thinks or feels.

The effect, she concludes, is that children's literature criticism reveals its intentions and purposes quite openly in 'an urgency of belief, asserted as knowledge, which is intricately involved with the need within Western society to capture, define, control, ...release and protect the child' (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, p. 8).

Ideas of the child are readily available. Society is immersed in common discourses about the child, particularly those which oscillate around binarised notions of the good, angelic child and the evil, devilish child. In the former, the child is seen as innocent, naïve, innately good, vulnerable and in need of care and protection. This view, as noted previously, stems from the 17th and 18th century works of philosophers John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, which sought to establish the child as a pure point of origin. On the evil/devil side, the young, particularly adolescents, are viewed as wild, animalistic, untamed, threatening and troublesome, as promulgated by G. Stanley Hall in his two-volume opus *Adolescence*. This work effectively created the category of adolescence as a life-stage and emphasised the primacy of hormonal influences at that time of life (the 'raging hormones' thesis)¹⁰.

As a writer of children's social realism fiction, John Marsden contests the idea of the protected, innocent child, claiming that protection is the oldest form of repression. Marsden positions the adult as soft-hearted 'control freak', satirising an imagined adult in the process of writing, or of approving a book for children:

¹⁰ Cross-cultural studies (for instance, Chatterjee, Bailey & Aronoff, 2001), tend to refute age and stage-based theories, preferring to constitute adolescence as culturally, socially and locally constructed. In these views, adolescence appears to occur as a variable both within and between societies, with late adolescence failing to appear at all in some. According to these perspectives, stage based descriptions tend to be a function of the technological complexity of a society, which may give rise to a longer period of dependency during knowledge acquisition.

(T)he world seems so dark and difficult. It frightens me. It's some comfort to imagine that there are simple innocent places – the pretty, pure, countryside (hence the attraction of James Herriot's Yorkshire, and 'Banjo' Paterson and Mary Grant Bruce's outback Australia), sweet fairyland (Enid Blyton's Toyland, James Barrie's Never-Never Land, May Gibbs' bush), beautiful Camelot (Buckingham Palace, John Kennedy's White House) – and the innocent world of childhood. (Marsden, 1994, p. 104)

Adults, concludes Marsden (Marsden, 1994, p. 105), use their power to write, control and censor children's reading, denying what he asserts are the rights of children to encounter genuine social and cultural 'truths' in fiction.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Sarah Gilead's position is somewhat coherent with this perspective, tackling the idea that adults satisfy their own needs through children's literature. Children's literature may be thoroughly child-responsive, she asserts, but it nevertheless satisfies adult ideas of children's needs and is shaped by conscious or unconscious goals that diverge from the conventionally dictated child-directed goals (Gilead, 1992, p. 80). Peter Pan, for instance, as emissary from the fantasy world, acts as the reader's symbolic guide in a flight from reality to fantasy; but Peter himself is in thrall to reality, constantly returning. Freed of mortality, youth is a prison; Peter can never grow up, thus embodying an adult obsession with time and death.

Peter is at once the idealized child and the regressive, impotent adult who is compelled to kidnap the very concept of childhood to alleviate the intolerable burden of adult existence.... Condemned to repeat the same story of denial with each generation and insatiably hungry for new stories, Peter exemplifies the unacknowledged power of children's literature over adults.... Peter represents the child's escapist imagination – more properly, the adult's romantic view of childhood as the liberated imagination itself. Peter also reveals the adult's fearful or even guilt-laden desire for the idealized imagination of the child. [Ellipses added] (Gilead, 1992, pp. 95-96)

From a similar psychoanalytic standpoint, Jacqueline Rose pushes this argument to a deeper interrogation of the desiring adult writing. Like Gilead, Rose (1994, p. xv) comments on *Peter Pan*, stating that as an object of cultural specularity it 'serves to keep in social circulation what is most difficult and potentially unmanageable about subjective desire'. Rose confronts the Romantic Rousseauian ideal of Western

childhood as a safe and happy space, asking: what is the adult that desires a child of a particular kind for whom a literature is destined? An acritical idea of children's fiction, she states, relies on a simplicity of address to a child simply present; it sets up a world in which an adult – as writer, maker, giver – precedes a child as reader, product, receiver (J. Rose, pp. 2-3). According to Rose, the adult intends to draw in the child that is portrayed, building an image of a child inside the books so that the much more elusive child outside can be grasped. Such an activity can be described as soliciting, chasing, or even seducing, Rose claims (p. 2). In this process, innocence declares itself not as a property of the child but as a portion of adult desire, as a form of adult investment in the child by which the child is stabilised and held in place (J. Rose, p. 4). However, childhood will not provide adults with the answers

needed to guarantee a certain knowledge of ourselves. For it is not only childhood, but adulthood itself, which can serve as the last of all myths. (J. Rose, 1994, p. xvii)

Ideologies implicit in debate about children's fiction foreground a politics based on age, class, gender and ethnicity, and include the globalisation of children's fiction and the role of liberal humanist values in a capitalist democracy, asserts Sarland (1999, p. 39). While conflicting ideas of 'the child' pervade capitalist society, the child desirable to the market economy, for instance, has emerged as autonomous and agentic, a wilful, knowledgeable and desiring agent making his or her own decisions and exercising self-expression through the medium of the commodity form (Cook, 2000, p. 503). In the ongoing project of positioning the child for the market, the intrication of diverse discourses around children's self-expression, development, desire, and choice represents 'authorial moments in the ongoing social construction of childhood' (Cook, p. 504). Despite the privilege accorded to individualism and the author's unique contribution, however, the many commonalities of an age – the 'captivity of mind we undergo by living in our own time and place and no other' – means that writers are likely to transmit the shared social and cultural milieu, according to Hollindale (1988, p. 15).

Kociumbas (2001) traces this effect in the political uses of the literary 'Australian child' in its trajectory through colonial landscapes, noting the emergence of mythic and stereotypic representations, such as the sad lost child and the tough little bush bred boy, which emerge from early writings. Each of these stereotypical representations, Kociumbas finds, is put to political work, variously contradictory and ambivalent to each other, in relation to changing ideals of masculinity, femininity, colonialism and the land. Among those ideas which influenced a newly robust, distinctive 'Australian boy' were G. Stanley Hall's recommendations that adolescent males should be free to practice hunting, fishing, fighting and other tribal pursuits. In particular the lost (effectively, like Harry Potter, orphaned) child was required to reject the compass of home, church and mother to age and mature, becoming shrewd, independent, ingenious and resilient as he went (Kociumbas, 2001, pp. 46-47).

From this, Kociumbas concludes that there was never a distinctive Australian childhood. Rather,

the child was an empty screen onto which changing groups of myth-makers projected their varying political ideals.... Of these various images, the over-riding emphasis on the innocence of the white male adolescent was perhaps the most ideologically powerful... [Ellipses added] (Kociumbas, 2001, pp. 50-51)

To extend Kociumbas's conclusion to the *Harry Potter* texts, Harry Potter, his friends, his enemies, and his readers all participate in a mythmaking project, the production of 'the child', through which diverse political ideals give themselves presence. This project is intersected in diverse ways with the use of genre in the production of the text.

Production of the text

To revisit the position stated earlier, the common denominator of children's literature is a desire to intervene in the lives of children, placing such fiction within the domain of cultural practices designed to socialise the target audience (Hunt, 1994, , 2001, , 1999; Stephens, 1992; Stephens & McCallum, 1998). The primary audience may be less experienced and inculcated in their culture than adults, but that does not make the text less experienced, according to Hunt (1994, p. 3); it does, however, place

the writer in a particularly influential position in the transmission of cultural values. The question that arises is whether the choices of genre in the *Harry Potter* series assist to construct the category of ‘children’ as powerful, given the power of genre to exert influence both on and in writing, and the production of the series within a socio-cultural milieu of increasingly conservative global politics.

The remainder of this chapter, then, explores the notion of a relationship which involves the series’ use of genre and the cultural meanings of genre. However, these readings rely not so much on authorial enunciations around the *Harry Potter* series, but rather on that reading position which fleetingly ‘holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted’ (Barthes, 1996, p. 122), acknowledging the critical position from which writer/reader/text are discursively embedded in context and culture (Devitt, 2000, p. 699).

To begin with, the literary form of a text has profound cultural implications. Frow proposes, for instance:

that textual meaning is carried by formal structures more powerfully than by explicit thematic content; that what texts do and how they are structured have greater force than what they say they are about; and that genre... is perhaps the most important of the structures by which texts are organized. [*Italics added*] (Frow, 2005, p. 129)

Writers and readers are immersed in the cultural history of story, whether they are conscious of this or not, so that the influence of established narrative forms, as suggested by Barthes and attested by Rowling above, is virtually unavoidable. Stephens and McCallum (1998) refer to generic power in suggesting a double movement, the formation of an overarching genre shaped from a Western meta-ethic sedimented, through continual innovative retellings of centuries of classical myth (particularly Greek), into the relational networks of contemporary narrative. The overarching genre, they suggest, constitutes a framing structure for apparently novel narratives. The persistence of the myth genre in this process is associated with its role in forming part of ‘our’ cultural heritage. However, the production of subjective wholeness attributed to

cultural mythology is ‘radically flawed by the individualism, imperialism, masculinism, and misogyny which pervade that mythology’ (Stephens & McCallum, p. 63). Thus constituted, the overarching generic framing structure disciplines diverse genres and social issues, reproducing conservative cultural and moral outcomes which act to further sustain the overarching genre.

Frow (2005, p. 132) also points to the larger shaping forces of a generic framework. In this case, it is constituted through the ‘unsaid’ of texts comprised of the individual’s latent and possibly incognisant information not directly available to scrutiny. Such a view illuminates the implicit ideological and hegemonising tendencies of the generic framework in its interaction with the specific information conveyed by the text, itself a vehicle for the carriage of narratorial ideologies. To highlight the subtleties indigenous to such interactions, Hollindale (1992, p. 37) emphasises the use of a correct analogy in the identification of ideology in literature intended for children. It is important to understand, he states, that ideology is a climate of belief, not a political policy. A political policy can be itemised, imposed, legislated into reality and often vindicated by pure reason. A climate of belief, however, is vague, holistic, pliant, unstable, and evolutionary in nature. Hollindale, then, advises alertness to the diverse, subtle and unpredictable actions of narrative ideologies, stating that we should accept:

both the omnipresence of ideology and the realities of fragmentation, divergence, passivity, inertia, conservatism, invisibility, unreasoningness, in much of its expression and reception by the author and the child. (Hollindale, 1992, p. 37)

In their discussion of the immanent nature of ideologies in stories for children, Stephens and McCallum also offer a useful refinement. They argue that children’s literature, compared to literature for general consumption, includes a much larger proportion of retold stories – partly because of the continuing influence of folk and fairy tales, traditionally considered more appropriate to children’s literature, but largely because of its culturally didactic role (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 3). This work of inculcating children with a culture’s central values and assumptions, and inducting them into a body of shared allusions and experiences, occurs through retellings of infinite variety. Such retellings present a society’s existential concerns through the use of

concrete images and symbolic forms in traditional stories. Narratives modified through the interactions of various retellings are simultaneously inflected by current social conditioning. The traditional fairy story *Cinderella* exemplifies such a process in its many transitions from Giambattista Basile's energetic, entrepreneurial and promethean 17th century Zezolla to Walt Disney's coy, insipid and passive celluloid kewpie doll of 1949; more recently, Harry Potter is cast as a 'Cinderfella' orphan who lives under the cramping stairs and is disdained by his stepparents and step-sibling.

Stephens and McCallum (1998, p. 62) consider that interactional genre processes offer children, as readers, privileged patterns of thinking, believing and behaving that explain or model ways in which the self might relate to the surrounding world (which can provide useful, as well as questionable guidelines, they propose). On the other hand, writers as retellers of stories characteristically desire unifying frames and may 'discover' one ready made, as the previous quotation from Rowling suggests.

Scholars are apt to trace the philosophical grip of genre to ancient Greece and Rome, where verse tragedy, regarded as the exemplar of genre purity, was adulated at the zenith of the classical period (Farrell, 2003, p. 391). Not coincidentally, during the height of Athens' political and cultural prestige the citizens of the city prided themselves on their autochthonic origins: 'idealization of literary forms goes hand in hand with idealization of the polis as a locus of social organization and with nineteenth-century attitudes towards ethnicity as well', explains Farrell (p. 392). In other words, the tendency to construct and revere the 'pure' associates itself with structuralist excesses of élitism, ethnocentrism, and those other practices of exclusion mentioned in the foregoing discussion.

While the classical period's lack of suspicion about genre coincided with an apparent high degree of social control, the disconnection of the imagined tie between genre and essence coincided, in another period, with both the widespread interrogation of the concepts of society and culture and the emergence of a modern theory of genre. Eighteenth century criticism, assailed by the impudent rise of the novel, some innovative generic mixing by female authors, the social shaping effects of new print

materials such as pamphlets and broadsides, the hunger for print materials of all kinds, and the influence of petit bourgeois morality on drama, destabilised generic authority even while maintaining a focus on form (Prince, 2003, p. 455). Prince notes the deep cultural tectonics:

Critical debates about the proper management of genres masked struggles to control the frameworks for interpreting texts, society, nature, and divinity. Stipulations about how to write had implications for who could write and who could be represented in what ways. (Prince, 2003, p. 455)

The manipulation of textual forms for social, political and gendered purposes was not disguised in that period, Prince notes: it was part of an explicit and expected restructuring of texts. Nevertheless, critical preoccupation with genre signals, then as much as now, a recognition that however much authors desire to ground their preferred form in the nature of things, in an archetype of beauty or in a transhistorical ideal (for example, the hero), ‘specific uses of any given genre serve local ends’ (Prince, 2003, p. 455). Genre suppositions give con/temporary relief both to the apparent human need to categorise and order, and to the associated tension between the particular and the general. This latter dilemma, known philosophically as the problem of the One and the Many, is reflected in literary theory’s various focuses on genre from both structuralist and poststructuralist vantage points.

What is genre?

Both structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives illuminate the idea of genre, opposing desires to tame and constrain with desires to release and fecundate. The particular perspective brought to bear gives rise to effects such as the siting of genre – variously or combinatorially as dispositions of reader, writer (creative, critical and academic), text, context and culture – and to its applications, as categories of interpretation (Prince, 2003, p. 453), as software-like applications of generically organised knowledges (Frow, 2005, p. 133), and as ‘typified social action’ (Devitt, 2000, p. 697).

In the structuralist vein, classical genre theory, as we have seen, was a powerfully essentialising discourse (Farrell, 2003, p. 383). The kind of verse produced was indissolubly linked both to the poet's character and to the poem's metrical form. According to Plato, the same person (always male, of course) was temperamentally unable to write both tragedy and comedy, while Aristotle held that genre arose from a person's natural instinct for a particular meter. Along with their high regard for the purity of genre, ancient academics and critics had, apparently, no sense of generic ambiguity: serious character produced serious poetry imitating serious actions; less noble character produced less exalted poetry imitating baser actions. The high/low division between the two kinds quickly suffused the culture of formal criticism (Farrell, p. 384). This culture nevertheless internalised its own deconstructive paradox in its blankness to the gap between theory and practice. The often radical departures of poets from established generic protocols disclosed an implied theory of genre much more complex and various than the explicitly theoretical tradition allowed (Farrell, pp. 402-403).

Plato's and Aristotle's notions of a pure essence in the literary form had the effect of conferring on the form an unmistakable identity. The ancients presaged the long-lasting overarching division of literature according to who spoke in the work: *lyric* for a work uttered in the first person; *epic* or *narrative* for a work initially spoken in the first person by the narrator, followed by the characters speaking for themselves; and *drama*, in which the characters alone speak (Abrams, 1999, p. 108). Further distinctions created by Aristotle and others included *tragedy*, *comedy* and *satire*, which have survived the centuries; but as the conditions of production, distribution and consumption change, so new forms emerge – for instance, *biography*, *novel* and *essay* have entered the lexicon of literature since the 17th century.

Influenced by biological classificatory models, structuralist versions of genre tend to maintain a taxonomic approach in which codes and conventions are understood as shared by writer and reader, generating expectations which may or may not be fulfilled (Abrams, 1999, p. 109). Nevertheless, conventions and codes encourage the reader to bring understandings to texts through intuiting correspondences to existing cultural and social codes, even as notions of fixity and stability trouble the structuralist

codex. For instance, Rebecca Lukens (1990, p. 13) begins by defining genre as ‘a kind or type of literature in which the members share a common set of characteristics’. However, she is immediately constrained to point out that the members, as much as they hold characteristics in common, also differ from each other. In a literary field divided into prose and poetry, she instances, where does one fit rhythmic, non-metrical writing spaced in poetic line length? The work may be poetic prose because it lacks metre; but on the other hand, it may be prose poetry because of its appeal to the senses. According to Devitt (2000, p. 700), contemporary genre theory must emphasise the nature of genre as difference, as well as similarity:

We know genres by what they are not as well as by what they are; a text participates in genres that it rejects as well as in those it accepts, in genres that it avoids as well as those it embraces.

Poststructural versions of genre, then, acknowledge the arbitrary nature of literary taxonomies and tend to use the concept according to heuristics and convenience. Necessarily, this approach abandons the Aristotlean idea that literary forms contain some pure identifying essence and acknowledges instead the contextuality of classification and the fuzziness of form. Rather than being discarded, the poststructuralist notion of genre attains the status of infinitely deferred meaning which nevertheless, in *différance*, confers boundaries on texts, however dynamic (Devitt, 2000, p. 700). At the same time, since any one genre exists in relation to every other genre, all texts operating within explicit genre or genres nevertheless implicitly participate in a theoretically infinite generic field. With exemplary deconstructive ludicity, Derrida explains:

(A) text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. (Derrida, 1980, p. 65)

Harry Potter and the jigsaw(lessness) of genre

Writers tend to construct texts similar to those they have read, and genres tend to reproduce diachronically in association with a law of precedence (Saunders, 1993, p.

44). Children see, read and hear texts such as folk and fairy tale, myths and legends, romance and mystery, and writers (once children) tend to reproduce the distinguishing features of assimilated genres in their own works. In addition, the available technologies of production and distribution influence the survival and development of various genres – the enormous print runs and widespread availability of the *Harry Potter* books are predicated on the use of cheap bulk paper, rapid printing and binding techniques, bulk shipping, trucking and warehousing, and the existence of multiple retail outlets, all of which factors in turn are built on the globalised and globalising nature of the publishing industry servicing a mass population.

Ideological utility also assists genres to maintain currency (Saunders, 1993, p. 43), not just in terms of dominant ideologies, but for their subversive tendencies as well. Alison Lurie (1991; Lurie, 2003) claims that childhood clings to many successful children's writers, such as E. Nesbit, James Barrie, Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, John Masefield and J. K. Rowling herself:

Unless you can really really really remember what it felt like to be a child, you've really got no business writing for children. Even if people hate the books, and I qualify on no other account, then I definitely qualify on that one, because I remember so vividly what it felt like to be that age. (Quick Quotes Quill, 2001)

Such writers, Lurie suggests, are often steeped – consciously or not – in the Romantic tradition from which childhood and youth can be represented as wonderful and unique; accordingly, they may exploit traditional genres to satirise adults, expose hypocrisy, subvert rules and generally suggest that children surpass their elders in intelligence and courage. Such strategies abound in the *Harry Potter* texts: for instance, the Professors Snape and Trelawney figures satirise irrational teaching styles, while the Dursley family models the worst of bourgeois pretension; bureaucratic hypocrisy is interrogated through the character of Rufus Scrimgeour, the new Minister for Magic; Harry himself models the subversion of both school and societal rules; and Dumbledore (*OoP*, p. 739) confesses his weakness and incompetence during the transition between his decline and Harry's ascendancy.

At first glance, the epic form of the *Harry Potter* series indicates an interest in sustaining adult dominance through demonstrating the continuity of legally-constituted authority and power in society, through formal education (Hogwarts), through the elder statesman figure (Dumbledore), through the anti-hero figure of Voldemort, and through the adventurous boy hero Harry – that is, in a feminist interpretation, through a patriarchal ideology. However, ambiguities in the texts portend subversions of the dominant authoritarian ideology, gambits likely to appeal to the adolescent task of social and cultural challenge: Voldemort, the masculine figure in whom the greatest evil is presently constituted, yet may emerge as Harry's close relative; like Howard in Diana Wynne Jones's *Archer's goon* (1984), Harry may yet discover the greatest evil within himself; and Dumbledore's gleam of triumph when Harry discloses that Voldemort, having infused himself with a small amount of Harry's blood can now touch Harry without pain (*GoF*, p. 604), awaits the seventh novel for explanation.

The abounding genre descriptions of the *Harry Potter* series are influenced by both structuralist and poststructuralist views of genre. Critics commonly characterise the series as a modern fantasy with elements of fairy tale, folk tale, legend and myth, and also acknowledge classical, biblical and medieval strands. Many commentators note Rowling's elaborations of genre by also offering descriptions characterised as sub-genres. A short list includes stories of the school, the English boarding school and the wizard school; the hero, the romantic hero and the gundam hero; the orphan; the Boys Own adventure, 'whodunit', mystery and crime thriller; horror and gothic fiction; comic farce and adventure-romance (Eccleshare, 2002; Hallett, 2005; Heilman, 2003b; Lurie, 2003; Nimbus, 2005; Schafer, 2000; Whited, 2002).

As noted earlier, ancient forms of cultural exchange – such as folklore, fairy tale, legend and myth – bring powerful influences to many classical and modern written literary projects. The infusion of such influences in the *Harry Potter* fantasies accounts for much of their richness and colour. The plot of each novel provides a conduit through which archetypes and symbols from generic frames can activate traces of previous stories which interact with the characters and events to augment and stimulate meanings. The titles alone signal certain generic relationships (Alton, 2003, p. 142): *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone* evokes fantasy, myth and legend; *Harry*

Potter and the chamber of secrets suggests mystery, thriller and horror. From *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban*, intimations of the crime thriller and perhaps gothic horror emanate. *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire* evinces expectations of adventure, fantasy and Arthurian legend, while both *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix* and *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince* breathe fairy tale, legend, myth, mystery, and perhaps Romance.

Use and meanings of genre

Folklore

Since the mid-19th century, ‘folklore’ as a collective term has referred to sayings, verbal compositions and social rituals that have descended through cultures by word of mouth and by example, rather than through writing (Abrams, 1999, p. 100). Although developing where oral rather than written literacies were common, folklore continues to exist in both oral-dominant and written-dominant cultures as oral jokes, stories, songs and forms of wordplay (examples can be found on websites featuring the latest ‘urban legend’). Propp (1984, pp. 3-7) emphasises the persistence of folklore, describing it as an international phenomenon, as the product of a special type of verbal art, and as performance art which is subject to change along with attitudes, tastes and ideologies.

Like other ‘phenomena of spiritual culture’, folklore does not register changes immediately and can extensively preserve old forms under new conditions, Propp (1984, p. 13) proposes. However, change in folklore formations can be provoked by clashes between eras or social systems. Thus, Ron sources his scatological gag from schoolyard folklore when he asks during an astrology lesson, ‘Can I have a look at Uranus, too, Lavender?’ (*GoF*, p. 178), and the earthiness of the joke simultaneously lampoons Professor Trelawney’s cosmic ‘new age’ pretentiousness, new age claims generally, and Lavender’s breathless reverence for the teacher’s mysticism.

In coherence with Propp’s suggestion, other instances of preserved folklore abound, often with a light sense of parody, in the *Harry Potter* novels. Professor

McGonagall, like the traditional witches of English folklore, can transform herself into a tabby cat whose markings simulate the professor's glasses. Aragog, the elephant-sized spider in *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*, bears the impress of Anancy, the cunning trickster spider of folklore. Feasts of abundance, which take place at Hogwarts at the beginning and end of the school year and to mark other special celebrations have their roots in folklore, as does the frequent occurrence of the number seven, reputed in folklore to have magical force (for instance, there are seven novels in the series, seven years at school, seven Weasley children, and Harry's birthday is in the seventh month).

Folk tales

Folk tales, as a form of folklore, originated as short narrative prose by unknown authors (Abrams, 1999, p. 101). Folk tales often cede into written form, but the term also includes stories which achieve oral status as retellings of the works of known authors. The term also includes myths, hero stories (see Chapter Five) and fairy tales, often referred to by the German term *Märchen*, or 'wonder' tales, in which marvellous feats are commonly performed. Jack's adventures on high aided by the beanstalk, for instance, are reminiscent of Harry's adventures in the labyrinthine underworld of Hogwarts, in which his descent is aided by the magical hyperlumenation of the sink pipes in *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*.

Fairy tales

Fairy tales survive, Alison Lurie (2003, p. 125) asserts, because they present experience in vivid symbolic form, enhancing the reader's capacity to grasp the 'truths' they dramatise. For Jack Zipes, what fairy tales symbolise in multitudinous ways is Utopia – that word signifying a code, as Fredric Jameson (1991, p. 334) states, for a vision of systemic transformation of contemporary society. Zipes therefore draws attention to the politics of the fairy tale, and in particular the subversion of the fairy tale into both an instrument of class oppression and an ideological tool for distinguishing 'high' and 'low' culture.

Zipes' class-based analysis may superficially appear outmoded in the face of theoretical confusion about class distinctions in relation to the postmodern, in which identity has been elevated and class either downgraded to a comparatively less powerful instrument of demarcation, or declared dead (note the discussion in the previous chapter, and see further discussion in Chapter Six). The disconcertingly swift intensification of neo-liberal globalisation in the last two decades has also added to the confusion about changes in class designations. There are reasons, however, why class analysis should be retained and recouped as a valuable concept.

Verity Burgman (2003, pp. 26-28) argues that much of Australian academia in the 1990s endorsed the postmodernist and poststructuralist romance with the decentred subject, allying itself with theory's profound doubt that such a subject could exert agency and support collective action. At the same time, social movements such as feminism, lesbian-gay (and increasingly, bisexual-transgender-intersex and queer) liberationists, indigenous rights and green activists continued to theorise, organise and act, collectively and politically. Although these movements seemed blessed with emancipatory potentials, the minimisation of class analysis in their politics undermined them. Politicised claims for the recognition of differences transposed easily into identity politics, and identity politics, weak on class theory from the left and undoubtedly cannibalised of any remainders by neo-liberal tactics, displaced the fundamental call of liberation movements for the fair redistribution of resources. Hansonism, in which claims of unfair and overgenerous redistributions to indigenous Australians were set against claims for recognition of the identity and postulated needs of Pauline Hanson's One Nation supporters, demonstrated a relative decline in claims for egalitarian redistribution.

Expounding Nancy Fraser, Burgman comments that the move

from *redistribution* to *recognition* in the language of political claims-making is occurring at a time when an aggressively expanding capitalism is radically exacerbating economic inequality. (Burgman, 2003, p. 27)

Burgman concludes that the politics of recognition, bereft of class theory, results in both economic and social jeopardy: displacement of the politics of redistribution by the politics of recognition redistributes attention, rather than resources, and may in fact exacerbate economic injustice; and simultaneously, complaints for recognition in exclusive terms discourage respectful interaction across multicultural contexts, encouraging social inequality through the fostering of separatism, intolerance, patriarchalism and authoritarianism. In contrast, while global socio-economic inequalities are widening, researchers are showing that class structures are hardening, occupation is the single most important signifier of social identity, and class location and certain political attitudes – for instance, towards trade unionism and private enterprise – are strongly empirically correlated (Burgman, 2003, p. 30). Burgman ironically notes:

As transnational corporations embarked upon an especially aggressive campaign to increase profits and decrease workers' wages and working conditions across the globe, academics were busily debating the death of class. (Burgman, 2003, p. 30)

From this position, Zipes' attention to class issues is useful, both in a historical sense and to contemporary critique. He holds that fairy tales continue to exercise an 'extraordinary hold over our real and imaginative lives from childhood to adulthood', signified by the scholarship they attract and their consumption in popular culture (Zipes, 1979, p. 22). However, they emerged at a particular historical juncture; the term 'fairy tale' materialising in the 17th and 18th centuries during the transition from feudal to early capitalist economies. At that time, folk tales/fairy tales spoken by the poor began to be recorded by the wealthy of Italy (Zipes, 1991, p. xviii), England and France and the material bases of the tales became obscured. Instead, the contents and meanings of fairy tales were subjected to discrimination and marginalisation by being stigmatised as the products of bizarre occurrences and irrational minds (Zipes, 1979, p. 23).

Similarly in Germany the idea of education for the people – promoted in the spirit of the *Aufklärung*, a clearing-out of old limitations – was modified into a 'limited enlightenment' under which the texts of education could be controlled. Magic in folk and fairy tales, according to Zipes (1979, pp. 22-23), metaphorises ontological effort; magic demonstrates what human beings are capable of becoming, and demonstrates the

resources of imagination and reason which humankind may call on to achieve new worlds. 'The controls were not only placed on the folk tales', Zipes (p. 24) remarks, perhaps rather sweepingly, 'but on all literary forms which appealed to the imagination and might stir rebellious impulses.'

Eilers (2000, p. 320) also remarks on the anti-fairy mentality which peaked in the 1780s, when proselytising children's authors produced hundreds of didactic texts intended to improve the morals, manners and malleability of the young. Along with Zipes, Eilers notes that fairy tales were accused of failing to provide useful knowledge and evoking belief in flippancies and falsities. In other words, they tended to draw children away from the pathways of rational thought and from the proper obedience to conventional pedagogies. However, Eilers (p. 321) believes that the Romantic impetus, assisted by the publication of popular translations of collections such as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Nursery and household tales* (1823) and Hans Christian Andersen's *Wonderful stories for children* (1846), assisted to restore the reputation of fantasy, folk tales and fairy tales. Grenby (2006), on the other hand, insists fairy tales never fell from favour but were continuously present in adapted form, evidenced by sustained publishing from presses such as William Lane's Minerva in the period 1788 to 1800. However, the Romantics, who transformed the folk tale into a radical critique of industrialisation, marketisation, and the accompanying banality and alienation, represented only a minority position, according to Zipes (1979, p. 26).

The emerging middle classes, constituted by the progressive industrialisation of Western Europe (and probably composed of many pleased to jettison reminders of previous poverty), encountered folk tales modified to distort the tales' origins in struggles for the fairer distribution of resources; for instance, the Brothers Grimm nurtured the hegemony of the growing middle classes by stressing bourgeois values and Christian morality (Zipes, 1989, p. 63). Grenby (2006, p. 18) considers the appearance of the 'moral fairy tale' as an example of the protean tendencies of the genre and for a time its dominant generic strain. The deluge of 'improving' texts – homilies, sermons, fables, anecdotes and didactic stories in newspapers, weeklies, yearbooks and anthologies – conspired to limit human imaginative resources, constituting a civilising project.

In contrast to the fairy tale, in the folk tale might is right; the folk tale, after all, does not often finesse the harshness of life and its naked struggles for power (Zipes, 1979, p. 27). Anyone with sufficient brute strength and cunning can challenge for power and become a king or queen. The fantastic in folk tales functions to genuinely fulfil the desires of underdog protagonists within the established social structures: rather than revolutionise social relations, the peasants sought to overthrow the aristocracy and replace it (Zipes, pp. 28-29). The folk tale, stigmatised by the dominant culture as representing low morals, remained with lower middle class people and retreated to the nursery with nurses and servants (Grenby, 2006). Thus, the folk tale remains associated with the oral traditions of feudal pre-capitalism and with the conflicts between peasantries and aristocracies, depicting common people's aspirations for better conditions. 'The utopian impulse has its concrete base', Zipes avers (1979, p. 23).

On the other hand the term 'fairy tale' is associated with early capitalism and was coined by the emerging bourgeoisie to signal a new literary form which used elements of folk lore in describing and critiqueing bourgeois aspirations and needs. Situated at the point of transition between a new and an old world order, the fairy tale brought both worlds into question in search of an alternative order privileging humanism (Zipes, 1979, p. 35).

The early progressive elements of the new capitalism are reflected in the new hero. Neither peasant nor monarch, the hero is a bourgeois protagonist, often an artist or creative person, encountering the supernatural in a search, not for wealth and status, but for a revolution in social relations. In contrast to the folk tale, the form of the fairy tale is multi-dimensional, hypotactical and open-ended, assisting its ideological impact to be both civilising and subversive. In subversive mode, the fairy tale's content incorporates an expanded range of social types, endorses subjectivity beyond the delimited Proppian functions of the folk tale character, and critiques capitalist ideologies implicit in wage labour, profit, accumulation and free enterprise (Zipes, 1979, p. 35). The freedom of the creative individual is situated in opposition to the constraints of mechanisation, and the world sought is ideologically and aesthetically a place where difference is respected and nourished and the creative potential of all human beings nurtured.

Applying fairy tale to fantasy, subversive writing occurs through two major variations (Zipes, 1983, p. 180): firstly, by transfiguring traditional fairy tale motifs to illuminate the way a different aesthetic and social setting relativises all values; and secondly, by fusing unfamiliar plotlines and settings containing contemporary references and traditional configurations. The first form alerts readers that life and civilisation are processes available to shaping; the second emphasises the factor of changeability in contemporary social relations; and the fusion demonstrates all possible means for highlighting a concrete utopia. Hence, Zipes (1979, p. 40) concludes:

(I)n transcending the limits and springing the confines of their own society with magic, fairy tales provide insight on how the rationalization process of exploitative socio-economic systems needs to be and can be humanized. Hence, the reason for the continual attraction of folk and fairy tales: breaking the magic spell in fairy realms means breaking the magic hold which oppressors and machines seem to have over us in our everyday reality.

In contrast to Zipes' claims, the social setting of Hogwarts tends to magnify dominant values and intensify struggles over them (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). The very familiarity and predictability of the plotlines, based on the quest of the hero infused with novelty references to élite sport (as in the Quidditch World Cup) signals the texts' comfort with dominant value systems.

The utopian impulse in fairy stories, Zipes (1983, p. 174) claims, can be described as a quest for home, 'a place nobody has known but which represents humanity coming into its own' – that is, a society without exploitation and enslavement. The fairy tale detaches the reader from the familiar world of lived experience and opens up the experience of the uncanny, that which is both frightening and comforting. The uncanny, corresponding to Freud's *unheimlich*, discloses unfulfilled possible futures, the crushed strivings of the ego, and the suppressed acts of will which recall the dream of free will:

(T)he real return home or recurrence of the uncanny is a move forward to what has been repressed and never fulfilled. The pattern in most fairy tales involves the reconstitution of home on a new plane, and this accounts for the power of its appeal to both children and adults. (Zipes, 1983, p. 176)

In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling vivifies her stories using traditional graphic insignia of fairy tales, such as flying broomsticks, invisibility, talking animals, ghosts, spells and potions, and transmutation between human and animal forms. At times, Harry's correspondence to fairy tale characters is mischievously emphasised, as in his representation as a male Cinderella:

While Dudley lolled around watching and eating ice-creams, Harry cleaned the windows, washed the car, mowed the lawn, trimmed the flowerbeds, pruned and watered the roses and repainted the garden bench. The sun blazed overhead, burning the back of his neck. (*CoS*, p. 13)

The Mirror of Erised reprises the mirrored lake of Narcissus and the 'mirror, mirror on the wall' of Snow White's wicked stepmother; Dumbledore warns Harry against the narcosis of narcissism by telling him that those who become addicted to seeing their deepest desires reflected in the mirror will lose touch with reality. Harry and various friends apprehensively venture into the Forbidden Forest, reminiscent of many scary folk tale forests, including the ones which hide the witch's cottage in Hansel and Gretel and the grandmother's cottage in Little Red Riding Hood. In his little cottage on the edge of the Forbidden Forest, the giant Hagrid, loyal friend and terrifying foe, recalls both friendly and frightening fairy tale woodsmen. An Alice in Wonderland *déjà vu* occurs down in the dungeon at Nearly Headless Nick's Deathday party, with its surreal admixture of the living, the dead, and the rotting cuisine (*CoS*, p. 94), and again when Harry, Hermione and Ron must become chess pieces in a life and death play-off (*PS*, p. 204).

Myth

Mythical tales are distinguished by belonging to a whole system of ancient hereditary stories, generated by a particular cultural group, which seek to explain the world through the actions of gods and supernatural beings (Abrams, 1999, p. 170). Like other literary genres, the form is not static; in assisting human beings to cope with the dynamic nature of existence, myths can be seen as works-in-progress. The forms and variations which cope best with changed social environments tend to survive and evolve. In addition, critics variously interpret the meanings, purposes and applications of myth according to their personal philosophies and the intellectual and socio-

economic currents of their times (Schafer, 2000, p. 128), giving rise to multiple and arbitrary readings. For instance, academic descendants of the classical age are likely to retain structuralist ideas of genius, essence and sacred insemination: 'Myth is the secret opening' declares Joseph Campbell (1949/1993, p. 3), 'through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation.'

Mythic references evoke stories of the divine, of explanations of human origins through the actions of the gods: for instance, the most powerful Greek god, Zeus, controlled the skies and was responsible for thunder, lightning and storms. Harry's forehead carries a scar in the shape of the lightning bolt – Zeus's sign of power and also a primal symbol of fear. Harry has survived his confrontation with Voldemort as an infant, and is thus marked by the scar as favour – the very powerful favour of his mother's love, credited with saving his life from Voldemort's attack. The lightning scar, as the mythic fear/favour insignia, establishes the series' fundamental plot – the battle between good and evil – and Harry's role as victim/hero who is destined to live his life according to the classical mythical pattern of quest, the defeat of evil and the restoration of order.

Many other characters resonate with mythical beings: Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, the self-obsessed Hogwarts teacher, corresponds to Narcissus who, falling in love with his own reflection and unable to tear himself away, dies of starvation. Both Hagrid and Madame Maxime represent the Titans, Zeus's tribe of enormous and exceptionally strong gods. Hermione is the granddaughter of Zeus and Leda, the swan, and was promised in marriage to two men – perhaps a hint of Hermione Granger's fluctuating relationships in the first five novels with both Harry and Ron; and Professor Quirrel, who hosts Voldemort in his own body, is akin to Janus, the double-faced Roman god.

Fluffy, the fearsome many-headed dog who must be sedated by music, reprises both Cerberus, the multi-headed dog who prevented the living from entering the underworld, and Argus, the monster of a hundred eyes who could only be subdued by music, while the Basilisk whom Harry must defeat in *Harry Potter and the chamber of*

secrets kills with its gaze, resembling the Gorgons, dragon-like creatures who turned humans to stone with their stare. Olympus was the home of the gods, originally on the top of Mt Olympus in Greece but later in the clouds above it, inspiring mortals to greater deeds. Similarly, in consonance with the mission of Hogwarts Academy and like the denizens of Olympus, the divine or mortal status of Hogwarts staff and alumni, such as Voldemort and Sybil Trelawney, is not always clear. Hades the Underworld, with its labyrinthine chambers, is reminiscent of the dark forbidding chambers and tunnels which appear beneath Hogwarts; while Hades, the eponymous ruler of the Underworld, who takes pity on Demeter and releases her daughter from the Underworld for six months of the year, may perhaps confer unsettling qualities of compassion on his mythic kin Voldemort as the *Harry Potter* series finalises.

Biblical allegory

The female saviour as biological or surrogate mother is a recognisable mythological archetype. Although she sometimes tries to destroy the child herself – for instance, Alcmena exposes Hercules out of fear of Zeus’s wife Hera – she is most often engaged in trying to save the child, usually from its father, grandfather or other powerful male figure (Grimes, 2002, p. 114). In reiterating that Harry’s mother Lily Potter (whose name gestures at both purity and the functional/aesthetic reformation of the earth) dies so that her son may have life, Rowling’s version allegorises biblical stories familiar as the Marian birth of Christ, and the death of Christ in expiation of the sins of the world. However, it is the maternal sacrifice – the Mary-as-Christ manoeuvre – for love of her child that confers on Harry his extraordinary resistance to Evil, personified in Voldemort.

The saviour theme underwrites the *Harry Potter* volumes, and it also intertwines with the theme of race prejudice (see Chapter Five). The fifth novel, *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix*, concludes with these two themes about to wage war as opposing forces. Rowling builds this grim scenario slowly but irresistibly throughout the series: for instance, at the end of the first novel Dumbledore tells Harry:

Your mother died to save you....to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever....

Voldemort... could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good. [Ellipses added] (*PS*, p. 216)

In the second volume, Harry repudiates prejudice, reminding Voldemort's younger cipher, Tom Riddle, of the power of his mother's sacrifice; and simultaneously reprising the story of the common-born carpenter:

But I know why you couldn't *kill* me. Because my mother died to save me. My common *Muggle-born* mother... (*CoS*, p. 233)

Rowling represents Riddle as an unbeliever who, to his subsequent cost, cominutes the power and significance of the maternal sacrifice (*CoS*, p. 233): 'Your mother died to save you. Yes, that's a powerful counter-charm. I can see now – there is nothing special about you, after all.'

In the third novel, Harry's relationship with his father is the greater focus. James's name has a Christian resonance: in Acts 12:1-2, King Herod orders St James, one of the first disciples of Jesus, executed by sword. Dumbledore refers to James when he tells Harry: 'You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble?' (*PoA*, p. 312). The admonition, however, also recalls prior references to Lily and allegorises the Christian theme of the god who can be called on in tribulation.

In the subsequent novel, Voldemort admits patricide, emerging as a Judas figure, while connecting his pogroms to race hate:

'You stand, Harry Potter, upon the remains of my late father,' he hissed softly. 'A Muggle and a fool... very like your dear mother. But they both had their uses, did they not? Your mother died to defend you as a child... and I killed my father, and see how useful he has proved himself, in death...' [Ellipses added] (*GoF*, p. 560)

Voldemort follows this speech by finally acknowledging that Lily Potter's sacrifice has conferred on Harry an unprecedented and apparently invincible resistance: it deflects the curse the Dark Lord sends to kill Harry, and causes Voldemort 'pain

beyond pain' while abruptly disembodimenting him. However, in parody of transubstantiation dogma, it is Harry's blood – rich with maternal protection –which resurrects Voldemort and reconfers human embodiment (*GoF*, p. 557). In the final pages of *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix* (pp. 743, 762) the power of love, conferred by his mother's sacrifice, is established as the force within Harry that will oppose the rise of terrorism in the penultimate novel, as Voldemort gathers his allies to war in his quest to gain control of the wizarding world. However, as the series' denouement approaches, the blood of the maternal sacrifice now runs in Voldemort's veins and what this will confer on Voldemort is yet to be seen.

At one level, the texts studiously avoid engaging the conventional Christian tradition of transcending the essentially sinful body, often personified in the female. On the contrary, they seem to desire redress against the Reformation's physical, liturgical, and conceptual minimisation of Mary as birthgiver in the central Christianising narrative of the birth of Christ (Miller-McLemore, 2003, p. 3). Lily's sacrifice links her to Ruddick's theory of maternal practice, in which the thinking embedded in that practice gives rise to concepts, cognitive capacities and ideals of virtue which embody anti-militarism (Ruddick, 2003, p. 4). Preserving a child's life is definitive of maternal practice and is directly opposed to militarism, even as it incorporates a life-serving concept of maternal battle, Ruddick asserts.

Some writers observe that the texts' representations of practices of the body, particularly the fact that many characters seem to be single and to have no readily discernible sexual orientation or practices, reveal gaps available to exploitation by novel genres facilitated by new technologies. Fan fiction writers make extensive use of the internet to share stories, from poems to novel-size, which 'write back' to the *Harry Potter* texts (VanderArk, Purdom, & Kerr, 2005, p. 261). A conservative estimate of fan fiction states that more than 25,000 'straight' stories are hosted on the internet, with an equivalent number in 'slash' fiction (fan fiction with gay themes) (MacDonald, 2006). Slash fiction features at least 12 further genres, including romance, hurt-comfort, death story and chainslash, which vary in content from gently erotic to extremely pornographic. Slash stories, apparently mostly written by young women, overwhelmingly feature male to male contact; stories featuring females are indicated by

the separate nomenclature of ‘femslash’ or ‘femmeslash’. Fanfiction, concludes Tosenberger (2005, p. 304), is by virtue of its existence subversive of dominant ideologies of text and authorship. However,

Within the boundaries of HP fanfiction, more subtle subversions are taking place – of literary genre, of the concept of pornography, of heteronormative sexuality, of the discourse of “children’s literature.” (Tosenberger, 2005, p. 304)

Legend

In contrast to the Marian theme, the militaristic legends of King Arthur haunt the pages of the *Harry Potter* series. As traditional stories containing at least some relationship to human beings who once lived and to actual events in which they were engaged, the enduring legends of King Arthur have endowed English literature with many characters, settings, plots and motifs. One of the most durable plot elements is King Arthur’s release of the sword Excalibur from the stone in which it was immoveably lodged. Harry’s reprise of this feat is the magical manifestation of Godric Gryffindor’s sword in the Sorting Hat, followed by Harry wresting it from the hat and plunging it into the mouth of the Basilisk (*CoS*, p. 236). The Basilisk itself is reminiscent of Beowulf’s terrible opponent Grendel, while Dumbledore as the powerful and venerated elder wizard reprises Arthur’s beloved mentor, the wise old magician Merlin. Like Arthur, Harry is required to undergo a number of quests, and many tests of mental, physical and moral fibre, while Hogwarts, as a utopian other world, resonates with Arthur’s Camelot or Kublai Khan’s Xanadu.

Fantasy

That many adults were initially surprised by the mass response to *Harry Potter* indicates the degree to which many may have underestimated the extreme nature and radical depth of change for which the terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘poststructural’ may be incomplete descriptors. The age of the real and the attraction to fantasy seem to have grown out of each other, with the development of the fantasy genre paralleling the growth of the industrial/technological revolution in the West. After several hundred years of Enlightenment reason, fantasy texts now thrive inexhaustibly through media such as electronic games, video, film, television, drama, and print literature.

Older fantasy texts, such as C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* series and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the rings* trilogy, reactivated in the public mind by its immensely successful film versions, continue to attract enormous readerships while newer productions, such as Philip Pullman's trilogy *His dark materials* and Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, flourish alongside the science fiction and fantasy works of Ursula Le Guin. Since the startling success of the *Harry Potter* series, critics and commentators continue to raise the perennial question: what are the powers at work in the books young people are reading? The attractions of fantasy are clearly implicated.

For many critics, the main function of fantasy is escape: 'With its appeal to the senses,' Bucher and Manning (2000, p. 136) remark,

fantasy may provide adolescents with a feeling of overcoming the odds and being triumphant at a time when their own lives are often a series of "battles" that they lose or never even get to fight.

Brottman and Sterrit (2001, pp. B16-B17) agree, adding that both the residual impact of childhood magical thinking and the power of language to imply knowledge of worlds beyond the senses (the concept of 'inner beauty', for instance) makes fantasy literature appeal to the strong intuition that all that surrounds us is not all there is.

Conventionally, the *Harry Potter* series participates in the long and ongoing tradition of fantasy stories which present imagined realities that significantly diverge in nature and function from the world as we know it (Abrams, 1999, pp. 278-279). The genre is characterised by a number of conventions: primarily, a fantasy world built on a reliable, internally consistent ontological framework, including history, rules and ways of life clearly differentiated from 'real life', along with a level of intimately knowledgeable description which constructs that world as convincingly credible; and strict rules which govern and constrain the fantastic or magical within the narrative. Rowling has described her process in this respect:

I spent a lot of time inventing the rules for the magical world so that I knew the limits of magic. Then I had to invent the different ways wizards could accomplish certain things. Some of the magic in the books is based on what

people used to believe really worked, but most of it is my invention. (Quick Quotes Quill, 1999a)

Further conventions include an imaginative originality which distinguishes narrative elements, such as plot, setting and characterisation; a grounding of the narrative in realism and in a conventional view of human nature; and the thematisation of subject matter – for instance, the Manichean struggle between good and evil. As Abrams (1999, pp. 327-328) notes, modern literary fantasies developed in parallel with literary utopias, signifying exaggerated versions of political and social life presented in idealised or satirised form; for instance, Plato's *Republic* was written in the latter part of the fourth century BC as a political blueprint for Commonwealth, and is the earliest known literary version of a utopia.

Fantasy frequently uses as its setting another planet, another time on Earth, or an imagined parallel world, governed by its own consistent internal logic. In the *Harry Potter* series, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is a clearly evoked parallel world of unmoored shifting staircases, unreliable walls, secret chambers, starry ceilings, and animated portraiture which operates its own frequently feisty subculture. The school setting is given utopian weight by its contrasting 'real world' dystopia ('difficult' or 'bad' world), the pedestrian suburban household at Privet Drive, Little Whinging, from which the series' hero Harry, in a classical hero figure pattern, departs and to which he returns annually throughout his education at Hogwarts.

Among many major modern fantasy stories which could justly claim to be antecedents of the *Harry Potter* series are J. R. R. Tolkien's *The lord of the rings* (1966), C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* series (1951-1956), and Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* quartet (1979-1992). In addition, Rowling (Scholastic, 2000, February 3) states that her favourite childhood authors were the prolific fantasy/adventure writers Paul Gallico, who wrote the series *The adventures of Jean-Pierre*; E. Nesbitt, whose prolific output includes *The enchanted castle* (1907), *The phoenix and the carpet* (1904), *Five children and it* (1902), and *The wouldbegoods* (1901); and Elizabeth Goudge, whose book *The little white horse* (1946) was a favourite when Rowling was about eight (Quick Quotes

Quill, 1999a). (*The little white horse* is not everyone's favourite; Terri Schmitz, in a 2002 review of reissued books for Horn Book Magazine, was scathing that Rowling's endorsement had revived the book from 'well-deserved oblivion', describing it as 'tripe').

Tolkien's influence

For Tolkien (1964, p. 16), whose work is widely credited with inaugurating the modern fantasy (Attebery, 1992), fairy stories comprise an over-arching genre of which fantasy is one of the possible sub-genres; however, he also uses the terms interchangeably. In Tolkien's view, fairy stories deal with the realm of *Faërie* – a word most closely translating as 'magic', but a moody, mysterious and powerful magic which Tolkien insists should never be made fun of, even in a satirical narrative. Defined by the way it touches on or uses *faërie*, the fairy story's sub-genres also include satire, adventure and the didactic tale.

As to origins: 'The history of fairy stories is probably more complex than the physical history of the human race, and as complex as the history of human language,' states Tolkien (1964, p. 24), and he notes the contributions of artistic invention, inheritance (borrowing in time from previous narratives) and diffusion (borrowing in space from contiguous stories) to the development of the fairy story. The latter two, diffusion and inheritance, would now be considered as elements of intertextuality. Tolkien's thinking was in tune with contemporary research that shows the critical importance of intellectual demand in the classroom (see Chapter Six):

[I]t may be better for [children] to read some things, especially fairy-stories, that are beyond their measure rather than short of it. Their books like their clothes should allow for growth, and their books at any rate should encourage it. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 43)

In addition, Tolkien presages the trials of Harry Potter in his assumption of the didactic role of fantasy:

[I]t is one of the lessons of fairy-stories (if we can speak of the lessons of things that do not lecture) that on callow, lumpish, and selfish youth peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death can bestow dignity, and even sometimes wisdom. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 42)

Such qualities are hardly the province of youth alone; Tolkien's construction of the child is probably benign for the times, but bears the palimpsest of the Christian notion of original sin. In fact, Tolkien's work is suffused with his Christian beliefs; for him, the writer is a subcreator to the 'Maker' from whose works of creation the writer results. Fantasy, he allows, can be put to evil uses; but 'of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true?' he muses (Tolkien, 1964, p. 50). Tolkien's god is clearly of the transcendental kind.

Fantasy's task, for Tolkien (1964, p. 44), is to prepare a fully imagined secondary world which, despite its 'arresting strangeness', credibly sustains secondary belief, in contradistinction to the primary ('real') world and in freedom from the 'domination of observed "fact"', or primary belief. Tolkien wrote at a time when Enlightenment reason remained a dominant Western ideology, despite an epoch of genocidal warfare between the nations of the Enlightenment, and when fantasy was disparaged as allied to dreaming or mental illness; that is, outside and opposed to the rational. Tolkien (1964, p. 50), however, recoups power for his chosen form by reinserting it within the Enlightenment paradigm and central to it:

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make.

This view is akin to Albert Einstein's response to a mother's inquiry about what books her son should read so as to grow up to become a scientist. 'Fairy tales!' Einstein is reputed to have said; and when pressed to be more definitive: 'More fairy tales'; and then, 'Even more fairy tales!' (Film Victoria, 2004). Both men participated deeply in 20th century warfare, Tolkien as a front-line soldier in the First World War, Einstein as

scientific parent to nuclear weapons, and both as respondents to the tensions of the Cold War arms race of 1947 to 1991.

For Tolkien (1964, p. 50), fantasy has three main functions: recovery, escape and consolation. Recovery corresponds to the concept of *Ostranenie*, used by the Russian formalists to indicate radical defamiliarisation with the ordinary, mundane and familiar, also referred to by Tolkien as ‘arresting strangeness’:

Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 53)

The second function, escapism, Tolkien also defended vigorously against the sneers of compulsory reality. A Romantic in the sense of resenting elements of the Machine Age, he presented escapism as necessary, noble and sensible and allied it to revolt, revolution and heroism:

There are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 58)

To his list of appropriate escapisms, Tolkien (1964, pp. 58-59) adds the atavistic longing to visit the deep sea, free as a fish; the similar yearning to fly like a bird; the desire to converse with other living things, a desire he describes as ‘ancient as the Fall’ and which underlies the representation in narrative of the magical comprehension of the speech of animals. Tolkien, predicting Rowling’s Dark Lord, casts the escape from death as the oldest and deepest desire, adding that fantasies are especially likely to teach the burden of immortality, or the kind of ‘endless serial living’ to which an ignoble fugitive, rather than the heroic escapist, is prone to fly:

Fairy-stories are made by men not by fairies. The human stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 59)

Tolkien's final and highest function, consolation, is presented as a metaphor for end-time resurrection; the sudden joyous turn, the happy ending – which Tolkien dubs the 'eucatastrophe' – stands for the (Islamo-Judaeo-)Christian promise of an afterlife. All complete fairy-stories must have a happy ending, Tolkien asserts:

The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. (Tolkien, 1964, p. 63)

Tolkien's doctrine of transcendence tends to come under pressure from later, more secular fantasy writers; for instance Philip Pullman relates religion to totalitarian authority and opposes it to a nascent idea of freedom. In Pullman's view, human beings must make a republic of heaven on earth:

(Tolkien) saw this world, this physical universe as a fallen state created no doubt by God but marked and weakened and spoiled by sin and his imagined world was so much more truthful and full of beauty and what have you.... The physical world is our home, this is where we live, we're not creatures from somewhere else or in exile... (W)e have to make our homes here and understand that we are physical too, we are material creatures, we are born and we will die. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2002, March 24)

The rise of modern fantasy

Eilers (2000), in a structuralist genealogy, places the rise of modern fantasy well before Tolkien in drawing a direct developmental relationship between traditional oral folk tales and fairy tales, the Romantic revolution and the development of literary realism. In doing so, she successfully debunks a common premise for the rise of modern fantasy – the view that the genre developed when people began to regard the 'extranatural'¹¹ as 'unreal', and therefore needed to sequester a corresponding fictional

¹¹ Eilers (2000) uses the term 'extranatural' to indicate a force operating outside known physical processes in preference to the more usual term 'supernatural' which, she alleges, carries religious connotations. 'Supernatural' implies that the force is operating above known physical processes and would provoke characters to respond with awe or amazement; neither feature is universally characteristic of modern fantasy, she objects. I have reverted to the use of 'supernatural', however, because the term is commonly used by a broad range of literary critics who appear not to utilise Eilers' distinction.

form as 'unreal'. Eilers (pp. 320-321) concludes in contrast that modern fantasy literature emerged in the late 18th and mid-19th centuries as a genre distinct to traditional fantasy when authors started to utilise the techniques of literary realism to compose stories about the supernatural. Theorising (against O'Toole, 2001) that readers since the 18th century probably have believed less in the supernatural and the magical than their forebears, Eilers nevertheless concludes that it was not scepticism of itself, but the hybridity of Romanticism and literary realism that generated the modern fantasy genre.

Eilers (2000, p. 319) agrees that the traditional vehicle for the supernatural had been fairy tales, deriving from oral folk tales of the supernatural. She also agrees that in the mid to late-17th century the oral stories, held as cultural commons, began to develop as a literary form in French aristocratic salons, and were published with enormous success in French and translations by entrepreneurs such as Madame d'Aulnoy and Charles Perrault. According to Eilers (2000, p. 321), the Romantic revolution assisted the development of the modern fantasy genre because it repudiated the dominant view that the material realm was the only basis for reality, and simultaneously encouraged the idea of accessing an expanded reality through the exploration of dreams, the mystical and the supernatural.

Concurring with this view Nikolajeva (1988, pp. 11-13), however, points out an essential distinction between fairy tales and fantasy: fairy tales occur within one magical world, where magic is natural, an unquestioned given, and the protagonist is not required to wonder. On the other hand, characters in a modern fantasy exist in two or more worlds, a real or primary world and a magic or secondary world in which they experience events which break natural laws, cause a sense of wonder, and cannot be explained either rationally or scientifically.

Resonant with today's relationships between the *Harry Potter* series, the Right, and reductionist/rationalist/modernist versus critical/postmodernist pedagogies, the rapturous reception of fairy stories was by no means universal: Locke, Rousseau and the Earl of Chesterfield adamantly opposed them; Coleridge, Lamb and Wordsworth extolled them as beneficial for children. In fact, fairy tales were rarely written

specifically for children (Nikolajeva, 1988, p. 15); later variants in which children are the main protagonists probably originated from transformations of adult protagonists. Fantasy for children begins when a child becomes the main character, which Nikolajeva traces to E. T. A Hoffmann's 1816 publication *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (The nutcracker and the mouseking).

The earliest modern fantasy writers, holds Eilers (2000, p. 323), emerged in the 1840s and wrote their tales in part because they held positive views of fairy tales and imaginative literature. Charles Dickens for instance, whose narrative *A Christmas carol* was published in 1843, promoted fairy tales as a necessary emolument against the prevailing machine age, alleging that the tales cultivated the imagination and promoted kindness and compassion. In concert with the familiar literary power struggle waged over supposed control of the minds of children by adults, however, the increasing popularity of the genre drew writers who produced moralising and didactic texts; nevertheless, the early modern fantasy writers such as Dickens, Sara Coleridge (*Phantasmion*, 1837), and William Thackeray (*The rose and the ring*, 1855) rejected overt didacticism, often heatedly. 'What distinguishes the earliest modern fantasies from their didactic brethren,' states Eilers (2000, p. 327),

is the fact that they are not limited to their moral agenda. Where the didactic fantasists single-mindedly propounded their particular dictums, the modern fantasists aimed to create complex characters and situations that, among other things, sometimes demonstrated the importance of certain moral principles. Indeed, the modern fantasies did not always even have a clearly established moral premise.

Like the first novelists, the first modern fantasy writers eschewed conventional plots. Ordinarily, such plots were built on the highly specific generic demands of traditional stories in which characters, plots and settings conformed to universal stereotypes drawn from history, legends, myths and folklore. The rise of literary realism – the convincing illusion of the real – meant that early modern fantasy writers were able to utilise the narrative conventions of realism to convince readers that their stories genuinely depicted human experience (Eilers, p. 335). New fantasy writers favoured original plots, individualised characters described in detail, a preference for realistic, internally consistent, versions of time and place, and – rather than the elegant,

figurative prose of times past – a largely referential, denotative prose style (Eilers, 2000, p. 329).

Nikolajeva (1988, pp. 15-16), taking a similar structuralist approach to Eilers, credits John Ruskin with crucially influencing the development of English fantasy through marking a retold fairy story, *The king of the golden river* (1851), with his inimitable authorial style. According to Nikolajeva, Ruskin profoundly influenced George MacDonald (*Phantastes*, 1858, *The light princess*, 1867, *At the back of the north wind* and *The princess and the goblin*, 1871, and *Lilith*, 1895) to whom Tolkien, Kenneth Grahame, C. S. Lewis and Edith Nesbit have all acknowledged their indebtedness, and whose works reveal their intertextual relationships to MacDonald. In her turn, Rowling has acknowledged her own debt to Edith Nesbit, as noted previously.

Nikolajeva considers Nesbit a pioneer contributor to children's literature, with most subsequent authors of fantasy producing at least some traces of her influence. Apart from rejecting Victorian didacticism, adopting realistic spoken language forms, replacing simplistically angelic child characters with the ambiguous types more characteristic of full subjectivity, and outing children's fiction from the nursery into the streets and countryside, Nesbit compiled a new kind of fantasy, according to Nikolajeva (1988, p. 16). Her cornerstone contribution was the clash between the magical and the ordinary when magic is introduced into everyday, realistically depicted, life; a contribution, states Nikolajeva, which has become a key notion of modern fantasy.

Important in the *Harry Potter* novels, this particular notion becomes a major vehicle for humour, the medium of Harry Potter's innocent revenges against his archetypal neo-conservative family, the foundational assurance of Harry's character as untutored 'good' in opposition to evil, and the harbinger of Harry's education in the use and refinement of magical powers, particularly in the early novels of the series. For instance, Harry's hair grows back to its familiar haphazard crop overnight after Aunt Petunia almost shaves it off; a repulsive cast-off jumper of Dudley's shrinks to doll size at the same rate as Aunt Petunia tries to force it over Harry's head; and Harry, harassed by Dudley's gang, suddenly finds himself (to his astonishment and the headmistress's

outrage) on the roof of the school kitchens (*PS*, pp. 23-26). Finally, the terrified Dudley is snapped at by a boa constrictor escaping from its cage at the zoo after the snake and an astounded Harry have conversed with complete linguistic sympathy.

Nikolajeva lays down further grounds for the emergence of the *Harry Potter* series by noting that while authors such as C. S. Lewis, Philippa Pearce, Lucy M. Boston, Mary Norton and Alan Garner, whom she places in the mid-20th century ‘Golden Age of British fantasy’ are indebted to Nesbit, their fantasies nevertheless achieve greater sophistication. To explain this, Nikolajeva (1988, p. 17; Nikolajeva, 1996, p. 75; see also Chapters Three and Six) alludes to the wider cultural context in which such fantasies have emerged and in which readers read: development of science and technology, including the theory of relativity, atomic energy and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, space exploration, mathematical and geometrical concepts such as chaos and fractal theories, a pervasive science fiction culture in literature and film, and computer and role-playing games. All of these may engender the capacity to accept, enjoy and perhaps demand the alternative worlds, non-linear time, extra-sensory perception and supernatural events characteristic of modern fantasy.

Children’s fantasy literature, then, has become more complex and sophisticated; nevertheless, the genre has maintained a relatively rigid canonicity within which evolution occurs. For instance, Nikolajeva (1988, pp. 113-114) uses the notion of the fantaseme – an abstract notion which assumes a concrete form in any particular text, acting as a narrative device to introduce magic around events, characters, objects and their interactions. Authors form fantasemes in intertextual dialogue, by transforming magic elements from myth and folklore, applying motifs and patterns from contiguous genres such as science fiction, and from other mainstream literature, to achieve modern currency. The dominant fantaseme is the secondary world, which introduces enormous variety to a text depending on whether it is closed or available to the primary world, or exists in an implied context. In the *Harry Potter* series, the wizarding secondary world’s interaction with the primary Muggle world often creates intense amusement. For instance, Uncle Vernon simply cannot escape the remorseless Hagrid and his outraged reprimands, despite sequestering his family on a wild and remote island (*PS*, pp. 39-48); and Fudge’s political discomforts create an enjoyable doppelganger effect as

the British Prime Minister contemplates his own potential for political nightmares during their interview (*HBP*, pp. 7-24).

The secondary world occurs with other fantasemes (Nikolajeva, 1988, pp. 114-119), such as secondary time – the interaction between mythic and modern conceptions of time; the passage, with elements such as the door, the tunnel or cave, and the object from a magical helper which itself often has mythic or folklore origins as well; and the impact of magic itself, through the paradoxical interactions of secondary and primary chronotopes (particular versions of space-time characteristics). Harry encounters such dislocations through Hermione's use of the Time-turner, in which he experiences being in separate places at the same time (*PoA*, p. 290).

As the genre becomes more sophisticated, each of these fantasemes evolve: the secondary world develops elusive boundaries; it becomes more ambivalent; mythic and folkloric prototypes become less traceable. The time fantaseme begins to raise psychological and existential problems while the passage fantasemes deal with symbolic or metaphorical doors. In characteristic postmodernist dissolution, uncertainty, instability, hesitation and duality replace the certainties of old, such as the happy ending. Harry will face some of these problems in the final novel, when he will have to deal with the symbolic nature of Voldemort's Horcruxes, each containing a seventh of his soul, and the way in which the Horcruxes relate (or not) to linear time so that they can be dealt with in an appropriate order.

Nikolajeva (1988, pp. 114-119) uses Diana Wynne Jones's *Archer's goon* (1984) to mark the paradigm shift between certainty and uncertainty. As mentioned previously, Howard, the protagonist, chases the evil forces that threaten his town; but quite late in the book, both Howard and the reader begin to understand that Howard himself appears to be the plotting evil magician. In a marked escalation of the sinister, this destroys the boundary between secondary and primary chronotope, and also destroys Howard's identity. The Manichean distinction between good and evil is questioned, forcing a poststructural rather than modernist reappraisal of identity. Through such paradigmatic shifts, the genre takes the power to deal with psychological,

ethical and existential questions, using the secondary chronotype to foreground character and shape identity. By such means, Nikolajeva concludes, the fantasy has grown in sophistication to incorporate the realistic psychological novel within its own genre.

The foregoing provides some grounds for concluding that fantasy may act as the new reality genre for young people today. Modern fantasy in its many modes is massively, probably incalculably, popular; its generic formations invoke classical and contemporary ideologies of heroism; it marries techniques of narrative realism to ontologically consistent fantasy worlds; it speaks of the magical transcendence of the body where contemporary science speaks of the cyborg (see Chapters Three and Five); in a world where social contact may occur at a distance, less dependent on the material than the cybereal, the art-life mimesis is sometimes barely discernible; and fantasy thus engages with the contemporary difficulty of telling life and art apart, as Gelder suggests.

Gelder (2003, p. 21) traces the literary fantasies which prefigure the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center buildings: H. G. Wells, in *War in the air* (1907), envisaging the fire-storming of lower Manhattan by Zeppelins; Melville's Ahab pursuing the whale with a similar obsessive focus to that of the USA pursuing terrorists; and Mike Davis's *City of quartz* (1991), in which white rich Americans in Los Angeles are depicted as creating compounds or strongholds to guard their privileges from immigrants, Hispanics, African-Americans and the urban poor in a parodic preplay of the national border paranoia post-September 11. Davis is led to propose a much closer association between reality and fantasy than many critics have previously conceded:

(T)he attacks on New York and Washington DC were organised as epic horror cinema with meticulous attention to *mise en scene*. Indeed, the hijacked planes were aimed to impact precisely at the vulnerable border between fantasy and reality. (Davis, 2001, p. 34)

What marks the epic fantasy genre, according to Gelder (2003, p. 24) is not only its utopian nostalgia for safe end-points and its propensity to chart permeable borders of geography and identity with ‘almost masochistic intensity’, but also its frequent refusal to reach resolution. Modern series, such as Robert Jordan’s currently 12-volume *Wheel of time*, are noted for the tendency to continue without resolution – to enter into the endless assault on the ‘evil Other’ as war without end, or as a permanent state of emergency. It is marked by a reliance on a Manichean conception of evil of the kind on which Bush and the ‘coalition of the willing’ have relied to differentiate the ‘axis of evil’ (Islamic States) from Western liberal democracy. As Gelder sees it,

Modern epic fantasy is a literary form of fundamentalism that troubles secular ideals. But it also troubles the kind of political fundamentalism that relies on Manichean binaries of good and evil. (Gelder, 2003, p. 126)

There is a utopian nostalgia within the *Harry Potter* series. Harry’s job, like many folk, fairy tale, mythical, legendary and fantasy heroes, is clearly to deliver his community from the evil which, in Manichean tradition, marks him as good. Rowling insists that Harry Potter’s adventures will end with volume seven, signifying that Harry is not embarking on a war without end, even though, through Voldemort’s less-than-human presences and ominous absences, evil is powerful and immanent in the *Harry Potter* series. Nevertheless, in the next chapter, I investigate the secular ideals by which Dumbledore cannily positions Harry as warrior, while exposing the political fundamentalism that undermines claims Dumbledore might make to critical pedagogy. In fact, the impact of Rowling’s generic choices is towards this end: the many charms and complexity of the written stories which take so much advantage of the historical traditions of narrative to apparently renew the fantasy form nevertheless rely on and reproduce deeply conservative world views: Harry is the folk tale hero whose efforts lead not to radical social change, but to the installation of his side in the places of power vacated by the evil Others. Harry’s world remains without a horizon which takes into account the contemporary conditions of intensified globalisation in a way which might encourage a less Manichean world view. By that means, the production of the child within the text, and the way it speaks to the child without the text, confirms the child’s powerlessness in meeting the great and novel challenges of a contemporary life.

In the next chapter, I consider some aspects of globalisation which may impact on school literacy practices, and the ways in which young people may thereby be positioned to read Harry Potter.

CHAPTER 3

Globalisation, boys, (girls), and literacy

(W)e cannot afford to waste the energy and potential idealism of the young. There is no question that listlessness, ennui, and even violence in school are related to the fact that students have no useful role to play in society. The strict application of nurturing and protective attitudes toward children has created a paradoxical situation in which protection has come to mean excluding the young from meaningful involvement in their own communities. (Postman, 1995, pp. 101-102)

You may give them your love but not your thoughts
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies, but not their souls
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow
That you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

This chapter draws on information and observations about the power flows of globalisation to explore literacy and literacy pedagogy in the lives of students and teachers. In doing so, it dwells on some factors associated with differential literacy acquisition, such as disengagement from school. I take the perspective that globalisation and school literacy practices participate in a mutually shaping field, and ponder how both Harry and his readers may be prepared for the 21st century by their schooling. This topic will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six, ‘The literacy wars’.

New worlds and new young

The 20th century was marked by exponentially rapid technological, cultural and social change, forcing separation along many axes, both global and local, and

exacerbating a divide between succeeding generations. Under the impact of globalising pressures, the idealised notion of smooth, predictable, linear transitions between childhood, adolescence, adulthood and work, alluding to the persistence of a Rousseauian ideology of idealised childhood historically under intermittent revision, has again been thrown into question, along with contemporary conventional notions of each of these categories. In these contexts, the recuperative and recursive movements of the *Harry Potter* texts speak to their massive attraction for young people, who are positioned in demanding relation to the shaping pressures of globalisation and the moulding forces expressed in society's hopes and fears for the future, including expectations of the kinds of people the young will become.

In the competitive, individualistic environments favoured by neo-capitalism, young people – particularly those advantaged by higher socio-economic status – are frequently positioned as wholehearted participants in the technological, cultural and social revolutions associated with questions of generational boundary change. In this respect, many young people, born, unlike their elders, to the screen rather than to print, are seen as leading in the development of new and evolving subjectivities as a result of their engagement and competencies with dynamic information and communication technologies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2004; Levin & Arafah, 2002; Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c; The New Media Consortium, 2005; Trent & Slade, 2001). Postman's comment above captures some of the threads of these changes, including a position, commonly expressed, which implicates parents and teachers together in what can be seen as outbreaks of responsibility attribution. While Postman goes on to envisage the energy of students being exploited for benign, constructive and humane social reconstruction, outbreaks of blame unleavened by utopian correctives may nevertheless sap energy and direction and distract from the accurate diagnosis of the multitude of mutually shaping effects exerted between globalisation and the young.

Indeed, both missed diagnoses and misdiagnoses appear closely associated with intensified concerns about adolescent boys in particular, and their acquisition of literacies. These intermittent eruptions are defined by Lumby (2001b, p. 219) as recurrent outbreaks of heightened public response to issues which symbolise the destabilisation of age as a crucial social and cultural marker. Lumby clearly links

young people and adults in the millennial reconfigurations of society and culture by asserting that ‘generation panic’ marks a critical temporal node for ‘major shifts in the discursive boundaries which organise the relationship between age, knowledge and cultural power’ (Lumby, p. 219). The *Harry Potter* novels, which have stimulated generation panics from, in particular, the religious right in the United States, but also increasingly because of cross-generational and cross-cultural euphoria (‘fandom’), can be seen as situated at the juncture of reconfigurations of relationships of age, knowledge and cultural power, with the potential to speak to reformist literacy pedagogies.

The recursive, conservative mobility of the *Harry Potter* series provides a convenient background against which to consider the lived experience of Harry’s readers. As suggested by McLaren & Gutierrez (1998, p. 316), the subjugated perspective – represented here by the young – its social construction and its relationships to larger forces such as globalisation, offers a means of critiquing pedagogical reform efforts.

Defining globalisation

Anthony Giddens (1999) noted that the term ‘globalisation’ was rarely used either academically or ordinarily prior to the last decade of the 20th century, when it became ubiquitous. Ubiquity developed in three phases: the first phase questioned the existence of such a phenomenon; the second phase accepted its existence and questioned its consequences; and the third phase distinguished globalisation’s negative consequences and theorised responses to them (Rantanen, 2005, p. 4). Broadly, globalisation is commonly characterised as political, technological, economic and cultural, exerting forces vertically, horizontally and laterally. The associated quaquaversal instability creates contradictory and oppositional pressures, persistently and differently modifying established fields of social, political and cultural power (Anthony Giddens, 1999; Lull, 2000). A global order is held to emerge through these processes, however anarchically and haphazardly. Institutions like the nation, the family and work have retained their familiar facades and carry the same names, but internally all is flux. ‘Many of us,’ Giddens (1999) consoles,

feel in the grip of forces over which we have no control.... The powerlessness we experience is not a sign of personal failings, but reflects the incapacities of our institutions. We need to reconstruct those we have, or create new ones, in ways appropriate to the global age. [Ellipses added]

Both heterogenising and homogenising effects are canvassed. Giddens' definition conveys a sense of the former, while Thompson's definition favours order. According to Thompson (1995, p. 150), globalisation concerns activities which take place in a global, or nearly global arena; such activities are organised, planned or co-ordinated on a global scale; and the degree of reciprocity and interdependency generated by them has mutually shaping effects on localised activities in different parts of the world. Further, Thompson elucidates the socially distancing effects of developing electronic technologies of communication:

The development of new media and communications does not consist simply in the establishment of new networks for the transmission of information between individuals whose basic social relationship remains intact. Rather, the development of media and communications creates *new* forms of action and interaction and new kinds of social relationships – forms that are different from the kind of face-to-face interaction which has prevailed for most of human history. (Thompson, 1995, p. 81)

As Rantanen (2005, pp. 9-10) notes, Thompson (1995, p. 87) points to an important social consequence of globalisation: the development of a 'mass experienced monological quasi-interaction', a qualitative change in human relationships by which face to face interaction is displaced by social relations at a distance within essentially one-way flows of information.

Bauman addresses social effects with characteristic passion, confronting the negative impacts of globalisation in relation to class, race and social justice. In Bauman's view, mobility – of business, trade, finance, information and bodies – becomes a primary marker of status in late-modern, postmodern culture, and is the main factor by which populations are stratified. 'What appears as globalization for some means localization for others; signalling a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate,' Bauman (1998, p. 2) declares.

In a further bid, Kenway, Bullen and Robb (2002, p. 3) draw on Beck's three distinctions of globalisation: globalism, globality and globalising processes. Globalism, they state, refers to that ideology which presents neo-liberal economic logic as inevitable. Associated with transnational corporate capitalism, this ideology is seen to have disarmed, at least temporarily, the nation state and organised labour. Workforce characteristics generated by the practices of globalism include the occurrence of small numbers of highly skilled and professionalised élites alongside growing numbers of casual, low-paid and job-insecure workers. The tendency exists in the huge global print publishing industry, where certain elements of the production of a book, such as proofreading, editing and indexing, are commonly outsourced under contractual agreements of variable value.

The second concept, globality, refers to global social relations which occur outside the integrative or determinative role of the nation state, and may include global media, labour markets and political activism. The practices of globality include transnational, non-local multiplicities – social circles (such as family genealogy researchers), communication networks (such as the Internet, the world wide web, and the various *Harry Potter* fandom websites), market relations (such as eBay and Amazon.com), and lifestyles (antique furniture collectors, or, in recognition of the underside of web democracy, paedophilia networks).

The third concept, globalising processes, refers to the processes by which sovereign nation states are traversed by transnational actors, various in power, identities, orientations and networks, which create transnational social links and alter and revalue the local (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2002, p. 6). In this respect, Giddens (2002) notes the thousand-fold increase in the numbers of non-government organisations, many of which are global in reach, from a few hundred in the 1980s to about 30,000 at the turn of the 20th century. Transnationals include trade and commerce-based supranationals like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as socially-oriented groups such as Education International, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Transnational actors may promote

third or hybrid cultures, including commerce-education partnerships inside schools which impact directly on curriculum issues (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2002).

Among the most important transnational actors in relation to young people are the global culture industries. Kenway, Bullen and Robb (2002) state that the culture industries are 'instrumental in the global circulation of culture, information, images and desires and in the overall production of consumer society'. In the process, they tend to bleach knowledge of substance:

Instead of rendering knowledge a complex and reflexive pleasure, the danger is that [global culture industries] may well reduce it to mere sensation, a consumer item. What this does is assist the shift from a society of producers of knowledge and innovation to one of consumers.... They are connected with the 'new economy', not a new society.... They reflect the hegemony of globalism over globality. (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2002)

The global corporate culture industries, they assert, target the young, teaching consumption as satisfaction, and promoting consumption, identity and pleasure as self-identical.

Educators have designated such activities by the terms 'corporate curriculum' and 'corporate pedagogy', and have reason to resent their resource advantages. For example, USA corporations spent about \$600 million marketing to young people in 1989; ten years later, they spent about 20 times that much (Quart, 2003, p. 65). The success of corporate pedagogy can be gauged by the outcomes; in 2000 alone, 31 per cent of USA teenagers spent more than \$155 billion annually on leisure expenses (Quart, p. xxvi). Descriptions of the global corporate curriculum richly evoke responses to the *Harry Potter* texts; the corporate curriculum is about

sensation; it is textually rich, entertaining and engaging, and is thus consumed hungrily and repeatedly by the young. Further, it has become young people's yardstick against which they judge and find wanting formal school curricula. (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2002)

In fact, Marc Prensky (2002b) suggests that a generation raised on just one particular product of global corporate culture industries, the modern complex computer game, is likely to clamour for the integration of fun and learning in the classroom, pressuring pedagogy to incorporate into its practices the gameplay techniques by which game designers keep players engaged and motivated. The very rapidity with which Harry and his friends transform elements of the world at the ends of their wands metaphorises computer game technology.

Globalisation and boys (and girls)

The comparison with global corporate curricula may or may not be among the reasons why young people, in particular boys, judge school as boring; but the finding that many boys are bored at school emerges consistently from research in Australia. Even though many boys traverse orthodox secondary education without unduly troubling themselves or their institutions, teachers express concern over particular groups of boys for whom the major relationship with school is alienation, often associated with disengagement, early leaving and poorer literacy skills (C. Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000). A species of human capital theory, the discourse of boys' performance at school is infused with anxieties about human capital issues and national economic performance in relation to economic globalisation.

Both the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2002, p. 96) and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (Penman, 2004), attest that the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy are the most reliable indicators of longer term educational, personal and economic wellbeing. By the time students are 14,

the levels of literacy and numeracy they have achieved are critical determinants of what they go on to do. If they have achieved high levels of literacy and numeracy, they are more likely to continue at school, enter university, and go on to high-status, well-paid jobs. (Penman, 2004, p. 1)

Within education, literacy functions as a key indicator of educational attainment, along with school retention, subject results in years 10 and 12, suspensions and expulsions, and admissions to higher education (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002, p. xvi). Using simple comparisons across these measures, boys as a group have consistently poorer outcomes than girls, a pattern reflected in most other countries belonging to the OECD.

Australian studies appear to confirm that boys' literacy skills have declined over time, while girls' skills have remained relatively stable (Cortis & Newmarch, 2000, p. 8); although from a UK perspective, Barrs (2000, p. 287) argues that girls are doing better within the system, rather than that boys are doing less well. Boys in Trent and Slade's 2001 Australian study also assert that the biggest problem they faced in attempting to fulfil their learning needs was a lack of 'good' teachers. 'Good' teachers were defined in the boys' responses as persons able and willing to establish relationships of mutual respect and friendship with students. However, Trent and Slade extend this finding to draw a clear relationship between boys' disaffection with school and the larger social and cultural processes of globalisation. Their description could be applied to a Hogwarts stripped of Harry's enlivening presence:

For most boys, school is focused on preserving the status-quo, which makes it culturally out of date and unable to respond to change. It remains detached from the real world, distant from the rest of their lives, and neither convincingly forward looking, nor plausibly concerned with the need to prepare them for a place within the emerging society. (Trent & Slade, 2001, p. x)

To become successfully engaged with school, boys appear to require a more supportive school and classroom environment (Fullarton, 2002). This may align with a profile of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities in which girls may feel quarantined from some boys' bullying and belittling behaviours in single-sex classrooms, while boys are more likely to prefer mixed-sex classes (Martino & Meyenn, 2002, pp. 305-307). In other words, one of the adaptive ways in which boys may go about providing supportive environments for themselves in the context of unchallenged hegemonic heterosexual masculinities is to effectively cannibalise girls' self-esteem to build their own; in the absence of girls, they are likely to adapt existing gender regimes to generate

an outsiders group of ‘not real boys’ to become the subjects of their harassment (Martino & Meyenn, p. 307).

Girls’ engagement, on the other hand, is fostered by schools which focus on developing a strong self-concept of ability and positive views of school climate (Fullarton, 2002). This may, at least partially, reflect the tendency of girls to underestimate their own abilities, reflected in turn in the under-enrolment of girls in higher level mathematics, physics, economics and information technology – matters unlikely to be mentioned when boys are constructed as the ‘new disadvantaged’ at school (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005, p. 4).

The point is repeatedly made that research requires a ‘which girls, which boys approach’. Williams (1965, pp. 63-65) refers to patterns of activity and value unevenly distributed across a community and which, in interaction, may characterise the social organisation which cultural analysis seeks to define. Hegemonic practices of both masculinity and femininity conform to this idea of pattern, which by no means marks all girls nor all boys, but which may lend distinctive character to a culture.

The pedagogical Atlas

In educational research, with its intentions of classroom applicability, pedagogy often bears the major weight as a site for research and reform. In terms of justice within a socio-cultural perspective, this implies at the least a complementary focus on a radical rethinking of professional development for teachers, as implied by Barbara Kamler and Barbara Comber (2004, p. 131), and the provision of social, economic and ecological capital to counteract the growing problems of spatialised poverty, as advocated by Luke and Carrington (2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c, p. 235). Nevertheless, research – like public opinion – readily targets pedagogy, which emerges marked as a potent site for change.

Not surprisingly then, a study for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), (2001) found the major factor causing disengagement from school, as nominated by the study's young participants, was the quality of support from teachers and the quality of teaching methods. Similarly, Lingard, Martino, Mills and Barr (2002, p. 119) conclude from their study:

It is the quality of teacher-student relationships and the quality of the classroom pedagogies that are central school-based factors in achieving good educational outcomes for both boys and girls.... Teachers and their practices appear to be the core element in good and effective strategies for addressing the education needs of boys. Indeed, these are the core elements in effective schooling for all students.

Effective schooling for all students inevitably means that pedagogies address regimes of explicit or implicit violence, including those regimes associated with unequal access. For instance, the degree to which boys are disadvantaged by apparently poorer literacy skills is debatable. One of the main factors contributing to early school leaving (finishing school at or before the completion of compulsory education) is low achievement in the early and middle years (Cortis & Newmarch, 2000, p. 13). Males are more likely to leave school before completing Year 12 (Penman, 2004, p. 1) and represent two-thirds of early school leavers (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2002, p. 11). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily disadvantage them in the labour market over girls who leave early.

In fact, as Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000, p. 7) emphasise, the higher order literacy skills of girls in general does not assure privilege in the labour market. Early-leaving boys are better able to access full-time work and further training on leaving school because of the wider range of employment options still available to boys in lower skill occupations. In association, as long as boys put together the right subject combinations – unlike girls who tend to opt for more balanced and comprehensive year 11 and 12 curricula – boys who have underperformed at school can nevertheless readily connect to vocational opportunities (Kenway, 2000, p. 28).

Jane Kenway (2000, p. 27) remarks that the ‘over-achievement’ in the labour market of so-called educationally under-achieving boys, against the ‘under-achievement’ in the labour market of so-called educationally over-achieving girls, is a startling paradox, no less because it attracts little policy and media attention. Despite higher school retention rates and their better average performance in most subjects in Year 12, a higher proportion of females fail to access the full-time labour market and thereby acquire the capacity to become financially independent.

Before leaving school, girls and boys of low socio-economic status are the most disadvantaged students. At the point of leaving school, however, gender predominates over any other socio-demographic factor affecting young people’s labour market outcomes, to the extent that being female becomes a major disadvantage. The paradox in the case of girls is that:

schooling does not pay off as well as it might in career terms, yet they are very dependent upon it. Indeed, girls have to perform better in school and stay longer than boys in order to access a roughly equal place in the labour market. (Kenway, 2000, p. 28)

If teachers are to be responsible for delivering the profound and diffuse social and economic outcomes demanded of schooling, it seems clear that support for appropriate curriculum change must be integrated and aligned across and within policy vehicles. Reflecting on this challenge, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli assert that it relates to the ‘real’ crisis in masculinity: that hegemonic heterosexual masculinities continue to be unaddressed, such that gaps and silences continue to drive gender debates at ministerial and policy level:

(S)tudents have repeatedly made educators and educational researchers aware that the real ‘crisis in masculinity’ is the misogynist reaction to any perception of so-called ‘female’ thinking and behaviour, the accepted hegemonic culture of male violence and power, and the fear many men in educational authority have of sexual diversity and non-hegemonic masculinities.... We would even go so far as to argue that the moral panic is driven by the need to preserve white heterosexual male privilege. [Ellipses added] (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005, pp. 7-8)

What could be added to the above argument is the corollary that hegemonic femininities of obedience, permission and facilitation are equally questionable and constitute a parallel continuing 'crisis' in femininity. To genuinely prepare students for the changes wrought by and in partnership with globalisation, then, the education system as a whole must be prepared to tackle questions of hegemonic gender regimes by which uneven treatment is mediated.

Harry and Hermione at school

The contrast between Harry and Hermione's relationship to schooling reflects the above discussion. The mythic invocation of 'chosen' status for Harry and for young males generally takes its place in the long history of such summonses in Western patriarchal cultures, and can be held to exert particular influences in the recent history of intensified globalisation: particularly in the heroic warrior positionings of such public exemplars of hegemonic masculinities as USA President George W. Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard. Such masculinities are accorded heroic roles in applying the lucidities of war to the confusions of globalisation. Harry's schooling is integrally aimed at such an outcome.

Young women in the *Harry Potter* texts are, on the other hand, in time-honoured fashion accorded secondary status while nevertheless supplying crucial support to the heroic trajectory. Hermione, for example, swots incomprehensibly hard, consistently outperforming everyone else and even managing to extend her school hours by, in modern Superwoman fashion, multiplying time. Despite being far and away the school's most capable student, she is still not particularly confident of her abilities, as facing the boggart (one's worst fears materialised) confirms:

Hermione did [the exam] perfectly until she reached the trunk with the boggart in it. After about a minute inside it, she burst out again, screaming.
'Hermione!' said Lupin, startled. 'What's the matter?'
'P-P-Professor McGonagall!' Hermione gasped, pointing into the trunk. 'Sh-she said I'd failed everything!' (*PoA*, p. 234)

In their third year at Hogwarts Hermione attends simultaneous lessons by covertly manipulating a Time-turner, granted to her only because of her outstanding organisational and academic capabilities:

‘Hermione,’ said Ron, frowning as he looked over her shoulder, ‘they’ve messed up your timetable. Look – they’ve got you down for about ten subjects a day. There isn’t enough *time*.’
‘I’ll manage. I’ve fixed it all with Professor McGonagall.’
‘But look,’ said Ron, laughing, ‘see this morning? Nine o’clock, Divination. And underneath, nine o’clock, Muggle Studies. And –’ Ron leant closer to the timetable, disbelieving, ‘*look* – underneath that, Arithmancy, *nine o’clock*. I mean, I know you’re good, Hermione, but no one’s *that* good. How’re you supposed to be in three classes at once?’ (*PoA*, p. 76)

For the moment, Hermione keeps her secret, but no matter how hard she tries her intellectual muscularity encounters contempt:

‘*Silence!*’ snarled Snape. ‘Well, well, well, I never thought I’d meet a third-year class who wouldn’t even recognise a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are...’
‘Please, sir,’ said Hermione, whose hand was still in the air, ‘the werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of the werewolf-’
‘That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,’ said Snape coolly. ‘Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.’
Hermione went very red, put down her hand and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears. It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once... [Final ellipses added] (*PoA*, p. 129)

Nevertheless, at the end of this novel, Hermione’s capacity to use the Time-turner proves crucial to her rescue, with Harry, of the Hippogriff Buckbeak from execution, and to Sirius Black’s escape from recapture and certain death (*PoA*, p. 290). Since both operations remain top-secret, Hermione’s triumph receives no public recognition or celebration.

Hermione’s choice of subjects is more typical of girls’ choices, which (as stated in the discussion above) tend to build social and cultural capital at the expense of a

direct vocational pathway. Muggle studies, for instance, enhances the comprehension of human ethnic diversity reflected in Hermione's inauguration of S.P.E.W., the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare. The acronym gestures jointly at Hermione's unawaresly obsessive focus and her fellow students' Klannish resistance to the abolition of slavery, as Ron exemplifies:

'I've been researching it thoroughly in the library. Elf enslavement goes back centuries. I can't believe no one's done anything about it before now.'
'Hermione – open your ears,' said Ron loudly. 'They. Like. It. They *like* being enslaved!' (*GoF*, p. 198)

Unlike Hermione, Harry accrues attention and respect for talents which seem natural, rather than hard-won:

(Harry) mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up he soared, air rushed through his hair and his robes whipped out behind him – and in a rush of fierce joy he realised he'd found something he could do without being taught – this was easy, this was *wonderful*. He pulled his broomstick up a little to take it even higher and heard screams and gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring whoop from Ron. (*PS*, pp. 110-111)

Harry takes this talent to the Quidditch pitch, with predictable results:

He pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded. Harry soared above the crowd, an odd ringing in his ears. The tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers.... Harry was borne towards the stands, where Dumbledore stood waiting with the enormous Quidditch Cup. [Ellipses added] (*PoA*, pp. 229-230)

The ideology of innate masculine heroic physicality is common in popular texts. For instance, in the movie *Gladiator* (2000), Russell Crowe's magnificent hypertrophic musculature – a characteristic which in any epoch requires not only the predominance of masculine biochemistry, but a helpful genetic inheritance developed by intensive, anatomically specific physical exertions aided by superior nutrition – was presented as innate to the character, unrelated to either genotype or phenotype.

In similar vein, the power and invincibility of Harry's body deserves closer scrutiny. Of course, he is injured – often – but magic repairs him, almost always; he rarely has to rely solely on the self-healing capacities of the biological body. Only his imperfect vision, a charming and perhaps authorially specious touch of ordinariness, remains outside the assurances of magic-as-technology.

Along with mass-mediated culture in general, the *Harry Potter* series can be viewed as participating in a contemporary individualist ideology of the construction of self as set free to explore, 'enjoy' and struggle within a world of options, rather than the self as constrained by historical religious and traditional boundaries (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 254). The modern world

dominated as it is by multinational corporations, image based mass marketing and liberal democratic ideals, brings with it a heightened sense of the value of separateness and independence. (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 255)

Harry correspondingly understands and practises himself as autonomous; an understanding, in the lived experience of his readers, which would constitute compliance to an ideology fuelled by the extension of social relations via the mass media and commodity production (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 255). In other words, Harry models for his readers apparent autonomy and choice in self-construction; rather than Being (Heidegger, 1927/1962) implicated in socio-culturally constructed subjectivity, he is an individual 'in' society.

Contemporaneously in the world of the readers, science and technology combine to reshape and redesign the idea of the body as a material given, enfranchising entirely new ways of thinking about how human bodies form and function. Previous ideas of biological limits or boundaries have been challenged by prosthetic and diagnostic devices which obscure old boundaries between artificial and natural, and confront established ideas of what it is to be a human being (D. Haraway, 1991). In these conditions of flux, the body becomes increasingly crucial in the mass mediated

encouragement to ‘just do it’; it becomes an action system central to the process of constructing and maintaining identity (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 254).

The outcome of weighting choice with vaporous limits, however, is risk: the obverse of the agency to choose is uncertainty about outcomes (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 255). In the modern world, individual choice cohabits with socio-cultural uncertainties, as Stevenson declares:

Living in the contemporary world means learning to live with the possibility of large-scale hazards that throw into question attempts at bureaucratic normalization, the imperatives of the economic system, and the assurances of scientific experts. (Stevenson, 2001, p. 306)

The upshot is that autonomy, choice, lived experience and risk become integrally related in complex and unpredictable ways (Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 261). Against this uncertainty Harry’s body – vulnerable, penetrable, pervious – becomes insured by magic-as-technology. In effect, the series takes ‘two bob each way’, allowing Harry’s body to maintain its human vulnerability while simultaneously demonstrating the invulnerable cyborg.

Magic, states Jacob Bronowski (1978, pp. 12-13) – in the days before objectivist science was destabilised by radical doubt – is technology without science, enabling activity romantically different from the mundane. The opposition between magic and technology is the opposition between power and knowledge, Bronowski argues; ‘and our heroes now tend very much to be the magic heroes.’ Through the cyborg icon, in this reading, Harry’s body symbolises an a-rational synthesis of magic and power. On the other hand, Applebaum (2003, p. 39) argues that Harry’s ‘cool’ comes from a superficial conflation of knowledge and power derived from his acquisitions of desirable consumer products (magic tricks) ahead of his peers:

What the Potter books do is destabilize the tension between acquisitive coolness and nerdiness because they take magic and turn it into techniques that can be learned.... *Harry Potter* books are an education for the information economy in

which everyone pays premium rates for narrow expertise and short-lived skills.
[Ellipses added]

In Applebaum's view, the cyborg metaphor validates a view of the world in which knowledge is an ephemeral add-on, tradeable in the marketplace for advantage such as tertiary or career entrance.

However, in the context of the 'risk' society, the cyborg's most important narrative may be in the recuperation of the body as materially given, familiar and habitable by ordinary beings while offering comfort to the doubtful and despairing in the guise of superhuman qualities. This, of course, is a time-honoured task of the hero; transposed, however, into a world of whole-globe hazard, it may constitute a narrative fraud on the acritical reader, a compliance with fantasies of survival on the scale of the weapons defence system dubbed 'Star Wars'.

Other customary divergences in reference to contemporary male and female schooling are demonstrated in the matter of future work. In Harry's careers consultation with Professor McGonagall (*OoP*, pp. 583-587) a clear and reliable pathway from school to Harry's chosen profession of Auror is delineated. Accordingly, the choice of subjects appears typical of boys' selections in that it suggests an emphasis on the development of an instrumental and vocational approach at the expense of social and cultural capital. Kenway comments:

(Boys') narrow selections mean that they miss out on developing many of the skills and attributes that help them to lead a fully rounded life. In general they are not well prepared to fully participate in or contribute to Australia's cultural circumstances and development. Also, their failure to use schooling to enhance their social capital has unfortunate consequences for citizenship and leaves them under-prepared to accept their citizenship responsibilities.... Overall, this may lead to a gender imbalance in the activities involved in maintaining and renewing the social and cultural fabric. [Ellipses added] (Kenway, 2000, p. 29)

The evolving dimensions of the literacy/gender debate mean that oppositional and homogenised gender categories have come to be seen as constituting too simplistic a framework within which to understand the educational needs of either boys or girls.

Instead, numbers of studies and reports (for instance, C. Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Cortis & Newmarch, 2000; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002; Penman, 2004) position educational outcomes as constituted by a complexity of intersecting social and cultural factors, including language background, locality, socio-economic status, health status, school cultures, learning programs, and gender. From this perspective, literacy and literacy pedagogy come to be seen as complex patterns of social and cultural practices, including those of femininity and masculinity, which give rise to multiple literacy forms (Luke & Carrington, 2000).

As for Harry, he is certainly prepared to accept the responsibilities of citizenship and to renew the social and cultural fabric, at least in the terms being laid down by Dumbledore (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). From a wider view than the national and economic, however, his immersion in the values of a hegemonic martialised regime and his failure to grasp the global implications of an apocalyptic confrontation with Voldemort constitute a localised reading of conflict unleavened by a globalised perspective. As such, it is a failure of the potential for critical literacy situated within an internationalised curriculum. As Luke (2002, p. 10) comments:

One area where mass media, educational systems and the state have worked closely and effectively, however intentionally, has been in *failing* to educate about, with, for, within, against, underneath, above, globalisation.

Globalisation and the school

In considering the apparent synchronicity of the findings on teaching cited above, it should be acknowledged that research must reflect to some extent the funding priorities of Federal governments, which in turn reflect political philosophies. Neo-liberal philosophies have been ascendant in Australian Federal governments of the last three decades, associated with a socially conservative research focus implying a tendency to the abstraction, dehistoricisation and demarcation of individuals and occupations from the broad socio-cultural milieu.

Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to acknowledge that the studies relate to the case that many young people, particularly boys, lead in the development of new and evolving subjectivities as a result of their engagement and competencies with the dynamic technologies of mass and popular culture. However, many adults have either not yet realised that adaptation is necessary or have misperceived the scale and complexity of the adaptation required (Levin & Arafeh, 2002; Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c; Trent & Slade, 2001). It is conceivable, then, that many adults who have titular power and control over the lives of the young are unable to understand with whom they are dealing and in what ways they should now deal. Under the circumstances, educational organisations may continue to deal with the subject of “postality”¹² in a modernist way, frustrating teachers in their engagements with the young and frustrating the young in their engagements with their new worlds.

In local communities, globalisation results in the creation of cultural and economic ‘scapes’. Continually evolving, scapes act as sites for everyday changes in the experience and use of time and space, the emergence of new practices of work, leisure and consumption, and the writing of blended, hybridised forms of human expression, artefact and identity. In the mid-20th century, people were prepared by the ‘industrial age school’ for stable work, identity and politics in a social environment supported by a basic level of government provision of health, education and welfare. The industrial age school, however, now confronts issues of identity, culture, sexuality and race thrown up by the fragmentation of the normative models of identity, community and nation which underpinned the older economic system (Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c, pp. 236-237). Jo Jones (2005, p. 47), for instance, asserts that the main reason for Harry Potter’s cross-generational appeal is nostalgia, invoked against a fractured present through the persistent idealisation of a safe, happy and stable past where heroism, integrity and responsibility were valued. In these ways, Harry is a modernist hero, providing a bulwark of certainties against the fluxes of the poststructural.

¹² The condition of subjectivity as constituted in and through the discourses of postmodernism, poststructuralism and associated retheoreticising stances, sometimes ironic, commonly prefixed ‘post’ (for instance, posthuman).

Such themes may characterise the contemporary classroom, where teachers seem to be confronting a series of common challenges: apparent declines in mainstream cultural and linguistic resources, impatience with conventional curricular and pedagogical approaches, and a variety of behaviour management problems including increased diagnostic rates of attention deficit disorders and similar conditions (Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c, p. 237). From the perspective of the industrial schooling system, it is reasonable to attribute such problems to ideas of deficit parenting, which can variously cohere abstracted ideas of parental failure to read to children at home, absent parents and/or deteriorating family structures, the over-provision of television and popular culture in all its forms, and oral language deficit and behavioural disorders.

However, a number of commentators suspect that teachers may be failing to note signs of the social, economic and cultural effects of globalisation, confusing these with deficiencies in the cultural and discourse resources that were once common in the postwar print era (Birr Moje, 2002; Levin & Arafteh, 2002; Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c, p. 237; Trent & Slade, 2001). This threshold, between teachers' and parents' attributions in relation to globalisation and young people's formations in its crucibles, offers a distinctive retheorising opportunity.

Globalisation and curriculum

The generation responsible for taking advantage of the possibilities for retheorisation, however, does not live separately to its culture; it is also participating as deeply as the young in the discourses and practices of globalisation. Seen from its homogenising tendencies, globalisation penetrates the operating structures of schooling, moulding worldwide institutional uniformity (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002). The agenda of global capital, according to Peter McLaren (2000, p. 231), is to reproduce teachers who can in turn reproduce one overarching goal – the creation of citizens dedicated to making the world safe for global capitalism and the interests of the capitalist class. As nation-states accelerate towards economic globalisation, impelled by the desire to develop competitive labour markets and enhance economic activity, so

educational policy is driven by States' policies requiring the development of human capital (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002).

Curriculum, as the repository of cultural knowledge, technical inputs and political flavours of the grammar of schooling, emerges as the ever more widely prized and contested 'core' of the schooling process. Under the influence of neo-liberal policies, States which have, over the last two decades, decentralised and privatised school systems now exert control over curriculum policy through demands to maintain international competitiveness (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002). Standardisation, achievement and assessments are emphasised, and controlled through policies of accountability and client choice. State bureaucracies are reorganised to assure surveillance at national, regional and local levels of curriculum decision.

From an optimistic or entrepreneurial perspective, the times, as stated, offer an exceptional historical moment for 'disrupting and questioning the acritical acceptance of a now internationally rampant vision of schooling, teaching and learning based solely on systemic efficacy at the measurable technical production of human capital' (Luke, 2002b). Reports from the field, however, indicate that the demands of globalisation at school level have left many teachers alienated, disengaged, tired and resistant to further curricular reform, however socially just.

Globalisation and teachers

Charlie Naylor (2001a, p. 6; , 2001b), reporting on a review of teacher workloads and related stress in Canada, the USA, the UK and Australia, concludes that teacher workloads are excessive. The considerable impacts include declining job satisfaction, reduced ability to meet students' needs, significant incidences of psychological disorders, increased absenteeism, and a high proportion of claims for stress disability. In an Australian example, in the three years from June 2002 to May 2005, the State of Victoria paid nearly \$5 million to public school teachers in 429 stress-related compensation claims, with 6568 teaching days lost annually to stress (Tomazin, 2005). This occurred despite the State's \$1.2 million package aimed at alleviating stress and workplace injuries in the sector.

Heather-Jane Robertson (2002, p. 252) reports that Australian teachers' spouses express chronic resentment over partners' workloads and the effect of workloads on family life. Robertson adds that a number of British teacher suicides have been attributed directly to workload problems and a rigid inspectorate system, one teacher leaving a simple epitaph: 'My best is not good enough'.

No relief is likely from a rush of new entrants to the profession; both retention and recruitment rates appear to be influenced by teachers' work conditions. In Australia, authorities alarmed by the rapid greying and early retirement plans of a sizeable proportion of the teaching workforce (Australian College of Education, 2001) have instituted initiatives to attract new teachers; however, teachers are leaving the profession permanently at 'alarming' rates within their first three to five years (Manuel, 2003).

In fact, up to 25 per cent of teachers leave the profession, many permanently, within five years of starting work (Lovat & Harvey, 2005). However, Terry Lovat and Andrew Harvey (p. 6) state that this should be expected. Teaching should be acknowledged, they assert, as a generalist degree which develops skills of communication, collaboration, and interpersonal and problem solving capacities, broadly attractive in the knowledge economy. Regardless of this, they argue, improving teachers' salaries is a minimum requirement for retention. Also desirable is the redesigning of the traditional classroom model, support for team teaching and teacher mentoring, rewards for postgraduate study, the facilitation of national and international teacher exchanges, increased funding for both teacher education faculties and places within them, and promotion of educational research (Lovat & Harvey, p. 7).

The knowledge that the provision of teacher education may be a source of corporate advantage does not assuage the tensions for those teachers who prefer to remain within the profession, however. The profession has struggled valiantly to cope with the intensification of work; as Robertson (2002, p. 252) wearily notes, the initial

1970s stress management workshops which ceded to 1980s burnout prevention finally gave way to time management in the 1990s. Robertson sardonically claims that current attempts to adapt based on the teacher wellness workshop – during which relaxation exercises ‘reclaim your inner teacher’ – often mean discovering deep inner exhaustion.

Globalisation and families

Teachers and teachers’ families share the impacts of globalisation with families generally. Specifying the material effects of globalisation at the local level now attracts significant research attention. The kinds of profound effects which can occur within the institution still known as the family provide graphic material for pedagogical contemplation, and more reason to contemplate Postman’s global claim that children may be receiving care of a different kind than they need.

Anne Manne (2003), for instance, provides a trenchant commentary on the globalised family through examining the medicalisation of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Pre-adolescent boys, she notes, are eight times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with ADHD. Manne’s case is that the capacity of parents to care for children within the family has been compromised by the time and energy demands of the neo-liberal workplace and by the financial demands of consumerism. The result, according to Manne, is that children’s dependency needs are transferred to childcare centres and schools or – in fulfilment of the Taylorisation of health institutions, where prescription becomes more cost-effective than human caregiving – are dulled-down by prescribed pharmaceuticals.

Increases in the United States, Canada and Australia in conduct disorders, emotional problems, aggressive behaviour, childhood depression and school underperformance, Manne (2003, p. 48) argues, are contemporaneous with the socio-economic changes wrought by neo-liberalism. The efficiency concept, prized above all other values including equity and social justice, promotes cost reductions, labour shedding, higher productivity per worker, and extended, often unpaid, working hours. The constituents of the new capitalism, then, are the ‘risk’ society, including a two-

stranded destabilised workplace of highly paid, highly skilled, long-day workers who need low paid, insecure, service-providing long-shift labour to maintain middle-class families, while low-income families make do; patterns of high consumption, in which a sensibility shift encompasses increased personal debt and increased house sizes in an economy of hedonistic consumerism; and the elevation of work to a total social good which defines subjectivity and devalues private relations of intimacy and care nurturing families and children (Manne, 2005, pp. 38-40).

Further impacts on children and families occur through efficiencies at governmental level, resulting in reductions in State expenditure affecting essential services such as schools, hospitals and daycare centres. With generous credit freely offered by financial institutions alongside the endemic nature of pressures to consume, family time can become compressed in a work-spend-work cycle, Manne (2003, p. 49) claims. Neo-capitalism gives rise to a new family model: previously private relations are transformed into commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace (Manne, 2005, p. 41). Time compression at home forces increased efficiencies – Taylorisation – necessitating the outsourcing of family functions to privatised childcare centres or nursing homes. Compounded by long-term unemployment, radical job insecurity and the emergence of a class of working poor, Manne (2003, p. 49) contends, the thinking of Australians about children and childhood has undergone a sea change:

The pervasive sense of hyper-competitiveness, of risk and insecurity, and the shortened time for nurturing deep human bonds, all contribute to the reshaping of our values and our attitudes to altruism, dependency and vulnerability.... The drawbridge of empathy, one might say, is being closed. [Ellipses added]

At the same time, the language of the market penetrates the life-world and transforms meaning, Manne (2005, pp. 43-44) alleges. The intensity and particularity of parental love becomes invalidated as merely ‘home-based childcare’. The new ideal is to feel less, so as to facilitate the survival of the self: ‘Separateness and detachment are the ideal, not deep connection with others’ (Manne, p. 48). The way in which the social relations of economic restructuring and the cultural emphasis on radical individualism come together, Manne concludes, creates a further sea change: the construction in child development and childcare literature of a new child who fits the times: an independent,

competent and resilient child. Such constructions coerce children to occupy ‘a diminished place in our culture,’ Manne (2003, p. 54) concludes. ‘Children must grow up fast and not press us too much with their needs.’

Harry and his Hogwarts family

Harry does indeed model the increasingly independent, competent and resilient child, companionate form to the time-pressed adult. The idea of Harry’s ordering role – the theme of apparent trust in the intellectual and physical capacities of youth – works its way through each novel in a multitude of ambiguous situations. It is often based around the mystifying, opaque behaviour of adults whom Harry should be able to trust. Some of these characters are teachers, such as the stuttering, highly-strung Dark Arts teacher of book one, Professor Quirrell, finally discovered to be hosting in his own body a ghastly embryonic Voldemort (*PS*, pp. 211-213) intent on milking the Elixir of Life from the philosopher’s stone in Harry’s pocket.

Professor ‘Mad Eye’ Moody (*GoF*, pp. 290-291) is another tricky characterisation, finally emerging as an impersonation by Barty Crouch junior, who has been planted at Hogwarts to transform the Triwizard Cup into a portkey which delivers Harry up to Voldemort, by which time Voldemort has abandoned the idea of the stone’s immortalising dram in favour of a slug of Harry’s revivifying blood. The Professor Snape character remains ambiguous until the sixth book: Snape and Harry form an antagonistic, distrustful relationship at their first meeting, and Harry maintains faith in his own judgment of the Potions and eventually Dark Arts Master despite Dumbledore’s insistence that the man is totally trustworthy – right up until the moment when Snape murders him.

So well does Harry learn to discriminate and negotiate his world’s labyrinthine parameters of power that in the last pages of the penultimate novel, he knows exactly how to position himself for the forthcoming apocalyptic showdown with Voldemort. The Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, importunes Harry to ally himself officially with the Ministry, a deeply self-interested bureaucracy, as Harry plainly comprehends:

‘What did Scrimgeour want?’ Hermione whispered.
Same as he wanted at Christmas,’ shrugged Harry. ‘Wanted me to give him
inside information on Dumbledore and be the Ministry’s new poster boy.’
(*HBP*, p. 605)

Harry declines Scrimgeour’s invitation, doughtily declaring himself to be ‘Dumbledore’s man through and through’ (*HBP*, p. 605). In this stance, he effectively checkmates the State by being positioned simultaneously as a dissenter and potentially as its only hope for survival. From this perspective, the figure of Harry, like his real-life peers, negotiates the liminal spaces between the certainties of the modern and the fluxes of the poststructural.

However, if from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry we abstract Harry Potter, his arch enemy Voldemort, and the latest riveting battle between good and evil, Harry’s school begins to look decidedly boring. Hogwarts takes on the beige caste of the 20th century ‘industrial school’ (Luke & Carrington, 2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c, pp. 235-237): subject-centred curriculum, transmission-style pedagogies, high stakes assessments; and the relentless disciplining of bodies in time and place and person.

What is it, then, that makes Harry Potter’s life at school so enthralling, exciting, exhilarating – so *engaging*, particularly in comparison with the schooling of many of his real-life, disengaged, young male peers? What is it that helps him to develop his independence, resilience and competence? How is the balance created between adult nurturance and protection and youthful energy and idealism such that Harry is meaningfully involved in his own community?

The secret is this: Harry has his own personalised, customised curriculum that calls on him to bring intense intellectual and physical effort to problems of immense and immediate local and global importance. Much like the terrorist threat that stalks abroad in the world of Harry’s readers, Voldemort’s mysterious provenances imply the

wizarding world's apocalyptic engagement with nebulous and opportunistic forces of destruction. Each encounter with Voldemort, his dark forces, and his totalitarian political desires confronts Harry with threats to his own immediate survival, the survival of his friends, and the continued existence of the wizarding world's tiro democracy¹³. Harry's success at school is therefore built on tasks which *demand* his entire engagement, with each task ably scaffolded by Dumbledore.

At the end of the first novel, for instance, Harry has of course thwarted Voldemort's plot to obtain the Philosopher's Stone and its immortalising Elixir (*PS*, pp. 161, pp. 214-215). The instruments of Harry's success in this endeavour are the Invisibility Cloak, his father's property, returned anonymously by Dumbledore (*PS*, p. 148); the Mirror of Erised, to which his access is monitored, if not manipulated, by a Dumbledore who does not need a cloak to be invisible (*PS*, pp. 156-157); and the Philosopher's Stone itself, which by Dumbledore's magical procurations materialises in Harry's pocket at the crucial moment (*PS*, p. 212, p. 217).

By the sixth novel, reflecting Harry's growing maturity as a wizard and the trust now placed in him as a wizard leader, Dumbledore introduces Harry to Voldemort's psychosocial case history (*HBP*, pp. 242-260, pp. 338-345, pp. 401-418), encouraging a deeper understanding of Voldemort's motivations ahead of ever more dangerous confrontations. Vicariously, Harry's friends are drawn into Dumbledore's view of the world, Hermione taking the position of the public intellectual whose output will be harnessed to the purposes of the repressive State:

'Wow, scary thought, the boy You-Know-Who,' said Ron quietly...
'But I still don't get why Dumbledore's showing you all this. I mean, it's really interesting and everything, but what's the point?'
'Dunno,' said Harry... 'But he says it's all important and it'll help me survive.'
'I think it's fascinating,' said Hermione earnestly. 'It makes absolute sense to know as much about Voldemort as possible. How else will you find out his weaknesses?' [Ellipses added] (*HBP*, p. 261)

¹³ For commentary on the way deficiencies in the rule of law weaken wizarding society, see Hall, 2003.

In addition, Harry's skills of detection have matured, aided greatly by the indispensable Invisibility Cloak. In the sixth novel, he is able to connect a series of clues which tell him that Draco Malfoy has made a parallel and opposite conversion to his own, becoming a Death Eater, a Voldemort supporter. The clues, which Harry synthesises accurately despite Ron and Hermione's disbelief and opposition, include Malfoy's strange and threatening behaviour in Burgin and Burke's, purveyors of sinister Dark Arts artefacts; a part-heard, uneasy interview between Snape and Malfoy, in which Snape appears to be attempting to mentor the angry youth; the Malfoy family's association with the dreaded killer werewolf and Voldemort adherent, Fenrir Greyback; Malfoy's use of the magically concealed Room of Requirement and his acquisition of Polyjuice Potion to disguise his guards, Crabbe and Goyle. The final clue comes from Professor Trelawney's report of hearing Malfoy whooping in triumph in the Room, where, it finally turns out, he has succeeded in mending the Vanishing Cabinet which opens a passage for more Death Eaters (including Greyback) to enter Hogwarts from a twinned cabinet in Burgin and Burke's shop.

As is apparent, Harry's personal schooling (as opposed to the general-issue curriculum) tends to reveal the real and terrifying state of his world to him; and everything about his schooling assists him – in the end, after each tremendous challenge – to hope, if not believe, that he has the agency to mend it. Even more encouragingly: the community around him acknowledges his crucial role in the resolution of the problems of survival. In the political maelstrom that develops around the fundamental threat to its continuity, sometimes the community is for Harry and sometimes against him. Nevertheless, he is consistently provided with the tools to do the job – and these tools (knowledge of magic, skills of the wand, and values based on a dualist ontology) mark Harry as a practitioner of a particular future, a cybertechnical future. Harry's success at school is built on tasks which call him in his entirety, and provide him with the tools and resources to complete those tasks. He is both trusted to succeed and scaffolded towards success through timely emotional and practical support from his loved teacher/mentor.

Literary critics commonly point to conventional thematic constituents, such as the school story, the boys' own adventure story, the detective novel, the fairy and folk tale elements of the *Harry Potter* series as the major justification of its attractions to young readers. However, the power, magic and importance of Harry's curriculum can be assumed by the enchantment of millions of young school-going people with the six *Harry Potter* texts. The intensity of their gaze on what Harry does at school suggests the necessity to consider the relationships between the texts' cultural contexts – that is, the lived experience of Harry's young readers in the 21st century – and the demands on education to fit young people for new worlds now under continuous construction through the many mutually shaping processes of globalisation. Acknowledging the tendencies of dominant conservative politics to retreat from the challenge of globalisation and contract curricula to earlier models, Luke and Carrington (2000; Luke & Carrington, 2002c) nominate a key educational issue in the confrontation with globalisation: the importance of moving away from literacy debates emphasising basic skills and commodified curriculum materials to a much wider conversation about literacy education as a sustainable and powerful curriculum practice.

Successful economic competitiveness in the economies of the future is not considered here to be the single task of literacy education, nor even its most important compared to other outcomes (Carrington, 2000, p. 29; Misson, 2005, p. 37); nor do I take at face value the allegations of relationships between boys' literacy and boys' capacity to compete in the workplace (Carrington, 2000, p. 27); and I do not invest in the term 'development' the meaning that non-Western societies are less sophisticated than Western societies.

Nevertheless, political demands in the West for all students to achieve high literacy standards have the effect of projecting into harsh relief the most persistent and challenging problems faced by education as Western democratic practice. These include unequal literacy outcomes (Kamler & Comber, 2004, p. 131), and the concomitant condition, noted by Luke and Carrington above, the need through curriculum to match the educational complexities generated both with, and as, intensified globalisation.

Harry Potter, enmeshed in confusion, often disobedient and unruly, nevertheless represents a principle of order, accomplishing the often arduous work of organising his world into clarifying dichotomies beneath the over-arching binary structure of the clearly good (Dumbledore) and the clearly evil (Voldemort). In this way, Harry carries out work somewhat comparable to that of the subaltern, in which degrees of overt and covert resistance interchange uneasily with degrees of overt and covert collusion with a ruling class. The Harry figure, apparently heroically resistant, is in reality compliant with the conservative hegemonies of the series, including the dominant pedagogical practices at Hogwarts. The Dumbledore figure, apparently pedagogically progressive, advances an attractive humanist philosophy of love, peace and understanding: 'Dumbledore would have been happier than anybody to think that there was a little more love in the world,' said Professor McGonagall... (HBP, p. 582); nevertheless, McGonagall's complaisance, along with Dumbledore's humanism, is offered in support of Harry's martial development, not his critical intellectual development (HBP, pp. 478-479).

This is the point at which Harry's youthful energy and potential idealism is laid to waste. This is the point at which Dumbledore fails the test of the critical pedagogue; by failing to provide critical intellectual armaments for Harry, he engages in a debilitating form of dystopian pessimism. It is the point at which Dumbledore, appreciating that the phenomenal world of the adolescent may be startlingly and potentially creatively different to an adult's, should have bracketed off his own worries and resolutions about Voldemort and opened the world to Harry's inquiring mind to explore, unbridled. To not do this can be seen as a parochialism in time, a relinquishment of potential. The warning from Raymond Williams (1985, p. 4) has lost no potency since last century: 'The settled pessimism of so much of the culture of the late twentieth century is in effect an absolute loss of the future: of any significant belief that it can be both different and better.'

As Dumbledore establishes Harry as his successor, the next warrior, he concedes that he cannot physically protect him any longer. Seeking to explain the high degree of violence towards and between children in the USA, Garbarino (2004) states that children who grasp that adults cannot protect them against potential physical violence

find substitutes, physically and emotionally, in such strategies as weapons, vigilantism, and gangs.

In the end, Harry and friends do not obtain the kind of critical education which can allow them to step outside their own 'available explanatory texts and discourses' (Luke, 2002, p. 12) in which good and evil may be considered 'not so much opposing entities as they are tributaries of the same river' (King, 2003, p. 109); and thereby grasp at a unifying politics which might underlie the possibility of global peace (Wessells, 2004, p. 11154) – in my view, a justifiably grand narrative.

Hogwarts is successful in delivering an education which thoroughly engages Harry. Nevertheless, in constituting him to comply uncritically with the demands of neo-capitalism, it fails him. His doughty independence, competence and resilience mark him as a soldier in the forces which make the world safe for negative forms of globalised capitalism. As an idealised warrior for neo-capitalism, he feels less (Manne, 2005) and will travel light (Bauman, 2000, p. 124):

'Ginny, listen...' [Harry] said very quietly, as the buss of conversation grew louder around them and people began to get to their feet. 'I can't be involved with you any more. We've got to stop seeing each other. We can't be together.'

She said, with an oddly twisted smile, 'It's for some stupid, noble reason, isn't it?'

'It's been like ... like something out of someone else's life, these last few weeks with you,' said Harry. 'But I can't ... we can't ... I've got things to do alone now.' (HBP, p. 602)

Harry's apparently unfortunate beginnings, as orphan and Cinderfella, in fact loosen him from the obligations of care within family and fit him for his tasks: 'The ideal employee', alleges Manne (2005, p. 55), 'is without human attachments or obligations, preferably childless.' Simultaneously, however, the *Harry Potter* texts place Harry as a highly privileged child: he is wealthy by inheritance both from his parents and from his godfather, Sirius Black; he attends a British boarding school domiciled in a castle within beautiful grounds, with all the labours of reproduction

performed by servants (the elves); and he has ‘natural’ gifts for sport (Quidditch) and language (Parseltongue). Because he survives Voldemort as an infant, he is both famous and visibly marked as extraordinary by his lightning-shaped scar. He epitomises the ideal trajectory of the individualised subject under neo-capitalist globalisation.

In addition, Harry’s school subjects articulate perfectly with his employment prospects, and he is assured of a bright future in the workforce. Harry will exit school with all the advantages of the upper middle class; and indeed, as the sixth novel ends, he is placed as a defender of the British Empire, about to face the dark ravaging hordes as protector of the Motherland. Hermione, on the other hand, despite her outstanding school performance, may nevertheless be reminded of Kenway’s dour assessment that schooling does not pay off as well for girls as it does for boys in career terms. Fortunately, Hermione can meet the requirement of performing better at school than Harry (although perhaps not staying longer, as things are turning out) in order to access a roughly equal place in the job market (Kenway, 2000, p. 28).

Harry’s *Bildungsroman* constitutes a paradox for young readers of the present era, many of whom, under the influences of globalisation, face the blurring of conventionally-held distinctions between childhood, adolescence and adulthood along with the disarticulation of once-linear pathways between school and work. Harry’s unitary subjectivity and clear life pathways offer consolation in turbulent, fragmenting times; but they may also act to deny the lived experience of his readers and the possibilities of a different global future.

The next chapter examines some ways in which apocalyptic currents occur both in popular and political culture and what a fear culture might mean in relation to readings of the *Harry Potter* texts.

CHAPTER 4

That-which-must-not-be-named: Apocalypse

‘You know that day we fought the Boggart?’

‘Yes,’ Lupin said slowly.

‘Why didn’t you let me fight it?’ Harry said abruptly....

‘Well,’ said Lupin, frowning slightly, ‘I assumed that if the Boggart faced you, it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort.’....

‘I did think of Voldemort first,’ said Harry honestly. ‘But then I – I remembered those Dementors.’

‘I see,’ said Lupin thoughtfully. ‘Well, well ... I’m impressed.’ He smiled slightly at the look of surprise on Harry’s face. ‘That suggests that what you fear most of all is – fear. Very wise, Harry.’ [Final ellipses in original] (*PoA*, pp. 116-117)

The *Harry Potter* texts participate in certain ways in contemporary dystopian political currents associated with a pervasive, amorphous, climate of fear. Occurring in both popular and political culture, such currents feature compulsory discourses of the Other as terrorist. In the *Harry Potter* texts, these discourses evoke narratives of apocalypse and Armageddon. This chapter seeks to explore some ways in which the *Harry Potter* series can be read in relation to such currents and discourses, furthering the claim of the thesis that the *Harry Potter* texts, unless considered within a global context, invite readings naively compliant with conservative and militarist ideologies.

Voldemort as the vector of all evils

The majority of the wizarding world is petrified of Voldemort, prohibiting even the utterance of his name. Inviting comparisons with the daily plagues of contemporary terror formulations bedevilling the world of Harry’s readers, the Dark Lord symbolises and cathects multiple sources of fear. The Voldemort figure activates notions of apocalypticism, with its references to Armageddon and environmental extinctionism; and militarism, with its aspirations towards technological supremacism (Cooke & Woollacott, 1993).

As the vector on which converges all evils and from which all evils emerge, Voldemort draws together allusions to totalitarianism, with its invocations of fundamentalism and terrorism. The Dark Lord's potential for doing harm to the collective good is awe-inspiring, as Sirius explains when he describes Voldemort's previous attempt to gain total power:

'Imagine that Voldemort's powerful now. You don't know who his supporters are, you don't know who's working for him and who isn't; you know he can control people so that they do terrible things without being able to stop themselves. You're scared for yourself, and your family, and your friends. Every week, news comes of more deaths, more disappearances, more torturing ... the Ministry of Magic's in disarray, they don't know what to do, they're trying to keep everything hidden from the Muggles, but meanwhile, Muggles are dying too. Terror everywhere ... panic ... confusion ... that's how it used to be.' (*GoF*, p. 457)

Nevertheless, it was not always so, as Dumbledore goes to some lengths to show Harry in *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*. Instructing Harry privately, Dumbledore historicises Voldemort's sociopathy, describing his mother Merope's origins in a squalid, poverty stricken, motherless household ruled by a violent father arrogantly proud of the family's pure-blood descent from Salazar Slytherin, one of Hogwarts' founders. The brow-beaten, hapless Merope falls in love with a rich Muggle, Tom Riddle, who deserts her and their expected infant when he discovers she is a witch.

Merope dies as her son Tom Riddle junior is born, the story of which stirs a momentary sympathy in Harry, another orphan; immediately quashed, however, by Dumbledore: 'Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?' (*HBP*, p. 246). The momentary aporia is important: Harry's question, 'She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?', has gifted Dumbledore a teachable moment. Effectively, Harry's incredulity subtly interrogates Dumbledore's version of truth (Habermas, 2000), opening out the possibility of a nuanced, reflective conversation about the social construction of subjectivity. Harry, however, is given to understand that there will be no 'politically correct' perspective that terrorism may have substantive causes based in complex social inequities. Dumbledore effectively repudiates the possibility that the formation of subjectivity occurs within communal forms of life, since his fundamentally conservative

philosophy exalts the idea that subjectivity can be self-assembled as an act of individual will ("Freedom in our time", 2005, p. 3).

Compounding Voldemort's double abandonment – the father's due to discrimination, the mother's to death – Riddle grows up in a somewhat Dickensian orphanage where, without knowing or understanding that he has magical powers, he nevertheless develops rudimentary dark arts and a vengeful, self-sufficient, secretive personality. Invited in the same way as Harry to study at Hogwarts, Riddle junior perfects a façade, achieving recognition as a brilliant student and serving as prefect and head boy. Dumbledore's telling locates the deficits in Voldemort, rather than in the social system, and opposes Riddle/Voldemort's sinister duplicity to Harry's honesty and guilelessness.

Riddle takes as his clandestine task the opening of Salazar Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets, designed to purge the school of all but pure-bloods. One student dies as a result. Riddle's subsequent life as Voldemort is a radical descent into the Dark Arts and a campaign for power marked by the accumulation of followers, and by deaths, disappearances, torture, and increasingly open civil violence. Seeking immortality, Voldemort hears of a prophecy naming a boy who will kill him; however, the curse with which he attempts to kill Harry Potter rebounds on him and severs his mind or soul – we are not sure – from his body. The series details his fight to reconstruct his body, destroy Harry Potter, win immortality, and rule the wizarding world. To do this, Voldemort is deeply reliant on a supportive socio-cultural milieu, a dependence graphically depicted as repugnant and marking him as contemptibly weak.

As an adult, Voldemort's virulent terrorism naturally stimulates official responses. Initially, this response is denial and a 'dumbing-down' spin from a Ministry averse to the disturbance of its comfortable habits:

'You fool!' Professor McGonagall cried. 'Cedric Diggory! Mr Crouch! These deaths were not the random work of a lunatic!'
'I see no evidence to the contrary!' shouted Fudge, now matching her anger, his face purpling. 'It seems to me that you are all determined to start a panic that

will destabilise everything we have worked for these last thirteen years!’ (*GoF*, p. 613)

In the presence of bureaucratic inertia, public fear rises and results in civil acquiescence to severe security measures, as Robin foreshadows. Political fear materialises laws, suggests Robin (2004), the most effective of which simultaneously locate threat externally while subjugating domestic populations. Regardless of the Ministerial denial, Bartemius Crouch, heading the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, responds to the prevailing amorphous climate of fear in concert with certain contemporary real-world authorities. Contemporary measures including torture, shoot to kill provisions and detention without trial are enacted or contemplated, even though examples of successful anti-terrorism laws suggest that basic low-profile, mundane police work is the most effective instrument against terror ("Freedom in our time", 2005, p. 2). Nevertheless, Crouch is responsible for breaching the (however flimsy) established rule of law by authorising Aurors to use the Unforgivable Curse against suspects, giving them the right to kill rather than capture, and handing some suspects over to the Dementors without trial (*GoF*, p. 457).

The general crackdown on civil liberties pervades Hogwarts through Dolores Umbridge's appointment as High Inquisitor. Umbridge's limitations on freedom of speech and movement, along with contractions of the curriculum designed to diminish dissent and produce obedient subjects, adds to the general downward spiral of fear, tension and democratic decay.

As the character who leads the cast of blatant evildoers, Voldemort is clearly constructed as an irredeemably totalitarian monster. In this, his style emulates the central characteristic typical of totalitarian regimes: the 'personality cult', or, in Hannah Arendt's terms, the 'leader principle' (Boyle, 1995, p. 46; Griffin, 1998, p. 29; although see, Mosse, 1987, p. 161, who nuances the monolithic theory of the leadership cult). The Voldemort figure speaks of Hitler and Stalin who, in company with their spiritual offspring such as Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and others, each believed in his own redemptive qualities as an omniscient, infallible and finally omnipotent leader.

The dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin, like Voldemort's incipient next reign, were marked by the leader's exertion of his 'will': his underlying belief in his own immortality – whether corporately, as in the idealised 'Thousand-Year Reich', or corporeally, as in his own physical immortality (Boyle, 1995, p. 47). 'There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!' snarls Voldemort (*OoP*, p. 718). 'You know my goal – to conquer death', he affirms to the Death Eaters (*GoF*, p. 566), utilising murder so as to redistribute the seven parts of his soul and achieve ostensible immortality.

Correspondingly, the totalitarian condition is typically:

directly the manifestation of a "will" whose fundamental purpose is to act out an ideal, and receive confirmation, of personal *perfection* and *eternal* endurance – which of course are, by definition, literally superhuman qualities.... (T)he central social, political and, in the case of the true believer, *personal* preoccupation of every individual below him is the enforced perception of the Leader's *divinity*. [Ellipses added] (Boyle, 1995, p. 47)

In the practice of the leader's will as an ideal, no trace of the underling's individual self can be tolerated and every subject is idealised: existing, in relation to the regime, only as an abstraction; that is, as a self-less automaton instrumentalising the will of the leader.

Thus, on Voldemort's passage to perfection and divinity, Cedric Diggory, who has no further instrumental value to Voldemort, is murdered by Pettigrew on Voldemort's cold order: '*Kill the spare.*' (*GoF*, p. 553). Pettigrew is required to further prove his loyalty by donating his right hand to the potion which restores Voldemort to a body of his own (*GoF*, p. 556), and Professor Quirrell is left to die after Voldemort has no more need to share his body. '(H)e shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies', comments Dumbledore (*CS*, p. 216). Requiring nothing less than every adherent's absolute devotion, Voldemort punishes a Death Eater who prostrates himself on returning to his service:

One of the men suddenly flung himself forwards, breaking the circle. Trembling from head to foot, he collapsed at Voldemort's feet.
'Master!' he shrieked. 'Master, forgive me! Forgive us all!'
Voldemort began to laugh. He raised his wand. '*Crucio!*'

The Death Eater on the ground writhed and shrieked.... ‘Get up, Avery,’ said Voldemort softly. ‘Stand up. You ask for forgiveness? I do not forgive. I do not forget. Thirteen long years... I want thirteen years’ repayment before I forgive you.’ [Ellipses added] (*GoF*, pp. 562-563)

However Harry, in nominating the source of greatest fear to him, spurns the norm and bypasses Voldemort for the Dementors, the Azkaban guards who suck the very soul from one’s being. Harry has learned to reliably defeat the Dementors, having mastered the conjuring of a Patronus (a silver stag, like his father’s Patronus) to drive them off; as he does in an alley near Privet Drive when he and Dudley are under siege by the foul creatures (*OoP*, p. 22). Already able to defeat the creatures he fears most, Harry is therefore nicely positioned to confidently confront Voldemort, whose powers to frighten him are correspondingly diminished.

Cultivating a culture of fear

A deductive non sequitur, Lupin’s insight in the opening quotation in this chapter – that wisdom lies in the development of a critical literacy of comparative political fears – does not mean that the threat of Voldemort’s terrorism can be dismissed, however, or that the possibility of attack by Voldemort’s forces has no basis. The history of Voldemort’s deadly antagonisms, like the history of terrorist attacks in the world of Harry’s readers, indicts such a position. Nevertheless, Lupin usefully alludes to the indispensable critical question under conditions in which fears of attack are cultivated beyond the probability of their eventuality: whose interests are served, and whose denied, by the tides of fear generated from these currents of cataclysm? A critical attitude to terrorism might respond to these tensions in alignment with the view of Ned Curthoys (2004, p. 50):

The word ‘terrorism’ functions in media and political discourse as a signifier of apocalyptic anxieties, a reflexive discourse of cultural crisis, and the pleasingly sonorous essence of the modern savage.

In other words, the word ‘terrorism’, like a fishing line in a crowded lake, reliably snags other things: a weighty catch of conflicting fear and pleasure-based

responses. For instance, it surfaces ideas about cultural crisis while resonating with the prejudices of colonialism. In particular, it ‘outs’ fears (for the religious right, ecstatic) that history will end in cosmic catastrophe, by which the downtrodden but righteous will be rewarded with heavenly transcendence and their contemporaries, the momentarily victorious wicked, will be punished. Wielded knowingly, the term ‘terrorism’ can be considered as a useful instrument of political fear.

Such a manipulation was demonstrated in Australia in 2001 when the Federal Liberal coalition government was approaching a general election during a time when refugees were practising increasingly risky means of escape from political turmoil in the middle-East. The government manufactured a popular crisis involving complicity in the generation of false claims that parents on board a wallowing refugee vessel attempting to make landfall in Australia had thrown children overboard, in order, it was alleged, to force Australia to accord the refugees asylum (Marr & Wilkinson, 2003). Refusing landfall to the refugee-laden rescue vessel, the government violated Australia’s obligations to people in distress at sea, to refugee conventions, the United Nations, world shipping, and its own Migration Act (Marr, 2004, p. 6).

The course was heroically popular in Australia. By exacerbating projected historical insecurities about invasion contiguous with the climate of fear generated by the attack on New York’s World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001, the government successfully activated a deeply-rooted Australian racism and was returned with an increased majority. Through this process, the power of political fear stood revealed.

Political fear, states Corey Robin (2004, p. 2), refers to people’s shared apprehension of the potential for harm to the collective good: the fear of terrorism, panic over crime, anxiety about decaying moral standards – or the intimidation of populations by governments or social groups. Sources of fear are as legion as sources of pleasure, the sources of their dissemination indefatigable. In the 1990s, according to Davis (2001, p. 36), millions of people in the USA trembled before the mass-mediated menaces of black helicopters, killer asteroids, mad-dog adolescents, recovered memories, Lyme disease, Satanic preschools, road rage, Ebola fever, Colombian cartels,

computer viruses, Chinese atomic spies and more. In 2005, a popular columnist in the Murdoch press tells of her dinner party conversation which dwelt on participants' 'favourite horrors' of the moment: avian influenza, landslide, typhoons, tsunami, necrophilia, paedophilia, and terrorism (Ostrow, 2005 p. 14). Contemporary fashionings of fear have engendered academic descriptors such as 'conspiracy culture', 'risk society', the 'plague of paranoia' and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.

Political fear can be used for manifold purposes: to dictate public policy, elevate new groups to power, maintain established ones and exclude others, and create and overturn laws (Robin, 2004, p. 2). Australia's adoption of stringent anti-terrorism laws, ably stimulated through the work of political actors as 'entrepreneurs of fear' ("Freedom in our time", 2005, p. 2), is an example common in contemporary democracies. Allusions to such entrepreneurs have become commonplace in popular media since the World Trade Centers attack; for instance, Mahir Ali inquires whether Australians remember the days

when everyone was supposed to be relaxed and comfortable? They seem so last century. Even the be alert but not alarmed mantra has been superseded. These days it is mandatory to be alert and alarmed. And very, very afraid. After all, we are told every few days that a terrorist act on Australian soil is not just possible or likely, but inevitable. There's no getting away from it. (Ali, 2005, p. R32)

Nevertheless, political fear springs, states Robin (2004, pp. 2-21), from conditions endemic to society, such as pervasive social inequities within and between groups and societies which may establish conditions generative of civil conflict. However, leaders typically deny the domestic provenances of political fear. After all, it has its uses: it exerts a structuring effect in public life, igniting energy, rousing action, and potentially unifying otherwise pluralistic populations. In the workplace, it is believed to spur the pace of contemporary production, fuelling growth and profit in the market economy. It may emphasise the worth of particular political values; for instance, fear of totalitarianism may provoke appreciation for liberal democracy.

In accordance with the utilitarianism of political fear, then, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers were attributed by many leaders and writers to defects of either the individual psychologies of the attackers (a benighted manhood proving itself), or to deficiencies of Islamic culture (culture being construed as external to politics, from this perspective). Accordingly, discursive recourse to unity, modernity, and directed activity counted among the responses, given, in Robin's ironic comment, that 'Fear restored to us the clarifying knowledge that evil exists, making moral, deliberate action possible once again' (Robin, 2004, p. 2). The confirmation of extant evil fulfilled a particular obligation of manipulated political fear: the establishment of a correspondence between the meaninglessness and despair of the decentred self and the object of the fear, which must resemble the nihilism haunting modern self and society (Robin, p. 13); in psychoanalytic terms, an externalisation, or projection, of the internal repressed.

Well-intentioned but misguided liberals who continue to pursue emancipatory ideals derive 'confidence and purpose, a deep sense of foundation, from evil itself, from cruelty and the terrible fear it arouses' states Robin (2004, p. 251). In effect, in Robin's terms, a perverted liberalism is constituted by an ethical façade around a core of concretised privilege; stabilised, in the *Harry Potter* series, by Voldemort as the projected spectre of nihilism.

Voldemort is poised, prior to the seventh and climactic text, at the end-point of Harry's entrained teleology of techno-supremacy – built, in its turn, on the confidence and purpose Harry derives from the 'fact' of Voldemort's incorrigible evil, as episodically revealed to him by Dumbledore throughout *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*. Dumbledore's induction, however, reveals an instability in his analysis, typical, to adapt Curthoys' argument, of those whose task it is to publicly explain that the threat of the fanatical Other may be amorphous but nevertheless soluble (the institution of on-going emergency powers at home and punitive expeditions abroad will fix it). Dumbledore, in his mentoring role, can be seen as attempting

to balance a rearguard defense of ... liberal humanist traditions, under threat from autocratic government measures, while entertaining a colonial discourse of

punishing and eradicating resistant indigenes. [Ellipses added] (Curthoys, 2004, p. 50)

Harry as the servant of conservatism

The prophecy which predicts the Dark Lord's downfall and drives Voldemort to attempt to kill Harry is simply nonsense, Dumbledore tells Harry:

Pointing at Harry with his black, withered hand, he said, 'You are setting too much store by the prophecy!.... If Voldemort had never heard of the prophecy, would it have been fulfilled? Would it have meant anything? Of course not!' [Ellipses added] (*HBP*, p. 476)

Finally relieved of the burden of superstition which has been his lot for the entire series, Harry is released from the coercions of fate and must reconsider his position. In this, he is informed by Dumbledore's exhortations, which both appeal to common sense and replace fate with an 'axis of evil', fundamentalist form of vengeance:

'If Voldemort had never murdered your father, would he have imparted in you a furious desire for revenge? Of course not! If he had not forced your mother to die for you, would he have given you a magical protection he could not penetrate? Of course not, Harry! Don't you see? Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do! Have you any idea how much tyrants everywhere fear the people they oppress? All of them realise that, one day, amongst their many victims, there is sure to be one who rises against them and strikes back!' (*HBP*, pp. 476-477)

Harry demurs: it all comes to the same thing; he must still try to kill Voldemort. Of course, exclaims Dumbledore; not because of the prophecy, but because Harry will never rest until he has tried. No longer fate's prisoner, Harry chooses. Taking moral justification from Voldemort's irremediable evil, he aspires to the mantle of avenging hero killer:

Harry watched Dumbledore striding up and down in front of him, and thought. He thought of his mother, his father and Sirius. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat.

‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’ (*HBP*, p. 478)

As a liberal humanist, Harry has been expertly positioned from the beginning by Dumbledore. In each of the first five books, Dumbledore has imparted core secular liberal humanist beliefs, which nevertheless resonate with Christian precepts. The first introduces a theme for which Dumbledore remains responsible throughout the series so far, and which is positioned to be crucial in the series’ resolution: the romance of maternal love – Marian, sacrificial, powerful, essentialised:

Your mother died to save you..... (L)ove as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin.’ [Initial ellipses added] (*PS*, p. 216)

In the next book, Dumbledore’s homily centres on the power of free will, or subjectivity self-assembled as an act of individual will: ‘It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.’ (*CoS*, p. 245).

Subsequently, a concept of eternal life resonant with Christian dogma is introduced:

‘You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him.’ (*PA*, p. 312)

Next, Dumbledore addresses the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, on the corruptions of power, the evils of discrimination, and the power of self-constructed subjectivity regardless of socio-cultural context:

‘You are blinded,’ said Dumbledore, his voice rising now, the aura of power around him palpable, his eyes blazing once more, ‘by the love of office you hold, Cornelius! You place too much importance, and you always have done, on

the so-called purity of blood! You fail to notice that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!’ (*GoF*, pp. 614-615)

Returning to the theme of love in the fifth novel, Dumbledore makes it integral, as befits the word’s etymology, to the hero’s courage:

‘There is a room in the Department of Mysteries,’ interrupted Dumbledore, ‘that is kept locked at all times. It contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than the forces of nature. It is also, perhaps, the most mysterious of the many subjects for study that reside there. It is the power held within that room that you possess in such quantities and which Voldemort has not at all. That power took you to save Sirius tonight. That power also saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests.... It was your heart that saved you.’ [Ellipses added] (*OoP*, p. 743)

Thus, Dumbledore has expounded stirringly and convincingly on themes marking a conventional liberal humanist education constitutive of an Enlightened, unitary subjectivity. In the sixth novel, however, Dumbledore’s moulding of Harry’s character increases its charge dramatically, transforming into a rite of passage entailing his confirmation in a patriarchal hierarchy of obedience and authority:

Dumbledore drew himself up to his full height.

‘I take you with me on one condition: that you obey any command I might give you at once, and without question.’

‘Of course.’

‘Be sure to understand me, Harry. I mean that you must follow even such orders as “run”, “hide” or “go back”. Do I have your word?’

‘I – yes, of course.’

‘If I tell you to hide, you will do so?’

‘Yes.’

‘If I tell you to flee, you will obey?’

‘Yes.’

‘If I tell you to leave me, and save yourself, you will do as I tell you?’

‘I –’

‘Harry?’

They looked at each other for a moment.

‘Yes, sir.’ (*HBP*, p. 514)

In practice, the rite parodies a Milgram's experiment in which obedience to higher authority is secured through the maintenance of the disciplines of torture (Milgram, 1974). Both famous and infamous, Milgram's experiments on obedience to authority were inspired by his interest in the pathologies of the Holocaust (Levine, 2004). He sought to explain why tens of thousands of ordinary Germans willingly provided their labour to the Nazi's massive program of exterminating human difference, hypothesising, contrary to disciplinary opinion, that the social norming of otherwise aberrant behaviour would be found in features of the situation rather than in individual psychology.

Milgram's experimental 'subjects' (in contemporary terms 'participants', a change partly influenced by the ethical revisions stimulated by the obedience experiments) comprised a diverse group of 40 adult men deemed psychologically normal. The subjects were required to apply (fake) electric shocks of increasing intensity to unseen 'learners' when they answered questions incorrectly. Despite the supposed learners' terrified screams, abject pleas for mercy and apparent lapses into morbid unconsciousness, 65 percent of the subjects, instructed by the experimenters not to desist, obediently increased the voltage up to its most lethal. The results also jolted the human behaviour disciplines, whose hypothetical estimates of how many would comply with such instructions proved heroic, varying from one percent to .001 percent (Levine, 2004).

Milgram (1974) concluded that situational circumstances so influence behaviour that ordinary people in the ordinary course of their duties could become compliant with, and agents of, horrific destructive processes. His implicit human model was constructed on the 'reactive individual', one who responds to social forces while believing himself independent of them. Regardless, therefore, of Dumbledore's insistence to Harry that the person he shows himself to be relies on his individual choices (CS, p. 245), the obedience experiments indicate that Harry's submission to socially sanctioned authority may well be more influential than some 'inner man' process. In *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*, Milgram's prediction appears to be vindicated.

Harry's initiatory trial is to make Dumbledore keep drinking the water which is apparently killing him, regardless of his pleas for mercy:

Harry was on his feet once more, refilling the goblet as Dumbledore began to scream in more anguish than ever, 'I want to die! I want to die! Make it stop, make it stop, I want to die!'

'Drink this, Professor, drink this...'

Dumbledore drank, and no sooner had he finished than he yelled, 'KILL ME!' 'This – this one will!' gasped Harry. 'Just drink this ... it'll all be over ... all over!' (*HBP*, p. 536)

That Harry succeeds in torturing Dumbledore signals a crucial wayplace in the adolescent male Bildungsroman. Harry has internalised the male authority figure, making it his own and graduating as a socially useful 'reactive individual', believing he operates under his own initiative while nevertheless obedient to social dicta. Dumbledore has done Harry a serious disservice by diminishing his ability to assess the demands of authority through the application of critical insight. Harry is now an automaton, a prisoner, of the intentions of the authoritarian hegemonic State: what critical vision he retains will be applied in its interests.

For his part, Dumbledore, a great proponent for the power of love, has ably demonstrated the utility of love and benevolence to the authoritarian State when its young are trained by those who lovingly and kindly guide them without critically interrogating either their own authority or the values of the State for which they are preparing the young; in other words, without a critical pedagogy. To revisit Robin's terms, Dumbledore evinces a perverted liberalism constituted by an ethical façade around a core of concretised privilege. While he mentors Harry in the terms of liberal humanism, and is himself venerated as a good and ethical person, he nevertheless presides over an institution – Hogwarts – constituted on powerful hierarchies, from a board of governors drawn from the most privileged members of society down to a troop of small, enslaved, infantilised people of difference, the elves, on whose unpaid labour and invisible presence the structure of concretised privilege apparently depends. The Dumbledore figure allows us, therefore, to question how good and evil can be described not as polar opposites but as tributaries of the same river. The character of Voldemort performs similar tasks.

Harry Potter's looming apocalypse

In opposition to the character of Dumbledore, the character of Voldemort, through reference to a doctrine of racial purity expressed in the desire for the supremacy of 'pure-bloods' and hatred of 'Mudbloods' and 'half-bloods' (of which Voldemort himself is one, as is Harry), signifies a fundamentalist position. A term of the 20th century, fundamentalism refers to the way long-held conservative religious beliefs, challenged by modernism, become associated with concretised beliefs in literalised versions of foundational texts (Marty, 2001, pp. 12119-13123), perceived threats to which commonly elicit defensive aggression.

Of the more than 100 book titles mentioned in the *Harry Potter* series, only one seems to constitute such a tract. *Nature's nobility: A wizarding genealogy* (*OoP*, p. 108) is kept in the gloomy and forbidding House of Black. This ironic name, which clearly refers to aristocratic white supremacism, adorns a decaying tapestry embroidered *The noble and most ancient House of Black: 'toujours pur'* (*OoP*, p. 103). Despite the apparent paucity of foundational tracts, the ideology of racial purity is clearly well-known, given the outraged response of other students when Draco Malfoy calls Hermione a 'filthy little Mudblood' (*CoS*, p. 86).

According to a popularly accepted timeline, Tom Riddle may well have formed his desire to destroy 'impurities' in the wizarding world at roughly the same time as Hitler was maturing his plan for the 'great and proper task' of the annihilation of the Slavic people through the Eastern Front (Ahmad, 2004). Rowling (2005b), in a curious temporal inversion, has stated that after she devised the series' genealogical distinctions, she viewed museum material outlining the National Socialists' genealogical distinctions and was 'chilled to see that the Nazis used precisely the same warped logic as the Death Eaters.'

Beliefs about apocalypse predate Christianity and occur in other religions, while secular sources located in popular culture and 'new age' practices are common. The term 'apocalypse' refers to the revelation, to a particular chosen or privileged person or

group, of extreme events, futures and mysteries hidden from the mass of people; it is often conflated to refer to both the prophecy and the catastrophic event. Voldemort's Death Eaters, inner arms marked by a skull, invoke resonances with the death camp apocalypses presided over by Hitler's forces.

Apocalyptic events are favoured in the *Harry Potter* series by Sybill Trelawney, the Divination teacher, through whom New Age spiritualism, and by implication, apocalypticism, is satirised:

Harry's immediate impression was of a large, glittering insect. Professor Trelawney moved in the firelight, and they saw that she was very thin; her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size, and she was draped in a gauzy spangled shawl. Innumerable chains and beads hung around her spindly neck, and her arms and hands were encrusted with bangles and rings. (*PoA*, p. 79).

Professor Trelawney's first name refers to the sibyls, mythical female seers and prophets who prophesied under the influence of Apollo, while her surname may comprise an obverse play on the ancient but widely known Cornish proverb which contains the words: 'And shall Trelawny die?' The proverb is thought to refer to Sir Jonathon Trelawny, one of seven Protestant bishops imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1687 (Carey, n.d.).

Professor Trelawney is renowned for the unendearing habit of incorrectly prophesying the death of one student in each commencing class each year (*PoA*, p. 84). She does, however, in two moments of uncharacteristic and apparently genuine trance state, make two powerful and accurate predictions: one relating to Voldemort's resurrection (*PoA*, p. 238), and the other foretelling an apocalyptic battle between Voldemort and the only boy who has the power to vanquish him (*OoP*, p. 741).

The disclosure of this latter prophecy segues to the final chapter in *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix* entitled 'The second war begins'. This chapter confirms

the implications of Armageddon, the mythical final or decisive battle between good and evil predicted in the *New testament*, immanent from the beginning of the series and openly confirmed by Harry at the end of *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince* (p. 606) when he affirms his intention to kill Voldemort. Foretold as the climax of the final novel in the series, Harry's Armageddon has a 21st century parallel in the increasingly terroristic deployment, both State-sanctioned and guerrilla-driven, of weapons of mass destruction.

Apocalyptic currents in contemporary politics

Like ideas of apocalypse, ideas of the millennium and Armageddon have deep and ancient roots in many cultures. In Christianity, the story is well known as the apocalyptic prophecy of the end of the world and the salvation of the righteous, the millennium or thousand following years of bliss in which Jesus and the faithful will rule on earth, and the final destruction of Satan and the institution of the rule of God in the ultimate battle of Armageddon.

Hindu, Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions participate in stories of end-time catastrophe; stories which call on earlier primitive mythologies about a fiery end to the world from which the 'good' escape unharmed (Lifton, 1999, p. 22). In Western cultures, the particular influence of the Christian *New testament book of revelation* or the *Book of apocalypse* (in particular chapters six, 11, and 20) means that the word commonly carries the sense of divine prophecies which incorporate eschatological beliefs such as the advent of judgment day, the resurrection of the dead, the 'rapture' of the deserving, and the dispositions of heaven and hell (Weber, 1999, p. 232). In the USA, apocalyptic belief is noted for its racist and misogynistic tendencies (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005; Quinby, 1999). Common in literature, film and television, ideas of apocalypse permeate the *Harry Potter* series through a discourse invested in the binary play of good and evil, and expounded through the trope of Harry, as the 'chosen one', bringing peace to wizarding society through the prophesied violent confrontation with Voldemort.

Apocalyptic language and material is characteristically arcane and mysterious, usually accorded meaning in hindsight, as in Sybill Trelawney's prophecy before Harry's July birth:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies... (OoP, p. 741)

Dumbledore points to the fundamentalist and self-fulfilling nature of apocalyptic belief by emphasising that Voldemort's error is to believe in and act on the prophecy, thereby endowing it with a falsely obtained truth (OoP, pp. 742-743).

According to Weber (1999, p. 232), apocalyptic and millennial visions were developed and promoted not by the oppressed and disinherited, but set deep into Western consciousness by élites. Proponents included church leaders, scholars and social figures who propounded a range of religious, social, secular and scientific apocalypses from early Christianity onward through the Middle Ages, the Puritan revolution and the Enlightenment. The secular scientific apocalypse extends from Paracelsus to Rachel Carson's *Silent spring* (1962), the latter instrumental in inaugurating a contemporary eco-apocalyptic genre; Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or survive* (2005) is a 21st century example.

Weber (1999) alleges that Christian scholars, immersed in the Enlightenment demands of rationalism, have minimised the apocalyptic message over the last two centuries because of a misunderstanding of the cultural power of the Bible and a rejection of the lurid violence of prophecy, instead according preference to the cooler tempers of rationalism; but rationalism, he writes:

did not mean rationality; secularism easily adjusted to magic, mysticism, and astrology; and a diet of second-hand, second-rate religion substitutes created more demand for religious revival and revitalization. (Weber, 1999, p. 232)

In conformity with this view, Stephen Snobelen (2003) states that while contemporary thought constructs rationality and irrationality as polar opposites, many scholars now regard the influence on modern science of early modern religion, apocalypticism, and even occult thought, as creative. For example, the father of modern science, Isaac Newton, learned in theology, prophecy, and alchemy as well as mathematics, optics and physics, was an apocalyptic thinker who employed biblical hermeneutics to muse fulsomely on end-time chronologies (Snobelen, 2003; Wilson, 2004). One of Newton's characteristic musings, that the events of the Apocalypse might begin in 2060, caused a sensation when it was revealed in a documentary in 2003; the 21st century lay mind being apparently less amenable to the idea of the creative connection thought to exist between the imagination and rationalist science than at a time when magic and science were more closely contiguous (Snobelen, 2003).

The benign impact of apocalyptic ideas also assists to explain such phenomena as the anti-nuclear movement, which has used imaginative representations of a global nuclear end to encourage an anti-nuclear political constituency (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995b, p. 352). In like vein, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or the modern Prometheus*, published in 1818, explored the idea of hubristic human neglect of the destructive potentials of technology, thereby inaugurating a period of literary speculations on the possibilities of techno-apocalypse (Lifton, 1999, p. 22).

Thus, ideas of apocalypse may operate on a continuum of effects from benign, in drawing attention to the need for socially ameliorative policies, to malign. In this latter case, obdurate commitments to eschatological ideas and the political and technical power to realise end-time have tended to articulate in historical recency, potentially generative of political fear. For instance, John Swomley (1999, pp. 8-9), in reviewing Grace Halsell's 1999 book *Prophecy and politics*, recapitulates that the USA religious Right's support of the tripartite formed by the military-industrial complex, Zionism, and the USA hyper-armoury is related to Armageddon theology, in turn underlying Ronald Reagan's attitude to military spending and his coolness to all proposals for nuclear disarmament. Again, Nazism was the most significant and frightening millennial movement of the 20th century, according to Raymond Sickinger (2001, p. 188), and the Holocaust was a kind of Armageddon. Hitler's plans for a scorched earth end for the

German people (*Götterdämmerung*) and his own actualised self-immolation articulated with his apocalyptic, millenarian, and fundamentalist beliefs (Lifton, 1999, p. 163; Sickinger, 2001).

In contemporary terms, apocalyptic belief may be deeply entrenched in the culture of the global 'superpower', the USA, where about one-quarter of the population is reported to hold Christian fundamentalist views (Quinby, 1999, pp. 1079-1080). In 2005, political and satirical essayist Lewis Lapham (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005) counted among born-again Christians President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the then majority leader of the House of Representatives, Tom DeLay, and 130 other Representatives. Accordingly, the presidency bears marks of the apocalyptic which influence ambient global themes of apocalypse and weigh on the lives of *Harry Potter's* readers.

In the vein of the Captain America heroic and folk tale tradition in which might is right, the Bush presidency has been notable for favouring power over law, proclaiming its willingness to act outside the norms of international law to claim a right of pre-emptive attack against other nations (Cooper, 2004b, pp. 25-26; Holding, 2004, pp. 10-11). Further, the USA has stated its preparedness to use 'mini nukes' in battle, and has nullified, at least temporarily, an emerging doctrine supporting lawful intervention on humanitarian grounds in cases of ethnic cleansing or imminent large scale loss of life (Holding, pp. 10-11).

Events both before and after the World Trade Centers collapse, which was widely perceived in the USA as an apocalyptic event, proved capable of exploiting the confusions between lived experience, fantasy and virtuality in favour of Western military hegemony. War against Iraq by the USA and its British, Australian and other allies produced super-sensory estrangement effects through elements as diverse, sophisticated and banal as high technology weaponry, which has the effect of distancing aggressors from the results of their actions; image-condensing cruise-missiles; 'embedded' (widely regarded as co-opted) journalism; and a USA government ban on the display of images of flag-draped coffins. Taken together, such practices allow for

the fantasy of a war without casualties, lending weight to the idea that globalised Western military hegemony relies on and cultivates cultural denial and ‘dumbing-down’ in the constitution of domestic political compliance (Cooper, 2004a, p. 49).

James Hatfield (2000) holds that Bush, as an iconic product of both his own agency, of political advisers, and of an élite global political and corporate network in which several generations of the Bush family have participated, reproduces the heritage of Captain America and the Apocalyptic tradition through the production of himself as hero. Dominant and emerging ideologies are thus shaped according to the conservative sentiment of which Bush is the apotheotic representative.

Religion as a presence in contemporary politics

Arthur Kroker (2005a) is one of several writers, including Quinby (1999) and Lifton (1999), to extend this position. The heroic positionings of the president distinguish the current American imperial project as focused on end-time, Kroker asserts. In his view, the United States’ historical Puritan background – like Voldemort, inexorably returning to life – constitutes the foundational creed of contemporary American politics.

The 17th century Puritans emerging from the ocean at Plymouth Rock brought two psychic precursors of faith-based American politics: a biblical spirit infused with feelings of discipline and revenge, implacable in its repression of the body and its hatred of existence; and a yearning for salvation from a sinful world (Kroker, 2005b). Burgeoning ‘New Protestantism’, backed by literalist interpretations of the foundational texts of the *Old Testament*, constitutes a unique intertwining of fundamentalist religion and increasingly cyberneticised imperialist forms of global warfare which structure the moral vision of American politics in the 21st century. These currents may, Kroker (2005b) predicts, constitute a ‘great overturning’. The New Protestant ethic is

(a)nimated by apocalyptic visions of the days of wrath announcing the Second Coming of Christ, motivated by feverish aspirations to be counted among the

spiritually elect in the coming age of division between the “Predestined” and the “Left Behind”, witness to the vengeful spirit of the Old Testament, (and) literal in its biblical rebellion against pluralism... [Ellipses added] (Kroker, 2005b).

Christian fundamentalism is a pervasive cultural narrative in Texas, the place of George W. Bush’s upbringing (McEnteer, 2004). Many writers have commented on Bush’s profession of faith and his utilisation of religious language, including his apocalyptic subtexts. His second inaugural address was notable for its acknowledgment of his belief in end-time, in a second coming of Christ (Suellentrop, 2005). A renowned drinker in his earlier years, Bush eventually renounced alcohol at the age of 40, under the alternative influence of evangelist Billy Graham (Hatfield, 2000, p. 71). Bush is said to read the Bible avidly, referring to it as a ‘pretty good political handbook’ (Hatfield, p. 227). Bush’s belief in his own divine predestination is identified by a number of his confidants, who have revealed that Bush was motivated to run for presidential office by biblical teachings, and that he understands himself as being addressed personally by God (Hatfield, p. 227; O’Donnell, 2004, p. 13).

O’Donnell (2004, p. 12) notes three persistent aspects of Bush’s religious rhetoric implying an apocalyptic worldview: his definition of the ‘war on terror’ as a war between ‘good’ and ‘evil’; his perception that these are unprecedented times calling for unprecedented responses; and his belief in being chosen to lead during this time. O’Donnell explains:

These three themes, which can be traced across many of Bush’s public statements, find symbolic resonance in key themes of the Biblical book of Revelation. It narrates the calling of prophets and leaders, a cataclysmic battle between the good ‘Lamb’ and the evil ‘beast’, and the saving of a remnant after a time of cataclysm and tribulation. Much of this symbolic battle is expressed in socio-political language of empires at war. (O’Donnell, 2004, p. 12)

American exceptionalism – the sense of a country chosen by God to hold a special place in the world – has a long history; Bush’s sense of mission is perhaps, however, unusually heroic. His second inaugural speech has been described as messianic, and his claim in it that ‘America’s vital interests and deepest beliefs are now

one' is challenging (Kroker, 2005b). Both O'Donnell (2004, p. 14) and Kroker speculate that Bush may be consciously attending to an end-time scenario dependent on key events prophesied in the *Old Testament*.

Based on the Middle East, these events include the reunification of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon on Temple Mount. More succinctly, according to Killgore (1999, p. 122), zealots who want to force God's hand and activate their own quick 'Rapture' (ascension) and Armageddon are demanding the destruction of the Temple of Solomon – 'Jerusalem's most holy Islamic shrine' – in order that the temple may be rebuilt, animal sacrifice resume, and a Jewish throne prepared for Jesus Christ and the institution of *Old testament* rituals. 'Could it be that in the contemporary political juncture,' inquires Kroker (2005b):

American exceptionalism is less understandable in terms of traditional political imperialism than a violent effort to breed the objective worldwide crisis necessary to biblical revelation, to the Moment of Rapture?

The religious right's impact on governmental social welfare distributions

The interpolation of highly conservative religious forms into the operations of the State remodels social justice practices. During his 1999 presidential campaign, Bush promised to rally 'armies of compassion' (meaning social and religious agencies) and release them from inhibiting regulations so as to assist the government in helping people in need (Hatfield, 2000, p. 277). Despite the separation of church and State under the United States' constitution, the Bush administration established the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives that has channelled billions of dollars to religious organisations which deliver religion along with services (Holding, 2005, pp. 40-41). In 2004, the organisation announced that \$40 billion was available for distribution, while more than \$65 billion was available to religious groups from over a hundred Federal programs. Other funds were also available from State programs. Barbara Ehrenreich (in Holding, 2005, p. 40) claims that the favoured evangelical churches have become an alternative welfare State, accomplices to the deliberate destruction of the secular welfare State. Jude McCulloch (2003, p. 35) elaborates this perspective as marking

the rise of the strong or authoritarian state – a shift from welfare to warfare state..... States no longer willing or able to provide the services and structures that support society are increasingly focussed on their coercive capacities. [Ellipses added]

In Australia, links between conservative politics and the rising religious right are obvious in the Howard Government's relationship with the evangelical Pentecostal Hillsong Church based in Sydney's north-western suburbs. The church belongs to the Pentecostal Assemblies of God denomination burgeoning in the southern USA and South America (Howden, 2005), transforming Africa's religious maps, and making a distinctive spiritual, social and economic impact in parts of Asia (O'Toole, 2001, p. 13108). Its 18000 strong Christian congregation represents the largest single congregation in Australia in a church which claims 200,000 members. Attendances are said to have risen by 30 per cent in the last decade while attendances of Australia's largest religion, Catholicism, are said to have dropped by 13 per cent (Wendt, 2005).

In similar vein to the southern USA pastors, Hillsong founder and Pastor Brian Houston preaches on network television in Australia and is broadcast to another 120 countries. Houston, who preaches a 'prosperity gospel' (the more you give, the more you get), has published a book titled *You need more money*. He estimates the church's income in 2004 as \$40 million (Howden, 2005; Wendt, 2005). This amount included more than \$800,000 in grants from Federal government departments in the previous five years (Howden, 2005), ostensibly to deliver community welfare services.

The place of apocalypse, religion and politics in *Harry Potter*

Through processes such as those above, religious influences, particularly institutional religion, and the ideas of religious eschatology overtly shape the political worlds of Harry Potter's readers. However, in distinction to the highly organised, instrumentalising model of religion afforded by Pentecostalism, the *Harry Potter* texts are suffused by an inchoate pattern of 'spiritual identity'.

According to S. Collins (2001, pp. 13051-13054), research suggests three broad patterns of relationship between religion and identity among young Western people.

‘Secular’ identity refers to those who adopt a utilitarian rational world view, developing identity through material consumption and close relationships with family and friends. ‘Religious’ identity describes those who belong to an established religious organisation, often evangelical, and who derive identity from religious belief, a powerful sense of group belonging and charismatic experience. Those in the ‘spiritual’ mode, however, treat religion with comparative eclecticism, able to decontextualise, reinterpret, and juxtapose apparently contradictory religious symbols without any sense of conflict:

Religious truth and certainty is judged according to subjective experience and utility – if it feels right, or meets an individual’s needs, then it is ‘true’. This type of religiosity requires little commitment to any particular tradition and the individual can easily move from one set of beliefs and practices to another. (S. Collins, 2001, p. 13053)

Conforming to ‘New Age’ philosophies, such influences permeate the *Harry Potter* texts in covert and implicit ways. In these processes, religious ideologies conform with the transformations of postindustrialism and postmodernity in which institutional forms cede to diffused religious attitudes. Neo-capitalist globalising processes including individualisation, privatisation, and fragmentation mean religion is increasingly seen instrumentally, as a broad, pliant, cultural resource at the disposal of autonomous individuals (O’Toole, 2001, pp. 13110-13111). Thus, Rowling’s texts reproduce the interests of contemporary youth in supernatural phenomena, non-traditional beliefs and ‘folk’ religion (S. Collins, 2001, p. 13051), utilising bricolage, pastiche and ‘mix and match’ in the constitution of religious references. For instance, Professor Trelawney’s mysticism, which is a characteristic of scripture-based religions, also invokes oral religious traditions which practise shamanism, vision quests, spirit possession and mediumship.

This apparent permissiveness, however, is belied by the implication of Harry’s increasing ability to transcend biology through the use of magical technologies; indeed the scene is set, as many apocalyptic texts suggest, for a final battle in which technological supremacy wins. From this perspective, it is useful to consider Thomas Luckmann’s thesis of ‘invisible religion’, in which religion, as stated above, occurs not as an institutionalised source of authoritative meanings, but as diffuse and implicit

forms. Luckmann is not relying here on a substantive definition of religion, in which elusive phenomena such as the sacred, transcendent, supernatural or superempirical are central. Rather, he calls on a functional definition, which represents religion as a crucial source of social cohesion by which human beings are assisted to adapt to their earthly environment and which mythologises ultimate questions of meaning and existence (O'Toole, 2001, p. 13107). Luckmann (1967, p. 49) effectively asserts that the human organism's desire to transcend biological nature is a religious phenomenon. The idea of secularisation, the progressive social decay of religion, gives way here to the recuperation of religion as formatively but abstrusely linked to processes of subjectification worked out in relation to transcendence as desire.

In the *Harry Potter* series, the desire for supremacy over the body is represented by technology made magic, allowing Harry's body to heal from otherwise fatal injuries (such as being deboned) and augmenting the body with increasingly sophisticated weaponry as the Armageddon of the series approaches. In this way, technoculture represented in the *Harry Potter* series privileges hegemonic masculinist values of indestructibility, omnipotence and military supremacy. Quinby (1999) ironically dubs such a culture 'virile-reality', pointing to the saturation of many new technologies with apocalyptic and millennialist desires, along with the masculinist dispositions characteristic of those ideologies. Harry's acquisition of magical skills in preparation for the defeat of Voldemort approximates to what Haraway (1997, p. 8) has called 'secular technoscientific salvation stories full of promise.'

The thriving of adolescents

The subtext to this discussion in the context of increasing global tension is the question: what conditions are required to allow adolescents to thrive? Addressing this concern, retiring North American associate editor of the *Journal of Adolescence*, Alan S. Waterman, has drawn attention to changes in research on adolescence over the 15 year period of his editorial service. As a gatekeeper between manuscript and publication, Waterman (2005, in press, p. 681) reasonably claims to hold a more representative exposure than the reader to current published and unpublished work in North America. On this ground, he observes that the number of manuscripts submitted

for publication has increased markedly, not only for the *Journal of Adolescence* but for other similar journals. The increase may be partly attributable to corporatised academia's amplified stimulus to publish, assisted by the ready availability in the United States of research funds specifically for the study of adolescent problem behaviours. However, Waterman's judgment is that a greater stimulus has come from 'the continuing, even increasing, vexation that schools, police, and other governmental agencies have with adolescents'; in other words, from deficit attributions to the individual.

Waterman's opinion tends to confirm that a number of the institutional discourses which articulate in the construction of 'childhood' are attempting to intervene in its conditions of possibility: that is, seeking to transform the mode of existence of the discourse of childhood and adolescence by intervening at the levels of its emergence, insertion and particularly, in this instance, in its functioning (Foucault, 1978, p. 21). Indeed, as noted previously, Catherine Lumby (2001b, p. 219) asserts that adult responses to assumed crises of adolescence may signify critical temporal nodes for 'major shifts in the discursive boundaries which organise the relationship between age, knowledge and cultural power.'

Waterman nevertheless takes issue with the direction of research which has influenced the research narrative of the *Journal of Adolescence*. The sheer volume of behavioural studies, Waterman (2005, in press, p. 682) states, could create the impression that problem behaviours are at the heart of the adolescent developmental process. This view is misplaced, he asserts, and in his period as editor the journal has received too few studies from a 'positive psychology' perspective (exemplified, for instance, by the work of Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi¹⁴).

However useful it is to know what can go *wrong* with development, Waterman holds, it is potentially more valuable to know what to *support* in adolescents to promote their thriving:

Thriving implies not only a sense of well being about oneself but the capacity and desire to contribute to one's community.... When adolescents feel they are coping successfully with the inevitable stresses of adolescence, when they feel they are preparing themselves for a successful adulthood, and when they feel they have something of value to offer to their communities, i.e. when adolescents thrive, they have the least need for the use of drugs, the least need for driven, inappropriate sexual activities, and the least need for bullying or the making of invidious social comparisons. Adolescents who are thriving should be the least likely to engage in those behaviours that might jeopardize their future. [Ellipses added] (Waterman, 2005, in press, p. 682)

It seems reasonable to propose, in that light, that a cultural preoccupation with the adolescent as problematic may be ill-directed when the future of humanity as a whole is represented as jeopardised by global instabilities narrated vividly every day on the screen. Additionally, it seems reasonable to suppose that the capacity to thrive may be affected by such an environment; which makes Richard Fenn's view especially poignant:

The young represent the irreversibility of time; they pose a standing threat of innovation and change. Therefore, most, perhaps all, social systems try to initiate the young into a story that spans the generations and incorporates the living and the dead into a spiritual community that transcends time. (Fenn, 2003, p. 110)

In an environment of apparent threatened extinction, Fenn's comment bears on the question of what kinds of stories are being presented to children, and whether these are able to carry out the work of linking generations across time while justifying confidence in the continuation of linear history. The question particularly applies to the *Harry Potter* series because of its globally distributed influence.

How Harry thrives

Although Harry gets tired and dispirited from time to time, he nevertheless thrives on the dangerous, exciting tasks presented to him. For differing reasons, however, some adults attempt to shelter him from the exigencies of his time in history.

¹⁴ Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychology*, 55, 1-14.

The malevolent Dolores Umbridge, a Voldemort plant, seeks to minimise perceptions of Voldemort's return:

Professor Umbridge looked up.

'This is school, Mr Potter, not the real world,' she said softly.

'Oh, yeah?' said Harry. His temper ... was reaching boiling point.

'Who do you imagine wants to attack children like yourselves?' enquired Professor Umbridge in a horribly honeyed voice. [Ellipses added] (*OoP*, p. 220)

On the other hand, the benevolent Molly Weasley furiously attempts to protect Harry from knowledge of the developing conflict between Voldemort's forces and Dumbledore loyalists (*OoP*, pp. 84-91). Even Dumbledore – who has the most crucial piece of information affecting Harry's life, knowledge of the prophecy by which Voldemort is impelled to kill Harry – finally confesses his struggles with preserving Harry's happiness and peace of mind against according him knowledge of his likely violent death:

'I cared about you too much,' said Dumbledore simply. 'I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act.... What did I care if numbers of nameless and faceless people and creatures were slaughtered in the vague future, if in the here and now you were alive, and well, and happy?' [Ellipses added] (*OoP*, p. 739)

In this passage, Dumbledore clarifies the Western contemporary dilemma of both parent and school: how to adequately prepare young people for life in times of increasing global tension in which large numbers of lives may be arbitrarily extinguished at any moment. His confession invokes the moral responsibilities of critical pedagogy by implying the failure of love which denies full information, and the potentially horrific consequences of thereby denying a generation the possibility of critically debating its own future. Postman (1995, pp. 101-102), as noted previously, claims to pinpoint the consequences for education of failing to balance protection against potential socio-cultural exclusion despite a subjectively, if not objectively, frightening socio-cultural milieu.

Dumbledore's confession also implies a controversial moral ideology in the context of an individualistic, hedonistic society: the value of individual sacrificial death (Harry's) in the preservation of other lives. This is the Socratic argument also made by Sirius Black in relation to Harry's parents, that it is better to suffer than surrender to evil:

'What was there to be gained by fighting the most evil wizard who has ever existed?' said Black, with a terrible fury in his face.

'Only innocent lives, Peter!'

'You don't understand!' whined Pettigrew. 'He would have killed me, Sirius!'

'THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!' roared Black. 'DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!'

(*PoA*, p. 275)

Dumbledore's confession further raises the question of the directness of the relationship between the objective existence of threat, the denial of crucial knowledge and the production of 'dumbing down'; the same issue raised by Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell when they discuss the esoterics of the USA's nuclear history.

WMD and the loss of critical capacity

(T)hough fear of mass death or *total death* has been an imaginative possibility for centuries (as seen in the myths of the end of the world in so many cultures), total death as a real possibility is a new phenomenon produced by twentieth century violence. (Lenz, 1990, p. 7)

The crucial problem facing human society now, as it has been for half a century, is to prevent the recurrence of nuclear war. There has been only one episode of nuclear war so far – the atomic bomb dropped on Japan in 1945, at a time when the killing power of a nuclear weapon was no greater than that of a heavy conventional air raid. The nuclear arsenal now has the capacity to wipe out human life. (R. W Connell, 2003)

The 20th century and its impact on the present may be incomprehensible without understanding the impact of the Allied bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the conclusion of World War II (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995a, p. xi). The

nuclear bomb was the first use of a weapon of mass destruction; that is, a weapon with the capability of wreaking death and injury on a mass scale never before experienced.

Lifton and Mitchell (1995b) postulate that witnesses who survived the bombing of Hiroshima developed a form of denial termed 'psychic numbing'. Experienced as a severe emotional detachment, numbing has the effect of protecting the mind against mental breakdown consequent on events too terrible to cope with at the time. The condition is not only individual, according to Lifton and Mitchell: psychic numbing extends into culture. Cultural numbness serves to protect the American cultural consciousness, and by implication the Western cultural consciousness, from the full realisation of moral culpability in relation to the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One postulated consequence is the tendency to think narrowly, to reduce the cognitive and imaginative range; in other words, a tendency towards secular fundamentalism.

Lifton and Mitchell (1995b) assert that nuclear denial has contaminated the American mind with manifold results. According to these researchers, the official policy of successive United States governments has been to manipulate media and public responses, resulting in widespread insensitivity to the bomb's human effects. Media manipulation has included the suppression of images and stories which originated with Japanese at the site, denial of the effects of radiation on the Japanese people, and denial of radiation effects in relation to the nuclear industry within the United States itself. At the same time, Americans have attempted to justify the World War II decision by finding virtue in pre-emption.

In summary, deception has moulded the American polity (and by implication, the polity of its World War II allies, including Australia):

Hiroshima was the mother of all cover-ups: it spawned patterns of distortion, manipulation, and concealment that have contaminated American life ever since – from Vietnam to Watergate to the Iran-Contra affair. We have to ask ourselves how much of our rising mistrust of politicians and officials of all kinds – the angry cynicism so evident in our public life – emanates from the Hiroshima and post-Hiroshima nuclear deceptions. (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995a, p. 59).

Inveigled into leaving all thinking about ‘the bomb’ to political, scientific and military leaders – the ‘nuclear priesthood’ – Americans have become accustomed to bowing out of the most critical debate of the age, and thereafter have established a pattern of alienation from subsequent critical public debates, according to Lifton and Mitchell (1995c). They claim that while governments attempt to control not only the story of Hiroshima, but also subsequent nuclear arsenals and history itself, ordinary Americans lose the sense of controlling their own destinies and futures. In psychoanalytic terms, displacement, projection and transference may then figure in narratives implicating adolescents in anomie, despair, alienation and fragmentation.

In popular cultural texts, the adolescent figure can be made to carry cultural fears and moral denial. In this respect, Kirk Curnutt and Richard Benjamin trace distinct changes in adolescent popular texts of the late 20th century, Curnutt in USA fictional novels, Benjamin in USA films. In contrast, reviewing early 21st century Australian adolescent fiction, Wendy Michaels traces recuperative changes in some texts, away from John Marsden’s late 20th century dystopian post-apocalyptic realism towards a hybrid form of realism incorporating the imaginative arts as renewal.

Blameworthy adults and damaged children

Curnutt (2001) traces the change in coming-of-age teenage novels between the middle of the 20th century and its last two decades. In stories of the 1950s and 1960s, many influenced by J. D. Salinger’s *The catcher in the rye* (1951), Curnutt describes the chief protagonists as troubled and rebellious adolescents who resist adult hypocrisy and sham and are driven by idealism and moral intent. In novels of the 1980s and 1990s, however, the main characters become solipsistic, blank, reticent, aimless and morally detached: ‘Instead of confronting adult hypocrisy with unfettered idealism,’ Curnutt (2001, p. 94) comments, ‘these adolescents are emotionally and morally obtuse.’ Works of this time exploit a populist fear of atavism, of an emotional detachment so severe that young people revert to lives of pure sensation (Curnutt, 2001, p. 91).

For example, Donna Tartt's fictional novel *The secret history* exploits such a fear when a group of honours students from a privileged American university kill a hapless interloper during a Bacchanalian enactment. Their subsequent descriptions of the scene seem blandly detached and indifferent; in the terms of psychology, they demonstrate flattened affect. Accordingly, the group's leader describes killing as simply 'redistribution of matter' (Tartt, 1992, p. 284), establishing a moral vacuity which supports him in claiming that he is entitled to do whatever he wishes without retribution. In fact, while the students are aware of their inability to feel remorse, the flatness of their affective states diverts the authorities and the crime remains undetected, although not unconfessed. Significantly, the adult to whom it is confessed – their sole educator, at least partly implicated in their behaviour through his teaching – washes his hands of the students, their offences, and his own complicity.

Absent adults and vile youth

Benjamin (2004) notices associated changes in young adult films of the 1990s, in particular the emergence of a subgenre he names 'youth apocalyptic'. Describing the subgenre as dark and extremely violent, Benjamin states that the films are obsessed with a scatology of the adolescent body, which is violated but also disruptive:

In these films, the young body literally erupts or is pulverized. The white youths depicted are pathologically violent and shockingly indifferent to the present or future. Indeed, their very identity formation as white youths is *predicated* on the pursuit of pathological violence and ecstasy. (Benjamin, 2004, p. 34)

An apolitical anomie fuels teen murder in the apocalyptic subgenre, which thrives on political apathy, senseless violence, murder fantasies and unmotivated contrived rebel stances devoid of stated material or political cause. Adolescents engage extreme violence in these films as a form of ecstasy that offers momentary and explosive power, liberation from the alternative urban dystopia. The violence itself has either transitory or null meaning, becoming not simply the symptom or product of the dystopian social order, but 'the mechanism guaranteeing its replication' (Benjamin, 2004, p. 36).

Reproducing a more extreme version of the discrimination against youth complained of by Waterman, violent youth becomes marked as the cause, not the symptom, of social ills. The adolescent body becomes the site of cinematically displaced social anxieties about violence, disorder, anomie and decay, simultaneously representing a crisis of teen subjectivity and validating Foucault's proposition that the body is the ultimate venue for the practice of novel ideologies; recalling that the particular novelty in question here is an actualised planetary Armageddon. In complex ways, youth apocalypse films such as *Kids* (1995) and *The basketball diaries* (1995) reflect a primordial and technologised adolescent body, a zone of affective intensity and an anchoring point for the articulation of passions and desire:

(T)he intensity and aesthetics of this subgenre, with its masochism and abjection, present these bodies both as symptoms of social relations and as possible alternatives to those relations – as ecstatic pleasure or personal resistance. (Benjamin, 2004, p. 47)

While mid-century protagonists rebel against too much parental authoritarianism in their lives, the millennial protagonists' malaise is related to the *lack* of parental authority, to the absent, self-absorbed, materialistic parent, referred to previously in kinder terms (Manne, 2003, , 2005). Resolution in a number of novels involves various forms of family repair, but Curnutt (2001, p. 106) rejects such resolutions as sociological simplification. A great unsatisfied hunger exists, he asserts, for narratives that explain the deep, diffused crises of society and culture which confront contemporary adolescents. The adolescent Bildungsroman has exhausted the power of sensationalism and nostalgia and must now rise above its 'teenage wasteland aesthetic', he states, to acknowledge the diverse processes by which agentic adolescents engage the conditions of their generation. 'Only then will the coming-of-age novel itself come of age', Curnutt (2001, p. 106) concludes.

Marsden's culpable adults, Michaels' helpful adults

Along the lines for which Curnutt calls, Wendy Michaels detects a possible change in Australian young adult fiction in the early 21st century. During the latter decades of the 20th century, John Marsden's grittily realistic genre led in featuring culpable, ineffectual, if not evil, adults after whom heroic teenagers picked up the pieces

of a post-apocalyptic dystopian world. Marsden's teenage characters typically reprised the liberal humanist mould which represents an Enlightenment view of subjectivity – the fixed, unified self (Michaels, 2004, p. 56).

In contrast, the five post-millennium novels examined by Michaels (all written by women) appear to represent a new trend in which subjectivity and identity are seen as on-going projects of social construction. Rather than extreme dystopian or post-apocalyptic settings (Michaels, 2004, p. 51), adolescent characters exist in mundane social contexts marked by ordinary quotidian routines. Parent and teacher figures, while dealing with their own flawed lives, demonstrate care and concern for the young (Michaels, p. 52). The novels indicate the contributions adolescents themselves make to the traumatic events and incidents of their lives, and through intertextual references to literary, artistic, musical and popular culture, suggest the importance of art and literature – that is, the socio-cultural imagination – as essential tools in young people's self constructions (Michaels, p. 57).

Harry will, of course, defeat Voldemort because he is, after all, just a character in a book. We have grounds to consider this a tragic outcome, and to feel concerned for how it may position Harry's readers to distinguish heroic undertakings in their own worlds. Harry's heroism has been moulded by a number of influences: political fear, an ersatz liberal humanism, the superficial storying of history, militaristic hegemonic masculinity, a failure of critical pedagogy and a lack of critical literacy. Unlike the adolescent characters in Michaels' review, Harry's approach to literature is instrumentalist. The school does not appear to have an arts or music program to stimulate the socio-cultural imagination, and his engagement with popular culture seems to be focussed on consumption of sport and sporting goods.

Harry is, in effect, caught in a literary time warp in which comfortable, albeit now potentially fatal, old ways persist, unable to acknowledge increasingly complex socio-cultural contexts. Technological fundamentalism – an overreliance on and belief in technosalvation – may have produced a 'dumbing-down' effect on Harry in the absence of a critical pedagogy seeking to construct meaningful understanding from a

wide variety of sources (Quinton, 2003). Cooper fears that global society, under the kinds of influences mentioned above, is moving towards a culture:

that is incapable of grounding a genuine peace. A culture circumscribed by new laws and surveillance techniques that close us off from the possibility of co-existence with others. A culture that exacerbates a sense of inside and outside through high-tech forms of integration, a media that seems more about closing off dissent than engaging in debate, and anti-terror laws that overturn basic rights and liberties as if we were in a permanently war-like situation. All these processes mutually reinforce each other and make a situation where perpetual war – as a globalised policing of dissent, opposition and difference, as well as terrorism – becomes acceptable. (Cooper, 2003, p. 7)

Although we are given reasons to remain hopeful that love and compassion will transfigure the looming apocalypse, there is as yet little evidence that Harry, positioned as a conservative stool-pigeon, will get the education he needs to break free of his measure of compliance with processes which may generate a state of permanent war.

The next chapter explores the ways of the warrior hero, the performance of hegemonic martial masculinities, the assistance of hegemonic femininities and some implications for school literacy learning.

CHAPTER 5

Hero

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his [sic] fellow man [sic]. (Campbell, 1968, p. 30)

(N)ature must be seen as a *political* rather than a descriptive category, a sphere formed from the multiple exclusions of the protagonist-superhero of the western psyche, reason, whose adventures and encounters form the stuff of western intellectual history.... The continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 3)

Ever-done, never-done: The hero's work

The fictional hero figure fulfils important functions in relation to the organization of societies, and the induction of their members into those societies. Historically, according to Hourihan (1997, p. 233), the hero figure may have assisted early human communities to achieve a sense of identity, and establish a regime of order to support that identity, against the disintegrative forces of the great unfathomable cosmos surrounding them. Perhaps, also, individual identity construction and the maintenance of group integrity were strengthened by celebrations of the heroic defeat of the Other. The hero's fighting and killing skills – for instance, Beowulf's ability to vanquish Grendel, and Parzival's epic battles and bloodshed – were certainly prized, acclaimed and rewarded:

She kissed him and made him sit down, then sent a young lady for some fine clothes already cut from a brocade of Niniveh, which her prisoner King Clamide was to have worn. These the girl brought, but she told her apologetically that the cloak had no lace. Thus, ceremoniously, Cunneware drew out a ribbon from

next her own white thigh and threaded it in for him.... Parzival's clothes became him well. Cunneware closed the neck with a brooch of green emerald, yet she gave him more – a costly and splendid girdle, an orphrey on whose surfaces were many animals made up of precious stones, with a ruby for clasp. [Ellipses added] (von Eschenbach, 1980, p. 160)

In his influential 1976 essay, 'The death of the artist as hero', Bernard Smith elucidates the way the narrative technology of the hero has played out historically in the role of the artist, through dominant ideals of the artist related to moments of major cultural change:

Communities are prone to produce culture-heroes at moments of major change, at times when significant shifts are occurring in the techniques and social relationships of that community's mode of production. At such times wilful, highly individualistic personages appear who have it in them to defy custom, and those of their community who help maintain the conventions. (B. Smith, 1988, p. 9)

In contemporary times, intensified globalisation intensifies such moments: the hero figure becomes a narrative technology which occurs in relation to a planetary, rather than discrete, community needing to adapt to globally shared environmental, social and political instabilities.

From a precautionary perspective, not heroic enmity but unprecedented levels of long-term co-operation are implicated; as, for example, in the 1987 Montreal protocol, which functions as a prototypical global agreement, in this case for protection of the stratospheric ozone layer. Against pre-eminently global needs, to persist with the ancient heroic ways may constitute what Ronald Wright has called a 'progress trap'. The progress trap signifies the point when useful technologies (as in ways of doing things) overreach themselves and become destructive:

Ever since the Chinese invented gunpowder, there has been great progress in the making of bangs: from the firecracker to the cannon, from the petard to the high explosive shell. And just when high explosives were reaching a state of

perfection, progress found the infinitely bigger bang in the atom. But when the bang we can make can blow up our world, we have made rather too much progress. (Wright, 2004, p. 5)

From a whole planetary perspective, the traditional hero narrative has become disabling, according to Margery Hourihan, who counts the ways:

In Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in innumerable versions, from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational and dedicated. It tells how they overcome the dangers of nature, how other 'inferior' races have been subdued by them, and how they spread civilization and order wherever they go. It tells how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled. It tells how their persistence means that they always eventually win the glittering prizes, the golden treasures, and how the gods – or the government – approve of their enterprises. It is our favourite story and it has been told so many times that we have come to believe that what it says about the world is true. (Hourihan, 1997, p. 1)

This kind of hero is linked to the fundamental binary, the dualistic concepts in Western thinking inherited from Aristotle and Plato, who nominated male as superior to female, human to nature, reason to passion, mind (or soul) to body, and freeman to slave, thus naturalising a view of human interaction as adversarial (Hourihan, 1997, pp. 2-3; Plumwood, 1993, pp. 46-47,77). In each division, the hero always occupies the superior term. Through the ages, added layers of value have attached to the dualisms – for instance, Christianity links them to the concept of good and evil, while Cartesian thought combines with imperialism to institute a black/white dichotomy which positions black people as 'ignorant', bestial and depraved.

While Shakespeare's *The tempest* (c. 1611) might constitute an interrogation of imperialism, Daniel Defoe's wildly successful *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) inaugurated nearly three centuries of the imperialist adventure story. It was succeeded by a stream of similar stories in which the white (usually European) hero defeats and tames the ignorant black hordes to bring civilisation to the wild lands. Children's literature has

been a particular focus: Jean de Brunhoff's Babar, for instance, is an African elephant who rises from all fours to become, under upper-class French patronage, an elegant Parisien, returning to Africa to similarly reform his peers and thereby bear witness to the literary justifications of the colonial endeavour (*The story of Babar*, 1934). Of course, the news is by no means all bad: another elephant, Theodor Geisel's Horton, expends enormous energy to save an imperilled community so small it is invisible, simultaneously mobilising a sophisticated non-violent discourse to convince its enemies to both desist and assist (*Horton hears a who*, 1954).

The imperialist hero nevertheless continues to persist, indefatigably. On one side of the Atlantic, Doctor Who, benevolent, avuncular and humane, outwits the malignant, alien, machinic Daleks; on the other side, as texts follow or furrow the paths of imperialism, Lee Falk's master magician Mandrake in the graphic-novel series is suave, subtle and urbane. Inexplicably, his good friend – the black man Lothar – transmutes into an evil opponent. At the cinema, the *Star trek* series (1966-2005), *Star wars* (1977), the *Terminator* movies (1984-2003), *Gladiator* (2000) and many others expound the extraordinary enterprise, courage, intellect, physical skills and daring of the white male hero. The female biology of newer heroes in no way mutes the pedagogical impact: the cool, cybernetic British aristocrat Lara Croft, for instance, diversifies sexual spice while validating and generalising hegemonic masculine characteristics. The Lara Croft character 'jams' feminist claims based, however tactically, on identity politics, and perpetuates the naturalness of Western supremacy and the inevitability of conflict.

Clearly, the passing of spatially-located European empires has been no barrier to the hero. Post the empire, the concept of communism was stigmatised through dastardly KGB-style villains, while Western-style liberal democracy was validated through the invincible, immaculate and urbane James Bond and his cohorts (Hourihan, 1997, p. 3). In realistic hero tales, Hourihan comments, the identity of the enemy ('Them') accords with political exigencies, while fantasy and science fiction invent the 'Other' to emphasise, through contrast, 'Our' higher qualities.

In the beginning

It is a long time since Vladimir Propp (1968) enumerated the immutable characteristics and behaviours of the hero, but not much has changed. The hero's story continues to suffuse many genres of contemporary Western literature including adventure, detective, fantasy, horror, myth, romance, satire, suspense, thriller and the postmodern eclectic genres. Progressing, as they do, from one perilous, puzzling, amazing, frightening, awe-inspiring, thought-provoking, teeth-clenching or blood-chilling climax to another, the hero's predicaments keep readers engaged and eagerly turning the pages. Interpretive and critical skills, however, are less likely to be engaged – partly because the familiar prejudices and biases of Western culture are reliably interred in the text much less perceptibly than its pleasures, and partly because the formula of the hero story features a comforting predictability (Hourihan, 1997).

That dependable pattern suffuses both children's stories and adult literature (Hourihan, 1997):

- The hero is white, male and Western (usually English, North American or European), most often young, and frequently accompanied by another male or in leadership of a band of adventurers. As already suggested, biologically female heroes, such as Lara Croft or Louise of *Thelma and Louise* (1991), tend to be gendered male: that is, the heroic qualities of the role are modelled on the male hero pattern.
- Following the Campbellian monomythic pattern of separation-initiation-return (Campbell, 1968, p. 30), the hero leaves an ordered and civilised home to venture into the wilderness in search of his goal. The goal may be material treasures such as gold, spiritual riches such as the Holy Grail, personal rewards such as the rescue of a virtuous prisoner, usually a maiden, or the destruction of enemies that endanger his home or home territory. In this latter undertaking lies the hero's supreme right, the power to take (or spare) life.
- The wilderness, where magical things may happen, may be any dangerous and unfamiliar setting; for instance, Africa or some other non-European place, the forbidding streets of a big city, a tropical island, another planet, a fantasy place, a forest, cave, mountain, or waterway.
- The hero confronts a series of challenges, including threats from dangerous opponents. These can be strangers, hoodlums, pirates, aliens,

fantastical creatures, witches and wizards, ogres, giants, or marauders; effectively, any form of the Other, demonised.

- As a man of action and a great fighter, handy with fists, club, gun, or in this case wand, the hero's personal qualities of courage, resourcefulness, reason and tenacity carry him through; however, he may acquire the support of wise and kindly beings who recognise his innate goodness and worthiness and help him out. Implicit in the hero's qualities of goodness is a justification for taking other lives.
- The hero eventually returns home to general acclaim.
- And finally, he receives a reward, which could be a virtuous and beautiful woman, but also could be territories, money, or leadership of his people; that is, a people recognises itself as community, tribe or nation in and through the living person of the hero, which coheres and symbolises its qualities and values. The hero pattern, repetitive and basically invariant, effectively comprises a body of legislated values which transcend individual lifetimes; hence, the unrelenting search for heroes in Western societies, and the relative ease with which those who fall from hero status are discarded (Hourihan, 1997).

The *Harry Potter* series is instantly recognizable here. The story varies from the pattern in interesting, but finally insignificant, ways; for instance, in the double rather than single departures and returns to home, and the incorporation of 'sensitive new age guy' qualities in the hero character. In conformity with the hero convention, Harry is young, male, white, and British. In each volume, Harry's initial departure or separation is from his miserable, abused existence at the Dursley's, a household anxiously conforming to the order and civility of middle class lives: 'proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much' (PS, p. 7), while nevertheless participating in diverse expressions of the physical and emotional neglect of both boys within its walls. For instance, Dudley is overfed, overindulged and beaten by his father (PS, p. 35; GoF, p. 30) while Harry is underfed, unindulged and beaten by Dudley (PS, p. 20, p. 47). The barbarities secreted within this particular form of civility assist to secure Harry's loyalty to his 'real' home, Hogwarts, to his House, Gryffindor, and to his mentor/father, Dumbledore.

As a fantasy destination, J. K. Rowling describes Hogwarts as a huge, rambling, somewhat scary looking castle, a jumble of towers and battlements and, supported by magic – not something Muggles could build (Schafer, 2000, p. 72). As his first destination, Hogwarts is Harry's *real* home where, for the first time, he *feels* at home: when he returns to the Dursley's at the end of each volume, Harry misses Hogwarts so much it is 'like having a constant stomachache' (CS, p. 8). For the first time in his life, Harry has friends – Ron, his stalwart, down to earth, wisecracking companion, whose family he comes to know intimately and becomes part of; and Hermione, whose intellectual skills prove crucial in many adventures but whose personal life, other than her relationship to Harry and Ron, remains almost entirely unnarrated. With each volume, various other students join the trio at critical points to form a band of adventurers.

From Hogwarts, Harry and friends depart for a variety of other destinations, sinister or threatening places in which elements of his quest must be carried out: the Forbidden Forest, a Chamber of Secrets hidden deep under the school, The Shrieking Shack, the school lake, the Ministry of Magic, a dark and forbidding cemetery, a world cup Quidditch pitch, Sirius Black's ancestral home at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Along with Harry, readers meet myriads of odd creatures, both as helpers and hinderers, including the surly elf-servant Kreacher, the three-headed dog Fluffy, the slippery Basilisk, the flying Hippogriffs, the stern Centaurs, the Crumple-Horned Snorkack and the spectral flying Thestrals.

The primary goal in each volume is the defeat of evil in the person of Voldemort, the Dark Lord – one of many such lords in heroic fantasy fiction (for instance, in Tolkien's three-volume epic, *The lord of the rings*, the first instalment of which was published in 1954). Voldemort's eventual defeat involves a series of challenges which escalate in intensity and terror with each novel. Crucial to his repeated partial successes against Voldemort, however, are Harry's courage, determination and wandskills, along with the help he receives from Dumbledore. Harry returns to Hogwarts, to benefit from Dumbledore's final guidance in each novel (with the possible exception of the sixth, in which Dumbledore's death signifies his

abdication and Harry's accession to leadership) and to enhance his own prestige and the standing of his house before he departs again for the Dursley household.

As befits a series, Harry has not yet achieved his final reward, so that each return home and closure is also a postponement pending the reinstatement of the cycle. In each case, the temporary closure performs essential ideological work. The return to the Dursley household, however bathetic, serves many functions, but the most important is to mark the way Harry is increasing both his personal power and his power base, accumulating the social capital of the hero. For instance, the penultimate paragraph of the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire*, reads:

Harry winked at them, turned to Uncle Vernon, and followed him silently from the station. There was no point worrying yet, he told himself, as he got into the back of the Dursley's car. (*GoF*, p. 636)

In contrast, the ultimate paragraph of the next novel, *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix*, recounts:

Harry nodded. He somehow could not find words to tell them what it meant to him, to see them all ranged there, on his side. Instead, he smiled, raised a hand in farewell, turned around and led the way out of the station towards the sunlit street, with Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and Dudley hurrying along in his wake. (*OoP*, p. 766)

In the final paragraph of the sixth novel, *The half-blood prince*, Harry emerges as a fully-moulded, renunciatory Odysseus and a warrior of the apocalypse:

His hand closed automatically around the fake Horcrux, but in spite of everything, in spite of the dark and twisting path he saw stretching ahead for himself, in spite of the final meeting with Voldemort he knew must come, whether in a month, in a year, or in ten, he felt his heart lift at the thought that there was still one last golden day of peace left to enjoy with Ron and Hermione. (*HBP*, p. 607)

Nevertheless, Rowling's inclusion in the conventional hero pattern of a broader emotional range constructs Harry as a hybrid hero, a cross-fertilisation between say, a Beowulf or Ulysses reliant on a restricted range of emotions, and the pressures which traditional theories of feminism have brought to bear on violent or insensitive male behaviours. For instance, Harry's emotions include at least six of the seven primary states said to be cross-cultural: happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, fear and joy (Ekman, 1997). When his godfather Sirius Black dies, Harry passes through the several classical stages of grief described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1970)¹⁵: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance; however, his emotions are in the main marked publicly by endurance, silence and repression (*OoP*, pp. 712-761).

In his constraint, Harry reclaims the grounds of the traditional hero by demonstrating that grief, like emotions generally, is gendered: his manful resistance to tears, for instance, can be seen as resistance to a feminised form of emotional discharge. Like the conventional hero, Harry is much more comfortable with action and extroversion than with feelings (Hourihan, 1997, pp. 9-10). However, in his customary end of the year private session with Dumbledore, he transforms grief into dramatised, conventionally masculinised forms as anger and hostility (*OoP*, pp. 726-727), thereby accessing the domestic sphere for the expression of masculinised violence marked by the uncontrolled, ergo shameful, feminine. Dumbledore, in the role of the omniscient, imperturbable counsellor, meantime demonstrates for Harry the fully-realised wise magician/hero. We are led to note the lesson that the dramatisation is not a productive use of power for a hero; urbane self-command, rational argument, and the stiff upper lip is clearly preferable.

On a continuum of heroic behaviours, Harry can be seen as a much more civilised version of Peter Pan: alongside his attractive zest and energy, Peter is also selfish, egotistical, boastful, manipulative, violent, cruel and utterly insensitive to feelings, an effective modeller of the appropriate hegemonic masculine incomprehension when Mrs Darling sheds tears (Hourihan, 1997, p. 75). In the terms of psychology, Peter's characteristics reprise the sociopath.

¹⁵ It should not be forgotten, especially as the *Harry Potter* texts are often validated for an ethic of hopefulness, that Kubler-Ross nominated hope as the most persistent, overarching stage.

Both Harry and Peter are victims of the long history of the extirpation of behaviours stigmatised as feminine, such as ‘softness’ and lack of control, which lies deep within early Western philosophy and is, for instance, a major aim of Plato’s properly militarised education (Plumwood, 1993, p. 77). Such models continue to be deeply influential. Harry’s progress in life invites the assumption of a continuum of violent behaviours in an apprenticeship of conventional hegemonic maleness for which the hero pattern is a major socialising medium, the point of which is to use violence productively to acquire power.

Even in the above ‘bare bones’ rendition, Harry’s hero story is already notable for its inscription of white male European dominance and its ability to convince the young male reader of his innate superiority (Hourihan, 1997). Hermione, despite her awesome intellect and her crucial inputs, demonstrates the marginalisation and invalidation of women and the ‘feminine’ in the hero story, in that her usefulness to Harry is her most valuable quality. Her position is also implicated in Platonic philosophy, in which Plato constructs the State as supreme and validates the mobilisation of all available human capacity to serve its purposes. According to Plumwood (1993, pp. 76-78), Plato thought women as a class were naturally inferior to men, but he also saw them, as individuals, potentially possessing talents of use to the State in what he considered as its vital necessity to reproduce itself by waging war.

In considering the genesis of the poorer literacy performance of some groups of boys, the agency of women gendered by historical precedents must be contemplated. The silent (in the sense of not being considered or heard in the matter) Other to adolescent boys’ literacy is the role of conventional or traditional subordinate femininities in the classroom. This includes the possibility of covert or overt, intentional or unaware, encouragement from girls for boys to continue to inhabit the narrow repertoire of behaviours that are associated with both hegemonic masculine heroism and disinclination to accept conventional literacy practices in the classroom (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002).

Towards the climax of *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone*, Harry and Hermione are trapped together in a room which can only be exited through fires (PS, pp. 207-208). Hermione applies Muggle logic to a set of clues to work out how to escape, Harry to go forward to face unknown evils, Hermione to go back to save Ron lying unconscious behind them. As they are about to swallow the magic elixirs which will make them impervious to the fires, Hermione – lip aquiver – rushes at Harry and hugs him.

‘Harry – you’re a great wizard, you know.’

‘I’m not as good as you,’ said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of him.

‘Me!’ said Hermione. ‘Books! And cleverness! There are more important things – friendship and bravery and – oh Harry – be *careful!*’ (PS, p. 208)

This is a complex and crucial passage which confirms the power balance between male and female in the *Harry Potter* series, establishing the dimensions of a conventional dominant/subordinant gender politics, and additionally supporting a dichotomy of action and intellect in which action is privileged. Note the negotiated power shifts: Hermione, whose intellectual and practical grasp of wizardry is universally acknowledged and essential to Harry’s project, elevates Harry by her compliment to high public status. Harry is embarrassed, presumably by both a physicality which denotes caring rather than warring, and by the compliment – and demurs to her greater capacities. Hermione resists: books, for centuries the technology of human intellectual development – here downgraded to something which can carry the connotations of shrewdness and cunning – count less than mateship, courage and risk-taking; that is, (the contested theory of) the logico-verbal intelligence of the female counts less than the kinaesthetic intelligence of the male.¹⁶ In symbolic terms, the academy has taken second place to the sporting arena, the intellectual to the physical, speech and thought to action.

Hermione is doomed *by her own hand* to be the brains in the background, while Harry must become the archetypal hero in response: he genuflects to her power; she repudiates it, thereby confirming the hierarchy of gender values through which their

¹⁶ See Gardner (1999) and Goleman (1995, 1996) for a discussion of elements of intelligence which taken together are theorised to produce a wholistic intelligence of the emotions.

relationship will be filtered. Hermione is complicit in, and the instrument of, her own banishment in a world which constructs public notice as a paramount mark of success. The relationship demonstrates the complicity of the feminine in the development of hegemonic masculinities drafted to the purposes of Western political hegemonies.

Ginny, on the other hand, is clearly positioned by both her brother Ron and her friend Harry as the property of the patriarchy. When Harry falls for Ginny (whose full name, Ginevra, is an Italianate form of Guinevere, the name of King Arthur's queen) he battles fiercely with the idea that Ginny is Ron's property/protectorate:

She's Ron's sister.
But she's ditched Dean!
She's still Ron's sister.
I'm his best mate!
That'll make it worse.
If I talked to him first –
He'd hit you.
What if I don't care?
He's your best mate!
(HBP, p. 483)

Meantime, enamoured of Harry well before this (CoS, p. 50), Ginny has consulted, in the time-honoured manner of Romance, an older, wiser woman – Hermione – about how best to 'catch' Harry (HBP, p. 603). In the end, however, the disposition of Ginny's person relies on agreement between the boys, not on her own freedom of bestowal, and is signalled by a suppressed leonine supremacy:

Hermione was beaming, but Harry's eyes sought Ron.... For a fraction of a second they looked at each other, then Ron gave a tiny jerk of the head that Harry understood to mean, 'Well – if you must.' The creature in his chest [roared] in triumph... (HBP, p. 499)

Harry the Lionheart

The traditional hero story permeates literature as fiction and fact, suffusing culture as lived experience. It is essentially the story of the young man, and his journey is the male journey through adolescence: the qualities of the hero are the qualities of the

adolescent male invested with a self-glorifying gloss (Hourihan, 1997, p. 74). In consonance with his responsibility as a role model for the letting of blood, the hero's socially didactic tasks include his induction into a meritocratic economy of life and death which directs the hierarchies of entitlement to kill. In this competitive structure, the most conventionally masculine male wins the hero's vaunted right to blood.

The premise that life is sacred – in Christianity, expressed in the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', an interdiction held in common in the Abrahamic religions – disintegrates under the pressure of lived experience. In the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort's moral economy supports torture, blood sacrifice, and casual, almost indifferent, murder; in the 'real world', mass media coverage has reinforced the knowledge of the global commonplaceness of such practices in wars and civil disturbances.

Here again, Harry Potter appears unlike many traditional heroes. He is, after all, sensitive, kind, caring, moral and likeable. These differences, however, are shallow. Just as a traditional hero is shaped, so Harry is called on to develop and exercise warrior skills, and as a warrior he will kill and be celebrated for killing in a context of global warfare. Hidden from an acritical view, the character of Harry bears the markings of conservative 'spin', or of a superficial progressivism dressed in an ethical façade (Robin, 2004, p. 251).

An inattentive reading of Harry as a hybrid hero produces interpellatory effects, validating the character's violence because of its essentialised and naturalised 'goodness', and associating violence favourably with power and domination. Such a reading repudiates at least one of the critical competencies needed by students as future global citizens: the rejection of violence in the resolution of conflict. Further desirable competencies include: the ability to see problems in a global perspective; the ability to work co-operatively and take responsibilities for roles and duties in society; the ability to understand, accept and tolerate cultural differences; the capacity to think in a critical and systemic way; willingness to change one's lifestyle and consumption habits to protect the environment; the ability to be sensitive towards and to defend human rights;

and the willingness and ability to participate in politics at local, national and international level (Tudball, 2005, p. 18). These qualities seem somewhat in conflict with the contemporary version of the hero represented by Harry and his fictional cohort.

The hero that the times wants

Alexander, the film authored and directed by legendary American director, decorated Vietnam war hero and post-war druggie drifter Oliver Stone, was both an artistic and financial failure when it opened in the United States in November, 2004 (Craig, 2005). An epic narrative strongly driven by character, the film explored the life of the legendary hero Alexander the Great, the warrior king who ruled an empire from the Balkans to the Himalayas by the time he was 25. He died just before his 33rd birthday, never defeated in battle and still planning further conquests. In an interview after the failure of *Alexander*, Stone indicated his artistic provenances to Olga Craig (p. 11): ‘When I enlisted [in the Vietnam war], I was ready to die.... I felt I couldn’t be an honest human being until I knew what war and killing were.’ In his directing career, Stone has become renowned for films which interrogate the pathologies of war, such as *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989).

In consonance with his previous films, Stone endowed Alexander with human complexities; torments of self-doubt and guilt, hesitations of leadership, hints of bisexuality. America’s film reviewers responded with derision, as related by Stone: ‘Puerile writing...confused plotting...limp acting...weak script...shockingly off-note performances...disjointed narrative...acted at a laughably hysterical pitch...it has wonderful highlights, but most of them are in [lead actor] Colin Farrell’s hair...’ (Craig, 2005, p. 10).

The timing of the release was crucial to the movie’s critical reception. It was released into the continuing socio-political intensities of America’s ‘war on terror’ after the attack on the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001 (9/11). Stone acknowledges the connection, linking the rejection of non-hegemonic masculinities and

the renewed desire for the traditional bellicose hero figure to a loss of critical capacity in young males:

Young boys, they wanted a warrior and nothing else. They did not want to see a man with vulnerabilities.... It has a lot to do with the war in Iraq.... There is something very strange going on in this country at the moment. It is like the whole value system has gone awry. We want only clearly defined heroes and villains, no subtleties in between. [Ellipses added] (Craig, 2005, p. 11)

As previously discussed, popular culture is important in fashioning the kind of hero suitable to the times: that is, popular culture is used pedagogically in the shaping of public understanding around particular events. While publicly abjuring a desire to influence film content, the Bush administration met the Hollywood film industry at least twice in the weeks following 9/11 (O'Donnell, 2004, p. 15). Firstly, the Pentagon sought the help of screenwriters to assist in imagining possible terrorist scenarios. Later, a key Bush adviser, Karl Rove, met leaders of major studios and television networks. It was suggested that the film industry could help address key Executive messages: for instance, that the 'war against terrorism' was a war against evil, and that the terrorist attacks had to be seen as attacks on the totality of civilisation, requiring a global response (O'Donnell, p. 16).

According to Marcus O'Donnell (2004, p. 16), 45 movies were cancelled, rescheduled or altered in the months immediately following the 9/11 attacks. For example, *Black Hawk down* (2001), a highly patriotic film exalting American military mateship against a background of atavistic Somalis at civil war and self-genocide, was shown ahead of schedule (also see comments by Razack, 2000, in Chapter Six). On the other hand, *The quiet American* – completed and intended for release in 2001 (Capp, 2003) – implicated CIA collaboration with local terrorists in civilian attacks aimed at hastening regime change in Vietnam, and thereby constituted a trenchant political critique of American militarism. The film was finally released for short seasons and into selected cities in 2002, more than a year after 9/11, and then only after pressure from the British leading actor, Michael Caine (O'Donnell, 2004, p. 16).

In deference to the sensitivities of the times, the release of *Collateral damage* (2002), starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was also delayed following 9/11. In a plot typical of the violence with which Schwarzenegger's acting is associated (Boose, 1993, p. 74), a firefighter seeks his own justice in Columbia for the killing by terrorists of his wife and child in Los Angeles, thereby discovering a scheme to blow up government buildings in Washington. Prior to the film's release, Schwarzenegger revealed a similar understanding to Stone's about the cultural work of the hero, pointing to the relationship between the traditional patriarchal hero and an acquiescent, simplified closure which entrains dominant or emerging cultural values:

Movies are movies. It's based on reality, but then you have to go the extra step. You want to make it entertaining and make it heroic, because that's what people want to see. They want a positive outcome. They want revenge. People are very loud and clear about what they want. When we tested our movie in November, they wanted to see a positive ending, they wanted us to kick the butts of the terrorists. Because in real life it's all so complicated. You know? Where are they? Have we found them all? We've found some of them. But bin Laden is still out there, some other guys are still out there. So there's still a dissatisfaction. But in a movie you close the deal. You close the chapter. Movies bring a certain kind of closure, a fantasy that makes people feel good afterwards. (O'Hehir, 2002, , 2002, February 8)

As Jewett and Lawrence (cited in O'Donnell, 2004, p. 18) point out, the post-9/11 milieu brings together antecedents of the apocalyptic tradition, rooted in Abrahamic religions, of righteous warfare, and of an American secular religion emanating from a long line of film and graphic novel superheroes such as the Lone Ranger, Captain America and Spiderman – characters which act outside existing legal parameters to implement one-man crusades against evil.

Life, death, and the hero

At a biological level, life is guaranteed by death, by the consumption of other life that threatens or nurtures the living. For instance, the human body itself is an autonomous killing machine, capable of countless simultaneous life and death decisions on the multitudes of micro-organisms which constantly inhabit or invade it. All living things must exist within a cycle of interpenetrating, interleaved life and death.

Nevertheless, human societies typically transcend biological imperatives to intervene in the biological cycle according to socio-cultural imperatives. Cultures invent and propagate life meanings, and societies order themselves, through the individual's energy for transcendence, the energy to taste life as greater than death, asserts Zygmunt Bauman (2001, p. 5). Social order is the redistribution and differential allocation of culturally produced resources and strategies for the individual to lodge some kind of victory over the transience of life, Bauman states.

The hero character, then, raises the question of the grounds on which the volitional capacity to both taste and take life, as triumph over transience and death, is socially distributed. Skill, cunning, knowledge, a cool head under pressure, physical superiority, technical excellence – all these count in the construction of the traditional warrior killer hero. As well, however, he must be a little stupid, closed to a wider perspective of himself in a world context. In fact, Harry's stupidity is emphasised, particularly in contrast with Hermione's acuteness (see Chapter Six), and seems essential to Harry's heroism (*PS*, p. 130 and pp. 207-208; *PoA*, p. 249). Apparently, the hero defines and abstracts the most desired qualities of the community/State that needs 'saving', and these qualities include a selective capacity for being unable to read the word and the world; for being unable to position-take in a global sense.

A further useful capacity of the hero is that, unlike ordinary citizens, he is not wholly bound to civil obedience. On the journey to public acknowledgment and reward, the hero may act outside guidelines, rules and laws, committing a number of no-fault crimes up to and including murder. His entitlement to blood is, in the end, never provisional: his future is always to have the greatest right to blood. Because of the essential goodness which marks him as a fundamentalist figure, his actions (regardless of conventional morality) are finally sanctioned and applauded; his qualities always already illuminated against the dark background of the essential evilness of the defeated Other. The hero title, then, does not rest so much on the biological necessities of survival but on the question of politics, in which the hero comes to symbolise the State and its warrior function: *in whose interests* is life taken? This is the same question which underlies the ability to read the word/world critically. Much of contemporary

politics as aired in the public sphere, however, would like to convince us that the warrior State is a just state.

Hero as progress trap

As previously stated, the last three decades have witnessed a continuous outpouring of progressively more violent popular fictional texts in which the threats to human and planetary survival are increasingly cataclysmic, paralleling a number of progressively more dire warnings from ecological science. These texts often construct the Other in more and more bizarre ways and constitute the white Western traditional hero in increasingly triumphalist modes, more so for closures featuring his breathtaking, just-in-time battered emergences. The film *Terminator* (1984), for instance, shaves triumph excruciatingly close to disaster by representing the evil cyborg (the terminator) in hypermasculine terms deeply attractive to the winner-takes-all psychology of dominant masculinity. The film successfully enchants or extorts from the viewer a flaccid, compliant desire to go with the strength.

The avalanche of violent texts may constitute a hysteria, or panic, of violence suggesting a critical juncture in the socialisation of killing, as Hourihan comments in the context of films:

The pre-eminent figure of contemporary mass entertainment is a super-violent hero destroying his enemies with maximum bloodshed and dramatic effect. The dialogue is usually minimal but the camera lingers on the details of shattered bodies and spilled innards. The slightness of the plot in many of these films suggests that the enjoyment of vicarious violence has become an end in itself. Perhaps because Western domination of the globe and the environment is now virtually complete the image of the brute assertion of superior power for its own sake, the most atavistic gesture of mastery, the stance of the playground bully, has become the West's pre-eminent cultural product. (Hourihan, 1997, p. 106)

Continuing in the context of films and other electronic media, almost all empirical research relating subsequent aggression in adolescents and children to exposure to media violence has been carried out in the US on electronic media (Whitney & Wartella, 2004, p. 16187). Experimental, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies

show both causal and long-term effects ‘larger than the effects of calcium intake on bone mass or of lead exposure on IQ in children’ (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Many US governmental and professional bodies have identified media violence as a public health problem (Anderson & Bushman; Whitney & Wartella, p. 16187), while the popular press has adopted strategies of denial even as media violence is considered to contribute to increases in rates of social violence (Anderson & Bushman; Whitney & Wartella, p. 16190).

Whitney and Wartella (2004, p. 16188) state that the likelihood of stimulating aggression as a consequence of media violence is greater where perpetrators are attractive, heroic and/or share similarities with the audience. In addition, media violence shown as justified can enhance aggressive behaviour, while unjustified violence may arouse fear. Possible remedies consist of reducing exposure, challenging children’s attitudes towards violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) and increasing socially responsible portrayals of violence (Whitney & Wartella, 2004, p. 16191).

No conclusions in relation to novelistic depictions of violence can be drawn from such studies, other than to wonder what the affective and motivational effects may be when young people read fiction, such as the *Harry Potter* series, in which thoroughly imagined acts of violence occur. It is possible, even, that the evocation of one’s own visual imagery has ameliorative effects on aggressive behaviours. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the series occurs in the socio-cultural context of an apparently escalating ‘culture of violence’ (Whitney & Wartella, 2004, p. 16188).

As stated, the ‘culture of violence’ has all the appearance of reaching a crescendo, in which the magnitude of popular fictional bloodshed and brutality urges either the repudiation of violence as resolution, or capitulation to an apocalyptic culture of killing. As discussed in Chapter Four, simultaneous with the voluminous Western production of such texts is an apparent Western global political hegemony built on pre-emptive militarism and disregard of international law, and concurrent with these processes is a resurgent apocalyptic faith at the highest political level.

Dominant Western religions, through their stories of Christ as the son of God, join the hero story to the power over life and death in the ritual of the Eucharist – that is, by requiring adherents to eat and drink symbols of the flesh and blood of the Christ who is dead, but who has risen and will come again to Earth. The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation emphasises the connection by holding the Eucharistic symbols to be the actual flesh and blood of Christ. A fundamentalist militant Christianity validates heroic measures in relation to life and death, in the same way as similar forms of Judaism and Islam.

The traditional hero story impacts on public life through culturally iconic figures that cathect the State, religion and culturally-validated violence. Such figures include George W. Bush, whose second election as president of the United States constitutes him as a politico-cultural hero. Bush may be said to constitute an influential figure on the cultural pervasiveness of the hero story, and on the ways in which the hero narrative may influence identity formation in adolescent males. In 2003, as president and therefore commander-in-chief of the United States armed forces, Bush arrived in cinematic style on an aircraft carrier to proclaim ‘victory’ in the Iraq War, interweaving in *Top gun* (1986) style a heavily crafted hero image with the cybernetics of warfare. In this, the presidency aligned intimately with its arch-enemy, the terrorist: as Robin Morgan (1989, p. 54) charges,

The terrorist mystique is twin brother to the manhood mystique – and the mythic father of both is the hero. The terrorist has charisma *because* he is the technological-age manifestation of the hero.

As noted, included in consideration of the influences of and on the presidential hero figure are the eschatological ideologies of apocalypse (the final book of the Bible, a highly symbolic narrative which predicts the end of humanity in a last convulsive battle between good and evil), Armageddon (planetary holocaust), and End-time (during which human beings will be judged finally by God) associated with the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States.

In relation to global conditions, Harry Potter and George W. Bush seem captives of the same mystery: reliance on prophecy. Until Dumbledore, two-thirds through the second-last novel, tells Harry that prophecy is nonsense, Harry still believes it has the power of immutable law (*HBP*, p. 476). When the prophecy is dismissed as a reason to kill Voldemort, what still remains in the narrative is any convincing explanation of why: why must Harry inevitably fight Voldemort? Why is Voldemort irredeemably 'evil'? What impels Voldemort to seek his own kind of justice? As Dyson (1997, p. 15) comments of popular fiction:

The human motivation for the conflicts between good and evil often is not clear: those possessed of the power to blow the world to smithereens seem inevitably to plan to use that power; those possessing the superhuman capacity to thwart their efforts inevitably do so.

The absence of an explanation deeper than the attribution of good and evil constitutes an aporia which acts in the text like the elephant in the loungeroom – a glaring absent presence. Although Dumbledore coaches Harry to understand that Kreacher's sly behaviour marks him as a product of the way he has been treated by society, he does not extend the same compassion in explanation of Voldemort's behaviour. The implication is that Kreacher, as a servant, is already securely positioned as subordinate; while he can, and does, wreak some havoc as a saboteur, his impact on the dominant hegemony is relatively small. Voldemort, uncontrolled and agentic, remains a threat because he is implacably externalised to the dominant social structure.

Nevertheless, until the penultimate novel, the reader is left to surmise *why* Voldemort is so irredeemably evil on the basis of the reader's own knowledge or orientation to knowledge: readily available, in this context, are the ideologies of the hero/anti-hero so culturally widespread. In this way, the *Harry Potter* series participates in the circularity by which essentialist ideas of good and evil may be distributed, bypassing the question at the heart of critical reading: in whose interests?

In whose interests

Harry's passage towards the final privilege, right and responsibility of the fully-realised Western hero, the power of life and death, generates much of the underlying continuous current of anxiety which permeates the texts. The final necessity and responsibility for Harry to kill or be killed is implicit in the first five of the seven-text series, and explicit in the sixth.

The sense of dichotomy, however, is misleading: Harry and Voldemort form a dyad representing the conjoined nature of life and death. Voldemort's name, interpreted in a mock medieval French, is Will-to-Death (Warner, 2001); whereas the putative original potter, the Sumero-Babylonian goddess Aruru the Great, was said to have created human life from clay, just as the later Christian God was said to have created Adam (Walker, 1983, p. 15). Harry and Voldemort share powers through their 'brother' wands (*GoF* p. 605); as Tom Riddle (the adolescent Voldemort) points out, they share physical similarities (*CoS*, p. 233); Harry gives his blood, involuntarily, to restore Voldemort to life (*GoF* p. 557); Voldemort briefly possesses Harry's body and mind (*OoP*, p. 719); and of course, they are joined by the curse that failed, leaving Harry marked with the lightning scar.

Harry and Voldemort can be seen as the one-and-the-same Janus-faced hero: on one side, the will to life; on the other, the will to (put to) death. At some point Harry and Voldemort will face each other in a final showdown, in which, according to the prophecy, one must die and the other must live. For Harry, the agonising moment of realisation comes as death disputes adolescent invincibility and becomes real, personal and possible to him in the death of the godfather he has come to love:

More to stave off the moment when he would have to think of Sirius again, Harry asked, without caring much about the answer, 'The end of the prophecy ... it was something about ... *neither can live* ...'
'... *while the other survives*,' said Dumbledore.
'So,' said Harry, dredging up the words from what felt like a deep well of despair inside him, 'so does that mean that ... that one of us has got to kill the other one ... in the end?'
'Yes,' said Dumbledore. (*OoP*, p. 744)

Harry will be required to kill Voldemort to protect other lives, or himself endure a living, possibly Zombie-like, state (*'neither can live...'*). The alternative is to die at Voldemort's hands knowing that his failure to realise his destiny as the protector of the wizarding world will abandon it to Voldemort's ethnic wars and possibly genocide. It has not yet occurred to Harry, nor apparently to Dumbledore, that if the prophecy is nonsense so is its predicted outcome.

The questions begged by this plotline, which metaphorises the moral claims on which historically recent wars have been waged by the West (notably the Vietnam, Gulf and Iraq wars and the 'War against terror') is: Must the hero destroy the villain to save everyone else? Could the hero bring peace through means other than violence? Along with the series' intensifying demand for increased resources of heroic courage, this question also intensifies: does this hero serve as an adequate model for the postmodern young reader in a dynamically globalising world?

These questions assume that the hero has some interest in collective welfare. Homer's *Odyssey* shows, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), that in fact, the traditional Western hero is absorbed mostly with himself, concerned with his own vested interests and his own self-preservation, his struggle linked since the beginning of Western thought to sacrifice, renunciation and repression. Odysseus is the prototypical bourgeois individual, seeking survival and the improvement of his lot, and in that quest adventurous, cunning, entrepreneurial and rationalistic. He learns to dominate by learning to calculate: he develops and implements his own system of rational calculation. At every point in his journey, he must delay fulfilment of his own instincts and needs. The delay of gratification represents his training in a particular form of civilization:

He can never have everything; he has always to wait, to be patient, to do without; he may not taste the lotus or eat the cattle of the Sun-god Hyperion, and when he steers between the rocks he must count on the loss of the men whom Scylla plucks from the boat. He just pulls through; struggle is his survival; and all the fame that he and the others win in the process serves merely to confirm that the title of hero is only gained at the price of abasement and mortification of the instinct for complete, universal, and undivided happiness. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 57)

For this hero the return home appears to be a fulfilment; it is in fact the endpoint of renunciation of his own desires and alienation from his own being. The point appears counterintuitive in the cultural milieu of the capitalist cornucopia, in which instant gratification rules. The mastery of the wand means instant gratification, which certainly features in the *Harry Potter* texts: witness the apparent conjuring from thin air of abundant feasts in the grand dining room, for instance. Nevertheless, Harry is a renunciatory hero.

To revisit the occasion when Harry finds love with Ginny, the first blissful kiss seems like several long moments, or half an hour, or even ‘several sunlit days’ (*HBP*, p. 499). Nevertheless, following Dumbledore’s death, Harry renounces the relationship:

‘It’s been like ... like something out of someone else’s life, these last few weeks with you,’ said Harry. ‘But I can’t ... we can’t ... I’ve got things to do alone now.’ (*HBP*, p. 602)

By withstanding the voyage’s temptations of magic, chaos, nature and sensuality – the qualities in dualism assigned to the feminine – Odysseus, like Harry, models for a Western bourgeoisie (for whom his example became general and historical by the 19th century) the formation of the individualist, entrepreneurial, rationalistic bourgeois man (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). The irrationalism of totalitarian capitalism,

whose way of satisfying needs has an objectified form determined by domination which makes the satisfaction of needs impossible and tends toward the extermination of mankind, has its prototype in the hero who escapes from sacrifice by sacrificing himself. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 55)

On the way to this goal, however, Harry utilizes a gift in the remit of the hero, the power to spare life. Nevertheless, sparing the life of Voldemort adherent Peter Pettigrew is a market, rather than moral, transaction: by itself, Pettigrew’s life does not have enough worth to spare (*PoA*, p. 275), but the act of saving it places Voldemort’s servant in Harry’s debt, as Dumbledore sees it (*PoA*, p. 311).

Requiring such a hero to act for the good of all may well be asking him to contradict his constitution within the profoundly influential historical discourse of the hero. We are left to ponder the suspicion that Harry's paramount task is to be a hero, and the saving of wizarding society is merely a pretext, a setting across which the hero trajects like a shooting star. In keeping with a liberal humanist politics, and in opposition to a social democratic politics, the individual is privileged at the expense of a collective.

Foucault, however, unites the collective and the individual (uneasily, it is true) by insisting that the State is inevitably and integrally a warrior State. He holds that underneath peace and order, wealth and authority, State and State apparatuses, laws and the 'calm order of subordinations', there is a primitive and permanent primary war of other relations, such as inequality, division of labour, and diverse relations of exploitation (Foucault, 2003, pp. 46-47). This war undermines society, divides it into binary mode, and is effectively a race war. However, it is neither pinned to biology nor free-floating, but related to histories of differences and barriers created by inequitable social distributions (Foucault, p. 77).

Where once war constituted history and preserved and protected society, Foucault (2003, p. 216) alleges (although it should be noted his tone in relation to the preservation of society is ironic), war is now the precondition for the survival of the State in its external and internal political relations:

(T)he racist thematic is no longer a moment in the struggle between one social group and another; it will promote the global strategy of social conservatisms. At this point...we see the appearance of a State racism: a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization.

In the racist thematic, then, myth becomes a discourse with specific functions, not so much to record the past or speak of origins, states Foucault (2003, p. 116), but to speak of the rights of power. The subject who speaks in this discourse speaks the

discourse of right, asserting and demanding a right marked by a relationship of property, conquest, victory, or nature. Truth claims are deployed from a combat, rather than philosophical, position, from the perspective of the sought-after victory (Foucault, pp. 52-56). 'The fact that the truth is essentially part of a relationship of force, of dissymmetry, decentering, combat, and war, is inscribed in this type of discourse ', Foucault (p. 53) states. Traditional mythical forms, such as the hero, are therefore integral to, and support, the discourse of war (Foucault, p. 56). As Dumbledore tells Harry the 'truths' about Voldemort (see Chapter Four), he arms the heroic mind for combat. Thus, Harry's prior physical preparation as a wizard with deadly wandskills is consolidated by an intensified psychological preparation analogous to that noted by Ruddick (1993, p. 113) as constituting the military male.

Foucault's work was completed prior to the highly intensified stage of neo-capitalist expansionism characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and the intensive re-theorising of the role of the State which continues to accompany these changes. Had Foucault lived, he may well have expressed different views about the kind of State about which he wrote. Nevertheless, the point which may be raised about Harry Potter is the degree to which Harry is absorbed in the kind of warfare based on the (fading) right of the king and the contemporary rights of the State.

Foucault, at his particular historical moment, saw monarchical right and 'biopower', the post-monarchical role of the State in achieving rule by regulating and normalizing bodies, as being awkwardly and incompletely hybridized (Foucault, 2003, pp. 242-245). Taking this particular Foucauldian perspective further, we can now position Harry as a hybrid hero: he bears both the right of the king to take life or let live (as he did in allowing Pettigrew to survive), and the right of biopower to make live and let die (Foucault, p. 241). Racism of the Foucauldian kind introduces a break into the domain of life under the control of power, fragments the field of the biological of which race as a discourse has charge, and creates caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower (pp. 254-255). Racism becomes the precondition for exercising the right to kill, justifying the hybrid use of monarchical right and biopower:

If the power of normalization wished to exercise the old sovereign right to kill, it must become racist. And if, conversely, a power of sovereignty, or in other words, a power that has the right of life and death, wishes to work with the instruments, mechanisms and technology of normalization, it too must become racist.... (R)acism is bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power. [Ellipses added] (Foucault, 2003, pp. 256-258)

As a hybrid of monarch and State Harry's role as hero, then, obligates him to kill the Dark Lord in order to maintain a disciplined populace. Harry symbolises the King, endowed with the monarchical right to put to death: that which disciplines the individual, stigmatised, body and satisfies the confused contemporary urge to personalise and defeat overwhelmingly large questions of survival. Harry also symbolises the post-monarchical State, and therefore the technologies of biopower which address and discipline the mass body of society; of particular importance in times of intensifying corporatising globalisation that challenge the external boundaries of the State (Bakan, 2004).

As symbolic of both king and State, Harry must exert herculean efforts to kill the malignant Other and to thereby discipline survival (ecological) fear: to protect wizarding society from its own perceived internalised impurities; and to enact the effort of the State to homogenise itself and thus identify itself to its members by eliminating internal, and clarifying external, boundaries. At this point, we are reminded of the historical and contemporary demonising and disabling of Aboriginal people in Australia, of the pejoration of the 'left' (Marr, 2004), and of the role of Osama Bin Laden in global politics. Such matters signify a State publicly in thrall to the concept of the good of each and all (N. S. Rose, 1999, p. 23), while inwardly disabled by a Foucauldian form of racism.

Harry's particular form of heroic hegemonic masculinity is essential in perpetuating a racist, masculinised State (R W Connell, 2000, pp. 40-46). Constitutionally unable to grasp the 'softnesses' of rapprochement, reciprocity and reconciliation, this State extends, into international relations, international trade and

global markets, a gender order marked by the hero (R W Connell, pp. 40-41). Perhaps it can be said, from this perspective, that in the interests of good, the State performs evil.

The hero's critic

The concept of the hero invites a ubiquitously kind critical reception; a reception which, as Jameson (1991, p. 349) has remarked about the related concept of power, ought to inspire some deeper ideological suspicions. Maria Nikolajeva (2003, p. 125), for instance, uses Northrop Frye's taxonomy of heroes created by literature as myth displacement to place Harry as a high mimetic hero, obedient to natural laws but superior to his peers. From this perspective, Harry performs didactic functions:

In fact, adult co-readers may find Harry quite satisfactory as a model for children: he is humble, well-mannered, respectful toward his seniors, almost a perfect English gentleman. (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 130)

The necessity to bring critical vigour to such readings is emphasised by Mary Pharr's critical response. Pharr acknowledges that readers live with a daily, media-driven awareness of the interconnectedness of 'our' world, and its vulnerability to random acts of violence and mayhem. Harry represents many a real child's wishful desire and many an adult's secret yearning for *someone* to come along and save a world apparently under peril, and thus she asks, quite reasonably:

Why do we care about the development of another hero? The question may well be, rather, how could we not care? Humanity has always had a boundless interest in heroes, in those few among us who rise to perform great but arduous deeds. (Pharr, 2002, p. 53)

It is quite possible, at this point, to agree with Pharr. Humanity has need of heroes; the question under exploration here, however, is what kind of heroes do modern times demand? Pharr's response reprises a now-suspect kind of heroism:

That interest is both innate and universal, representing as it does something individualized within a society and yet wide-ranging among all societies. Joseph Campbell spent a lifetime investigating and describing the expression of this interest, the heroic monomyth "through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human manifestation." The manifestation of such energies

may emerge in the form of a hero, a figure who represents the intense human struggle for both power *and* wisdom, recognition *and* introspection, grandeur *and* honor. Few of us achieve the rigorous balance of such dualisms, but they endure as more than naïve aspirations; they endure as goals to guide us toward our possible best selves. (Pharr, 2002, pp. 53-54)

Pharr's commentary reprises a conventional heroic paradigm: as an academic and thereby a privileged Westerner, she makes all humanity Western and gives it ownership of history, being able to state confidently that which has always happened in all societies. Joseph Campbell, as Hourihan (1997, p. 22) points out, similarly considers the hero story as universally beneficent while also seeing it only as a treatise on male development, with female characters representing developmental tasks of the hero's psyche. Pharr uncritically imports these assertions of a dominant culture and gender (and presumably race) into her commentary, and then constructs the hero as a grand narrative whose uncritiqued, individualistic, goals all people should strive to emulate.

The comments white-out the colonial era of Western domination, assert the blanket valuing of a type of modernist humanism which may have no currency in other cultures, and ignore the postmodernist era of a heroic globalising capitalism related to increasing divisions of wealth and opportunity between rich and poor both within and between cultures. Voldemort – rejected by a rich father, abandoned involuntarily by a poor mother, raised poor in an orphanage – symbolises such division, although Dumbledore's analysis, couched in socio-cultural terms, nevertheless constructs Voldemort's subjectivity according to a liberal humanist ontology (see Chapter Six). Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk has referred poignantly to the impact of a global wealth and income divide by asserting that most people in the world live in a grim and troubled private sphere created by their awareness of deprivation established by mass media depictions of Western lifestyles:

The Western world is scarcely aware of this overwhelming feeling of humiliation that is experienced by most of the world's population; it is a feeling that people have to try to overcome without losing their common sense and without being seduced by terrorists, extreme nationalists or fundamentalists. (Pamuk, 2001)

In his turn, Ziauddin Sardar rebukes the Western academy for its damaging narrowness of vision:

Colonialism was about the physical occupation of non-western cultures. Modernity was about displacing the present and occupying the minds of non-western cultures. Postmodernism is about appropriating the history and identity of non-western cultures as an integral facet of itself, colonizing their future and occupying their being. (Sardar, 1998, p. 13)

The necessity of a new approach is outlined by Bauman when he states that postcolonial frontiers are encounters between strangers, none of whom comes to the meeting with permission to set the agenda. Residents of frontierland (the postmodern condition), he opines, face a similar task: not to censure, legislate or soliloquise; but to understand, interpret and dialogue. This seems to be the precept, he states,

for a new, humbler, yet for this reason more potent humanities, promising bewildered men and women inhabiting our times some insight and a modicum of orientation in the mass of increasingly uncoordinated and often contradictory experiences – and, for once, capable of delivering on its promise. (Bauman, 1999, p. xlix)

The last hero

The attraction of Harry Potter's exciting linear progression through life is unlikely to diminish: it satisfies a deeply held sense of arousal and anticipation which may also exist biologically as the 'orienting response', a primal survival urge based in neurocognition (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, Western culture is steeped in a hero story, itself steeped in European patriarchal narratives of dominance and control (Hourihan, 1997, p. 203), which urgently needs to be replaced. New versions may need to retain the primally attractive conventions of linearity, action and excitement yet without imposing the values of an addictive culture of mastery on the reader (the word heroin, meaning an addictive substance engendering a self-view of euphoric omnipotence, is etymologically related to the word hero). Hourihan relies on Plumwood to adumbrate a future unable to grasp the urgency of promoting a different hero:

(T)he inevitable final stage of the culture of mastery is the global Rational Economy and the assimilation of all planetary life to the needs of the masters... In this ultimate scenario all the remaining space on earth is gradually appropriated to the needs of the economy according to the dictates of Platonic and Cartesian 'reason' which sees nature as the inferior opposite of civilization, a resource to be exploited.... Thus biodiversity dwindles and indigenous cultures are destroyed. Within the dominant culture space for love, friendship, contemplation, art, the development of psychic wholeness, is sacrificed to the needs of economic rationalism. Those who cannot conform to the demands of economic rationalism – the poor, the disabled and the old – are increasingly marginalized, and women, the irreducibly 'other', are either suborned or alienated. The final result, the last triumph of the hero, can only be the collapse of the culture of mastery, since nature is not an endlessly exploitable resource. (Hourihan, 1997, p. 203)

Harry the orthodox hero, bearing on his shoulders uneasy alliances between the entrepreneurial individual, the monarch and the warrior State, is positioned to carry out important work for those whose gaze refuses a globalising panorama. The questions posed earlier bear re-emphasis: must the hero absolutely destroy the villain to save everyone else? Could the hero bring peace through means other than violence? Does this hero serve as an adequate model for the postmodern young reader in a dynamically globalising world?

In partial response to these questions, the following chapter explores the means by which young people may be encouraged to take positions, through school literacies, for the critical examination of such questions for themselves.

CHAPTER 6

The literacy wars

‘*Nothing comes*’, emphasises James Gee (1991, p. 280),

from literacy or schooling. Much follows, however, from what comes *with* literacy and schooling... namely, the attitudes, values, norms and beliefs (at once social, cultural and political).

In *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix*, the fifth novel in the series, forces of conservatism achieve ascendancy at Hogwarts, subjecting the school to a reformist disciplinary regime and imposing regressive changes on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Similarly, forces of conservatism pressure the education of Harry’s young readers with profound implications for educational outcomes. In the sixth and penultimate novel, *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*, agentive resistance rises; but we await the seventh and final novel to determine whether this resistance inclines wizarding society to an even more entrenched conservatism, or whether the repetitious cycle of power as power-over can finally be voided in favour of a power-with stance.

Drawing on events at Hogwarts, this chapter explores the meaning of polarised political positions and the dominance of the political Right in the politics of education. In particular, the chapter examines the struggle over schooling and literacy in Australia as an expression of the rapidly polarising balance of power between Right and left, and advocates for the kinds of literacy schooling which Harry’s young readers are likely to need to equip them with agency in their own lives and futures.

The distinction between right/Right and left/Left in the politics of education

Political positions in a functioning democracy with an active civic sphere are rarely monolithic; both persons and groups can simultaneously host right, or conservative, and left, or progressive, tendencies in manner inchoate, exempt of the expression of particularly definable political positions or commitments. From a poststructuralist perspective, there is no essential political identity, just as there are no essential personal or social identities. Political identities are produced in the social flux as multiple, contradictory, and contingent. Nevertheless, contests over education shape potent fields for the production of formed, polarised political positions.

Interactions with unresponsive institutions, according to Michael Apple and Anita Oliver (2003b, p. 26), often force people to take up coherent political identities. As an example, Apple and Oliver use the case study of a school that resisted and rebuffed parents who wanted to negotiate over whole-language texts, new in the school's language arts program. Initially, the parents occupied a broad range of uncommitted political perspectives, and were mainly united by their perception that the school was attempting to deny the right they claimed to control their children's education (Apple & Oliver, p. 44). After several months of conflict, parents' political attitudes formed and solidified, drawing them within the hegemonic influences of rightist groups, the ideologies of which included the sanctity of the family and the existence of absolute truth.

From this study, Apple and Oliver (2003, p. 28) conclude that conservative discourses act in creative ways to disarticulate prior connections and rearticulate groups of people into larger ideological movements. Conservative positions do this by connecting to the real hopes, fears, and conditions of people's daily lives, and by providing seemingly common sense explanations for current troubles. Apple and Oliver do not say so, but the same processes can be used to explain the ways in which people are attracted to progressive discourses and take up progressive political positions, except that these may become more available in times of greater social confidence.

In what follows, I explore some philosophical and practical differences between conservative and progressive political positions and their implications in the politics of education. To begin with, ‘right’ and ‘left’ are used to indicate amorphous political tendencies which may be tentatively, unstably and even imperceptibly in relationship with each other and which may or may not, at some point, coalesce into distinctive political groupings, such as campaigns, movements or parties. The terms right and left function as shorthand signals to indicate certain qualities, artificially delineated so that the distinction between the two, though arbitrary, is maintained for my purposes.

Capitalised ‘Right’ and ‘Left’ indicate formalised, synthesised political groupings. Right and Left are not considered as oppositional forces in the same way as right and left comprise oppositional tendencies; in my view, the former are more philosophically aligned than in dispute (this position is explained further later in this chapter). The descriptor ‘New Right’ stems from Friedrich von Hayek’s political project to undo the managed Keynesian economic balance between private and public interest, and to extend competitive economic markets to every facet of social life (Marginson, 2004, p. 29). The term indicates the marriage of radical neo-liberal capitalism and social conservatism.

For better or worse, qualities engaged by the political right or the political left and applied to the politics of education give rise to distinguishable educational outcomes.

In my view, both the rightward and leftward pressures experienced in the political contexts of education reflect embryonic, intuitive, and tentative essays of power under the perceived exigencies of increasingly uncertain and risky futures. However, claims of confidence accompanying right/Right pressures, rather than disclosing any utterly reliable knowledge of pathways to the greater good of the greatest number, gauge instead the depth of fear about those futures, alongside a refusal to admit the social and cultural concerns which contextualise education so as to hold equal global status with globalising capital. Such responses are, in effect, educational fundamentalism.

Initial philosophical distinctions between right and left can be drawn from Lincoln and Guba's speculations on the impact of novel theoretical productions on the academic disciplines. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 52), citing Schwartz and Ogilvy, recall the pressure exerted on dominant disciplinary knowledges under challenge from an emergent paradigm in the latter half of the 20th century. Drawing on developments in most major disciplines, such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, ecology, neurology, linguistics, religion and the arts, Schwartz and Ogilvy synthesised seven major characteristics of emerging disciplinary world views which diametrically opposed orthodox disciplinary perspectives. Characteristic of the dominant, threatened, paradigm was a world view based on ideas of simplicity, hierarchy, mechanism, determinism, linear causality, assemblage and objectivity. In contrast, the emergent, divergent, paradigm founds its world view on complexity, heterarchy, holography, indeterminacy, mutual causality, morphogenesis and perspective.

Arguably, the dominant paradigm is more closely allied to the Newtonian 'clockwork' universe, structuralism, modernism, liberal humanism ceding to technical rationalism, structuralist linguistic and psychological theories, Benthamite pedagogies, neo-liberal politics, the economic concepts of scarcity and demand, and the right/Right. The emergent paradigm, on the other hand, tends to participate in the Einsteinian relational universe, poststructuralism, socio-cultural theories, Freirean and Deweyian pedagogies, liberal humanism ceding to social democracy, the economic concepts of abundance and supply, and the left. These distinctions, superficially convenient, easily falsify in the face of complexity: neo-liberalism, for instance, draws on both paradigms, benefiting from hybrid vigour.

To maintain my demand on convenience, however, references to the right/Right signal that policymaking tends to be centred on the individual; knowledge production is likely to rely on a positivist orientation; the research focus may be narrowly targeted, with quantitative and instrumentalist research methods likely to be preferred; while attitudes towards education tend towards the functionalist. For instance, literacy may be seen singularly as a set of tools, learned in a methodical and linear fashion, producing measurable outcomes. This tendency favours a coding approach to literacy.

Critical literacy under this political regime, then, will take an instrumentalist approach concerned with sharpening a set of 'neutral' higher level interpretive skills, such as evaluating the quality of a text, detecting the intentions of its author, assessing the author's credibility in terms of expertise and impartiality, distinguishing fact from fiction and discriminating information from knowledge (Kramer-Dahl, 2002). In the universe of the right, outcomes are discrete events, controllable, determinable and predictable; certainty is highly desirable, if not mandatory. At its most pronounced, literate subjects produced from a coding approach to literacy are likely to resist workplaces based on flexibility, change and innovation (Kress, 1995, pp. 76-77).

In contrast, references to the left (but not mandatably the Left, or New Labour) signal that policymaking centres on socio-cultural complexes; knowledge production tends to be constructivist; the research focus is likely to be broad, with diverse mixes of qualitative, quantitative, multimodal and multidisciplinary research processes preferred; and attitudes towards education are likely to be relationally based. For instance, literacies may be seen pluralistically as sets of relationships in dynamic interaction, learned and practised in many ways, never fixed, and assessable more than measurable.

In this case, critical literacy will consist of social and political practices examining the ways in which all texts promote certain views of the world, and of knowledge coupled to the cultural and political interests of dominant groups (Kramer-Dahl, 2002). In the universe of the left, outcomes are processual, to be encouraged and facilitated. They may be incompletely determinable and creatively amorphous; uncertainty, therefore, is normative. At its most pronounced, literate subjects produced from a contextual approach are likely to dissipate opportunities for creativity and innovation (Kress, 1995, p. 80).

The bases of the political struggle over schooling and literacy

Public education originated in Australia in the determination to make a high quality comprehensive education available to all children regardless of social class, wealth or religion (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2004). From a politico-socio-cultural

perspective, public education functions as a paradoxical Holy Grail, central to democracy but also to political hierarchy. While public education remains viable, robust and populous, it is the vehicle of the formation of political futures and the validation and expression of control over what counts as a society's resources of knowledges, skills, values and beliefs. In another sense, as a product – however negotiated and contested – of a raced, classed and gendered neo-liberal State (Apple, 2003a, p. 10) which valorises competition, private enterprise and choice, public education ought to be the default validation of the State's economic creed; that is, it should demonstrate that private education produces a 'better' education.

Rather than maintaining public schooling as the source and exemplar of a high quality, equitably distributed education, under a neo-liberal creed public schooling ought to be a subordinate, effete form. However, the political project of redirecting resources to exemplar schools – in other words, constructing school hierarchies based on socio-economic privilege – is complicated partly because of the centrality of literacy to political and economic futures, both for individuals and communities. The State has an interest in fitting people for employment in new economies (both because employment may indeed exist and because the State validates such aspirations in order to reproduce itself) to obviate the potential for future welfare imposts and civil unrest, so while it survives public schooling must be maintained at a level which can be held to deliver such an education.

It is hardly surprising, then, that literacy – the core cohering principle of education – becomes a crucial nodal point in the political struggle for control of public education, and that disputes polarise between contracted (conservative) and expanded (progressive) notions of literacy practice. Such struggles are internationalised, unfolding at different paces in Western democracies but sharing significant commonalities, so that encounters from elsewhere can illuminate the development of literacy politics in Australia.

The cyclical nature of such struggles is among the shared characteristics of internationalised literacy politics. In *Hard times* (1854), Charles Dickens satirises the

Benthamite version of education: the notion that human beings are sensory automatons best educated, under strict panoptical surveillance inside detentional structures, through repeated drills in the basic skills needed by commerce, industry and the State (Little, 1998, p. iv). Championing progressive notions of education, Matthew Arnold, the first of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, proffered an oppositional epistemology: that the free play of the mind on the problem of mechanical habits is more representative of genuine education. However, Bentham's repressive version maintained a mythological grip on the public imagination and was exported with the British education system to Britain's colonies. The influence of Arnold's progressive preference was nevertheless preserved, and the dualistic positions recur cyclically, in the expression of general fears about the state of education and in specific suspicions of a persistent or intermittent decline in literacy standards, usually attributed in the popular media to deficiencies in 'progressive education' (Little, 1998).

Simon Marginson (1997) has described the current internationalised 'Back to Basics' campaign, beginning around 1975, as rooted in the movement generated in the USA by the 1950s fear of being outmanoeuvred by the space technology of the then-United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). The Back to Basics movement (often rendered satirically as 'readin', writin', and 'rithmetic') was adopted by New Right groups, cultural conservatives, the moral majority and the religious right. It also included those who favoured Reaganomics, that is, conservative social values and monetarist forms of economic policy. In Britain, the culturally conservative *Black papers on education* nourished the ultra-conservative Thatcher government's education agendas, while in Australia the conservative, self-appointed Australian Council for Educational Standards manipulated the international sources in pursuit of its own, similar, themes (Little, 1998, p. v).

Government and literacy in Australia

Commonly with other Western nation governments, the Howard Federal government has adopted the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills as a key policy. As the 1999 *Adelaide declaration*, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed a program of new

National goals for schooling in the twenty-first century, which states that every school leaver ‘should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level’ (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1999, 2.2). Importantly, while clearly vested in a human capital orientation, the goals tend to espouse a progressive approach to education:

The new goals for schooling are student centred; that is, they focus on the learning outcomes of students rather than the strategies and processes of education providers... They provide a better balance between the theoretical knowledge students should attain in terms of curriculum content and their capacity to apply, and build on, that knowledge in new contexts or circumstances. They also reflect the importance of students’ developing generic, transferable skills (eg problem solving, critical thinking, oral and written communication skills, the capacity to work with others, etc) and entrepreneurial, innovative and adaptive behaviour.... The new goals also describe a schooling which is socially just and make clear the crucial link between educational equity and the achievement of outcomes. (Kemp, 1999)

A supporting document, the *National literacy and numeracy plan*, lays down the design of national literacy and numeracy benchmarks implemented in national benchmark testing. Acrimonious debates around the adoption of national standardised testing are a further hallmark of contemporary international education reform.

In Australia, an aggressive Federal education reform agenda was accelerated by the Howard Government’s accession to control of the upper house of the Federal parliament in July, 2005. Features of the agenda include a vigorous renegotiation of the relationships between State and Commonwealth governments in relation to education, and the strong tendency of the Commonwealth to use fiscal measures to advance centralised control and impose conservative reforms.

Fundamental national reappraisals and reconfigurative attempts include an inquiry into teacher training (Nelson, 2005), moves towards the institution of a national curriculum (ACER, 2005; Nelson, 2004 December 8), the suggestion of teaching ‘intelligent design’ alongside evolutionary theory (James, 2005), a demand that public schools move from a ‘values neutral’ position to the teaching of the Commonwealth’s

specified values (Green & Leung, 2005, May 2) fiscal and budgetary strategies which direct greater public funding to private schools (Green, 2005; Vickers, 2005) and a general evacuation of robust equity and social justice practice (Bob Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000, pp. 101-103).¹⁷

Finally, in fulfilment of the historical precedents for the crisis representations of literacy by both governments and media (Little, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1999), the Minister for Education instituted an inquiry into literacy, which later transmogrified into an inquiry into the teaching of reading (Nelson, 2004a, November 29). As previously mentioned, the inquiry was disciplined by the Minister's prior statements in support of phonics as the principle tool for teaching reading, and duly validated this stance, even while managing to qualify it somewhat, in its final report.

Literacy education is inherently political, and its 'crises' tend to coincide with political crises. Literacy politics are illuminated by Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (1999), who point to the way in which the various foci of debate constitute 'red herrings'. Neither phonics, progressivism, open education, process writing, nor traditional grammar 'cause' literacy problems, they reiterate. Historically,

how and when literacy became a problem had as much to do with economic, cultural and social change as it did with anything that might go on in schools and classrooms. From this view, it should surprise nobody that literacy has become a continual, "millennium" problem – a sign or indicator of moral panic over the kinds of changes wrought by new technologies, fast capitalism and globalisation. (Luke & Freebody, 1999)

Literacy education is inherently bound up in the political in several ways. Firstly, it operates as ideological representation. That is, from the whole range of possible socio-cultural positions and class interests, it selectively introduces particular

¹⁷ In July 2006, for example, the Federal Government announced a plan to direct cash bonuses to public school teachers that turn out high achieving students (Ferrari, 2006, July 10). The Minister for Education, Julie Bishop, was quoted as saying that the proposal was designed to make state governments and public school teachers accountable for their performances, to reverse complacency towards literacy and numeracy, and to address the drain of good teachers to better rewarded jobs in private schools.

social and political ideologies, cultural values and beliefs. For example, a policy focus on basic skills instruction in early literacy narrows and circumscribes the diversity of the curriculum and the extent of ideational production (Luke & Greishaber, 2004, pp. 5-6), impoverishing the rich socio-cultural contexts which support literacy development. Additionally, literacy education also directs children's access to, and develops differential capacities with, textual and semiotic systems, so that children with favoured kinds of cultural capital may systematically receive greater educational benefit. Finally, because literacy education constitutes particular kinds of bodies and sensibilities, students learn to look, act, and feel like particular kinds of readers and writers (Luke & Greishaber, p. 6).

Harry's schooling and literacy

At the beginning of the sixth volume in the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*, how is the education of Harry and his cohort – their literacy and schooling and what comes with it – positioning them to enter the adult wizarding world? To make this assessment, it is necessary to assemble a model of socially-constructed literacy development against which to gauge Harry's educational progress.

Much contemporary research emphasises the importance of understanding literacy education as holistic, of 'nesting' it within a focus on good teaching supported by whole school plans connected to families, local communities and the world. For instance, the three-year Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) demonstrates the importance to good student outcomes of good teachers and teaching; the necessity of cohering curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; the importance of classroom supportiveness, high intellectual demand, relevance to the world beyond the classroom, and the recognition of difference within it (Bob Lingard, 2001, p. 24). The study shows that when student backgrounds are held constant, individual teachers, rather than schools, have the greatest impact on student learning (Bob Lingard, p. 19; Bob Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000, p. 103).

QSRLS has generated a model triadic planning structure, consisting of products titled the New Basics, Productive Pedagogies, and Rich Tasks, to bring Queensland school education into alignment with postulated new futures. While researchers have appended the usual disclaimer of generalisability, the QSRLS findings and products have been widely disseminated throughout Australia, the USA, Canada, the UK, Europe, Asia, South Africa and the Middle East (Bob Lingard, 2001, p. 25). Within the model, the New Basics acts as curriculum organiser to assist teachers to structure what is taught.

The New Basics aligns students with the diverse communities and complex cultures of the future by engaging them with four questions critical to new identities, economies, workplaces and technologies (Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, 2004). The question ‘Who am I and where am I going?’ addresses issues of life pathways and social futures. ‘How do I make sense of and communicate with the world?’ engages the student with the issues of multiliteracies and communications media. ‘What are my rights and responsibilities in communities, cultures and economies?’ stimulates interactive citizenship, while ‘How do I describe, analyse and shape the world around me?’ implicates environments and technologies.

The New Basics coheres with Productive Pedagogies, a 20-part, multidimensional model of classroom practice which also functions as a mode of professional development for teachers. It specifies strategies to build intellectual challenge, social and cultural relevance, emotional and practical support, and recognition of difference into daily teaching (Luke, 2001). In turn, Rich Tasks allows students to demonstrate deep, elaborated learning from intellectually challenging, real-world relevant tasks over three year sequences up to year nine. This approach creates a productive alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, the three ‘message systems’ of schooling.

Assessing Harry's literacy

Harry Potter, 16 in the sixth novel, has now left the compulsory middle school years¹⁸, but at this point his educational outcomes are a product of them. In the middle school years, engagement, achievement and literacy are integrally related (Carrington, 2004, p. 30). In terms of literacy, Victoria Carrington builds on QSRLS to note that maintaining engagement and achievement initially demands a particular alignment: of real-world-related, intellectually provocative curriculum; with productive pedagogies; providing clear linkage between assessment and classroom practices; and with all of these embedded in socially and emotionally supportive environments (Carrington, p. 36).

Victoria Clay (2005, pp. 10-11) agrees, also building on QSRLS to suggest that the key to engaging boys in effective literacy is to tap into their worlds and make literacy teaching 'real, relevant and radical'. Clay recommends researching the customary literacy materials of boys and their parents, and incorporating a selection of everyday and popular text types into teaching activities. She recommends identifying boys' skills and funds of cultural and social knowledge to increase teachers' understandings of the way boys approach literacy practices. Finally, she suggests radical possibilities including giving boys choices over the activities and content of the curriculum, choices which preferably integrate physical action, clear goals and immediate feedback.

At Hogwarts, Harry is exposed to a formal curriculum that encompasses a variety of pedagogical approaches, none of which quite matches the QSRLS-derived prescriptions above. Hogwarts' teachers, like many of the earliest Australian teachers, are appointed from the community of wizards on the basis of life experience. They do not encounter the Muggle world's urgent emphasis on professional development aimed at reskilling teachers, a proportion of whom appear recognisably disengaged and dispirited (Carrington, 2004, p. 33; also see Chapter Three, Globalisation), to meet the new and dynamically mutating educational needs of young Muggles. The productive

¹⁸ Years five to ten and ages ten to 15 includes the range of most definitions of the middle school years.

alignment between schooling's three message systems – curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment – appears variable, if not haphazard, at Hogwarts.

Professor Binns ('I deal with *facts*, Miss Granger, not myths and legends') demonstrates a low-challenge, teacher-centred transmission style of pedagogy in a subject-centred History of Magic curriculum devoid of connection to students' lived experience:

Professor Binns opened his notes and began to read in a flat drone like an old vacuum cleaner until nearly everyone in the class was in a deep stupor, occasionally coming round long enough to copy down a name or date, then falling asleep again. (*CoS*, p. 113)

Teaching on in disregard of his own deceased status, Professor Binns adequately symbolises the consequences of the attempted recuperation by conservative commentators of subject-centred, canonical curricula in Muggle education.

I return to Kevin Donnelly, introduced in the Foreword and encountered again in Chapter One, as my iconic Australian representative of a conservative recuperation. Donnelly (2005a) notes that the English classroom was once a place where students could learn to read, write and study worthwhile literature, such as Shakespeare, Patrick White, Joseph Conrad and Jane Austen. He objects to the 'explosion' of the canon to include texts from cultural contexts such as the fashion industry, daytime television, cyber-feminism and plastic surgery. He also alleges and rejects the replacement of concepts such as truth and beauty with others such as authenticity, identity, historical revisionism, mimicry and hybridity.

To rescue boys from the 'feminist-inspired gender agenda [which] has been forced on Australian schools', Donnelly (2005a, p. 61) advocates reading to boys from traditional fairy tales and legends. He nominates stories such as *Jack and the beanstalk*, *Robin Hood*, Norse legends and the tales of Greek heroes such as Odysseus 'in order that boys understand and value those personal qualities that are distinctively male.' A former teacher and previous chief of staff to a Federal coalition employment minister,

Donnelly is author of *Why our schools are failing* (2004), a conservative revisionist text which participates in constructions of moral panic and, in relation to boys, takes recourse in the hegemonic masculinities implicated in the poorer literacy performances of some groups of boys.

Alternatively, as if to remind us that pedagogies must be sensitively aligned with the local and individual, Hagrid displays a laudable real-world, hands-on, student-centred approach in *Care of Magical Creatures*. Unfortunately, however, Hagrid's approach is allied to an alarming excess of challenge:

'Now, firs' thing you gotta know abou' Hippogriffs is they're proud,' said Hagrid. 'Easily offended, Hippogriffs are. Don't never insult one, 'cause it might be the last thing yeh do.' It happened in a steely flash of talons; Malfoy let out a high-pitched scream and next moment, Hagrid was wrestling Buckbeak back into his collar as he strained to get at Malfoy, who lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes. (*PoA*, pp. 88-91)

As for supportive environments, which encourage students to influence the choice of school activities, take study seriously, regulate their own behaviour and meet explicit criteria and high standards, these are somewhat capriciously available at Hogwarts. Before the first flying lesson gets under way, and against strictest orders, Harry flies his broomstick (brilliantly). Professor McGonagall catches him, but does not, as he fears, initiate his expulsion. Instead, she marches the quaking Harry away to receive a startling reward for his unregulated behaviour - a meeting with Wood, captain of Gryffindor's Quidditch team, to be signed up as the team's youngest Seeker in a century (*PS*, pp. 110-113).

Professor Snape, on the other hand, appears to achieve regulated behaviour and academic effort by deliberately stimulating student terror:

Snape finished calling the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels. 'You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making,' he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word –

like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort.... 'I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.' (*PS*, p. 102)

At base, Hogwarts shares many similarities with Muggle schools struggling to cope with the demands of new times. Without the patination of Harry's adventures, the school exemplifies a 19th century education system expecting an eternal sun to shine on the British Empire. Harry is lucky, however: despite the shortcomings of Hogwarts' official curricula, his personal learning is nevertheless encompassed by a real, relevant and radical, intellectually provocative curriculum replete with linked assessments, with all of these embedded in an emotionally and practically supportive environment (as discussed in Chapter Three).

Firstly, Harry is the beneficiary of an alternative, unofficial curriculum that values and engages his differences as 'the boy who lived' (*PS*, p. 7) and 'the chosen one' (*HBP*, p. 42). This curriculum comprises the continuing project, in each of his years and in each of the novels, to resolve real-life mysteries related to Voldemort. These challenges involve clear goals and plenty of physical action. Immediate feedback arrives in the actual physical and mental survival of his high stakes adventures, in the loss or gain of house points generated by teachers' judgments of his intervening escapades, and often as public plaudits at the successful conclusion of many of his tasks.

Secondly, Harry benefits from Dumbledore's facilitatory teaching style, engaging with a project-based, problem-oriented curriculum not available to Hogwarts students generally but in which his closest friends share by virtue of his relationship with them. Initially, Voldemort has established the terms of the curriculum through his attacks and incursions, but in the sixth text Harry crucially discovers that his consent to engage is necessary even to a compulsory curriculum:

(H)e understood at last what Dumbledore had been trying to tell him. It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but

Dumbledore knew – and so do I, thought Harry, with a rush of fierce pride, and so did my parents – that there was all the difference in the world. (*HBP*, p. 479)

Finally, until the last stages of the sixth novel when Dumbledore dies, Dumbledore has provided important practical support in the initiation stages – for instance, in the provision of the very handy invisibility cloak – and substantial emotional support, particularly during the resolution phases of the plots. Since deceased principals are entitled to speak, act and influence events from their portraits in the principal's office, Dumbledore may well continue as Harry's mentor in the final novel.

Harry's politics of literacy

The contexts of Harry's unofficial education, then, are favourable. Nevertheless, Harry's literacy practices demand closer scrutiny. Unlike his fans, he does not appear to read print for pleasure, and he generally treats the screen-based technologies which surround him – moving portraits such as The Fat Lady, which guards the porthole to the Gryffindor common room – as utilitarian. Like many boys, Harry's literacy practices have a strong technicist-instrumentalist bias: when he needs factual information to undertake and successfully prosecute a task, he seeks it zealously and consumes it avidly – as, for instance, when he, Hermione and Ron research assiduously to attempt to find the identity of the keeper of the Philosopher's Stone, Nicholas Flamel, and when Harry illicitly infiltrates the library at night to locate restricted texts (*PS*, p. 145, pp. 151-152). Otherwise, he is a reluctant, but admirably dogged and competent reader of the mandated school texts, and from a socio-cultural perspective, this is indeed a magical outcome.

Socio-economic status continues to be a potent predictor of school-based literacy achievement, cutting across many other categories (Comber et al., 1998; Lokan, Greenwood, & Cresswell, 2001, p. 184, p. 207). Despite the Dursley household's upper middle class income status, however, it is neither abundant nor at ease with print. Dudley's storage room, for instance, is full of broken, discarded toys and shelves of pristine untouched books (*PS*, p. 32). As for conversation around texts, Aunt Petunia's first rule for Harry is: '*Don't ask questions*' (*PS*, p. 20), and it seems unimaginable that

either Petunia or Vernon Dursley might ever have cuddled up with him and read stories, sang songs or recited nursery rhymes in a conventional middle class way (Ainley, 2004, November-December, p. 4). There is no encouragement for drawing, writing or expressive uses of the body; in fact, the Dursleys keep Harry as downtrodden as possible, hoping 'to squash the magic out of him.' (*PoA*, p. 8). We must assume from this that the elementary school he and the brutalising Dudley attended together did assist Harry, encouraging and preserving his literacy skills despite the corrosive effects of the Dursley household.

Should Harry continue beyond the seventh novel as the man who lived, we should not worry that his instrumentalist style of literacy practice is likely to impede his social or workforce participation. In fact, by status, wealth and power he is positioned to accede to the highest levels of social, cultural and political participation. Famous by virtue of surviving Voldemort's original attack on him, Harry is also wealthy by inheritance both from his dead parents (*PS*, pp. 50, 58) and his godfather, Sirius Black (*OoP*, pp. 710-711). Despite Hermione's best attempts to stimulate interest in S.P.E.W., the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (*GoF*, p. 198), there is as yet no redistributive social justice movement questioning the relationship of wizarding wealth to the bonded servitude of elves, so Harry's wealth remains entirely his own.

Harry plans a career, and there is no doubt it will be distinguished, as an Auror, involving high status espionage with Bondesque elements of danger and secrecy. In contrast to the lived experience of many of today's youth, in which pathways from school to work have become radically delinearised (Furlong & Kelly, 2005; Luke, 2001), Hogwarts provides a perfect fit between subjects at school and Harry's chosen profession (*HBP*, pp. 166-167). As Dumbledore's protégé, there is also little doubt that Harry will become the next most accomplished wizard to Dumbledore. At the conclusion of the sixth novel, Dumbledore passes him the mantle of leadership:

'It's going to be all right, sir,' Harry said over and over again, more worried by Dumbledore's silence than he had been by his weakened voice. 'We're nearly there ... I can Apparate us both back ... don't worry ...'
'I am not worried, Harry,' said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. 'I am with you.' (*HBP*, p. 540)

Harry appears to be mirroring Dumbledore's own Bildungsroman, since Dumbledore is famed for defeating the previous dark wizard, Grindelwald, in 1945 (*PS*, p. 160). The defeat of the dark wizard, resonating etymologically with Beowulf's defeat of Grendel and temporally with the Allies' defeat of Hitler, appears to be a *rite de passage de rigueur*, the proper path of the hero/wizard leader. By situating Dumbledore simultaneously as the most conventionally literate and crucially, the most technically literate and therefore the most powerful wizard, as the progressive head of the wizards' most prestigious secondary school, and as the leader of the wizarding community's progressive political movement, the text promotes a conventional bourgeois ideology that relates functionally advanced literacy skills to social and political power.

In a future beyond the series Harry may well succeed Dumbledore as Hogwarts' principal, acquiring charge of the curriculum and exerting a large measure of control over both the political tenor of his times and the political formations of the future. His conventional literacies do him no harm, certainly; but his social and cultural positionings greatly advantage him. As a member of the ruling class, Harry's traditional print literacy practices, embedded within privilege, are useful but not crucial to his future; what really marks him as a leader are his technoliteracies, his ability to make the word weapon. Although Harry's moments of glory are built from both quotidian and exotic print texts, his fame attaches to technoliteracy: that instantaneous, spectacular moment when the magic of the word, as spell, transforms into martial technologies. In his case, power adjuncts literacy to advance power.

The martial idiom is by no means mandatory. It is, however, frequently marked by gender: the school nurse, Madam Pomfrey, whose work is reproductive and little audienced, often uses potions, not spells, for healing purposes such as regrowing Harry's bones (*CoS*, p. 131). Molly Weasley exerts a brisk hand with household spells: *Scourgify!*, for instance, is a useful all-purpose cleaner and handy domestic organiser. However, when it comes to dissipating a Boggart, a menacing mirage in the form of a person's worst fears, with the more demanding *Riddikulus!* spell, Molly is disabled by terror for her loved ones and has to be rescued by a calm, competent male on whose bosom she then profusely weeps (*OoP*, pp. 159-161).

Hermione's compendium of useful spells is crucial to Harry's successes, but, like Molly, she is made to carry paralysing emotion as foil to the agentive male. As though encountering an invisible ceiling, Hermione is felled – often by fear – at vital endpoints, never quite making it to the final heroic showdown in each novel (Heilman, 2003a, p. 224). Neither does Ron, but he is more likely to be felled nobly; as when he bravely surrenders himself at chess to be knocked oblivious by the white queen (*PS*, pp. 206-208), so the others can go on.

Text by text, Hermione's bouts of anxiety and hysteria, at odds with her usual level-headed quick thinking, increase in exact proportion to Harry's increasing anger, profanity and vengefulness, which are much less exhibited by the other males his age and appear to signal his growing dominant masculinity. Harry's anger (*OoP*, p. 647, p. 669) intimidates Hermione at times, and he is not above making her bear the brunt of it:

A wave of hot, prickly anger swept through Harry's body; how could she remind him of that blunder now?

'I mean, it was really great of you and everything,' said Hermione quickly, looking positively petrified at the look on Harry's face, 'everyone thought it was a wonderful thing to do –'

'That's funny,' said Harry through gritted teeth, 'because I definitely remember Ron saying I'd wasted time *acting the hero* ... is that what you think this is? You reckon I want to act the hero again?'

'No, no, no!' said Hermione, looking aghast. 'That's not what I mean at all!' Harry let out a roar of frustration. Hermione actually stepped back from him, looking alarmed. [Ellipses added] (*OoP*, p. 647)

As Sara Ruddick (1993, pp. 117-118) comments, war does not begin only on the day of declaration: there is no sharp division between domestic, civic and military violences, and '(d)iscrete episodes of legitimate violence are predictable consequences of daily warlike ways of living.' Heavily imbricated in a fluent dialectics of martial masculinity and its companionate subserving femininity, Harry and Hermione are trapped, without critical insight, into validating Harry's 'good violence' while receiving no pedagogical support to deconstruct their modes of interaction. 'Bad' violence, states Boose (1993, p. 78), is the hostility no-one wants to examine because it works to undermine or expose contradictions in the cultural myth for which good violence is the paradigmatic structure.

As a conventional hero, Harry must always go on alone, and he often does this – in contrast to Hermione’s intelligence – with ‘stupid’ courage. For instance, when he tackles a troll it is ‘both very brave and very stupid’; Hermione has already fallen to the ground in terror (*PS*, p. 130). When, for the first time in his life, Harry wants to attack not to defend but to kill, his ‘stupid’ attack takes his opponent by surprise (*PoA*, p. 249), while Hermione whimpers. As the Dementors close in, Hermione collapses and Harry is yet again alone... ‘completely alone.’ (*PoA*, p. 281).

It would be wrong to castigate the *Harry Potter* texts for not being fully inclusive: no text reasonably can be (Misson, 1998, p. 88). However, it is important to note the degree to which the potential of the feminine is repeatedly sacrificed to construct a version of the masculine as supreme, making the truncated feminine essential to the *über* male. Equally though differently alienated, neither male nor female gets to demonstrate the expanded repertoires of practice by which literate subjects may be encouraged (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002).

In the *Harry Potter* texts, then, spells to disable or kill – such as *Imperio!*, *Crucio!*, *Sectumsempra!* and *Avada Kedavra!* – attest to the word made mainly male and highly lethal. With each novel, Harry becomes an ever-more expert practitioner of violent means of defence, containment and aggression. At the culmination of the sixth novel, he is fully blooded:

‘But, sir,’ said Harry, making a valiant effort not to sound argumentative, ‘it all comes to the same thing, doesn’t it? I’ve got to try and kill him, or –’
‘Got to?’ said Dumbledore. ‘Of course you’ve got to! But not because of the prophecy! Because you, yourself, will never rest until you’ve tried! We both know it! Imagine, please, just for a moment, that you had never heard that prophecy! How would you feel about Voldemort now? Think!’
Harry watched Dumbledore striding up and down in front of him, and thought. He thought of his mother, his father and Sirius. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat.
‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’ (*HBP*, p. 478)

There is a certain melancholy in reading Harry at this standpoint. His literacy, schooling and all that comes with it – a privileged socio-politico-cultural position – brings him to a particular philosophical position: an individualist ontology, a dualistic epistemology and a retributive axiology. Harry constitutes himself as the seat of meaning and action, he constructs himself as good and the other as evil, his morality commands sacrifice of self to avenge his community.

Terry Eagleton, however, is prepared to assist in confronting Harry's self-positionings. In the face of the 20th century's megadeaths – estimated at 187 million, the equivalent of more than ten percent of the world's population in 1900 – literary theory ought to critique such classical tragic notions as fate and heroism, the ennobling role of suffering, the need to sacrifice the individual to the whole, the transcendent nature of tragic affirmation, and 'other such high-minded platitudes of traditional tragic theory', states Eagleton (2003, p. x).

Risking the epistemological naivety of referring to 'real life', Eagleton (2003, p. 21) insists that tragedy nevertheless refers to actual human distress and despair, breakdown and wretchedness (Eagleton, p. x). About the genre of the tragic, he states, there is an ontological depth and high seriousness which grates on 'the postmodern sensibility, with its unbearable lightness of being' (Eagleton, p. ix). Harry's positioning, rather than reflecting depth and seriousness, is analogous to that of which Eagleton complains in relation to contemporary theories of the tragic: an inability to confront genuine human suffering, and a tendency to avoid actual suffering by positioning the tragic as ecstatic transcendence (Eagleton, p. 24). Harry presents us with a square-jawed, masculinist ideal of tragedy, a pugnacious public-spirited hero who will face his punishment as a [Christ-like] man (Eagleton, p. 76).

Tragedy can be seen as the nub of what makes the *Harry Potter* series both boring and terrifying: the perseverant recommitment, in language charming, disarming, and compelling, to the millennia of *lex talionis*. Underlying the seductions of language is the morbid, and perhaps now mortal, repetition of a philosophy which engages dualism to repudiate love and its remorseless psychological demands, and to validate

hate and its technical ease; that is, to eject rather than embrace both the Other and the compassionate self. The passage quoted above reverberates with the public rationales offered for the West's most recent war against Iraq, in denial of the knowledge of those subtle and overt brutalities which historicise the subjectivity and subjectification of the Saddam/Bin Laden/Voldemort figure. For Harry, it could have been, and could still be – because Rowling has seeded her narrative with alternative possibilities – so different.

In the age of postmodernism a critical understanding of the relationship between the self and the other is one of the crucial challenges for pedagogical practices, according to Peter McLaren (1995, p. 17). McLaren (p. 18) defines the postmodern as subtlety – as a sensibility, or logic, by which subjects appropriate cultural practices into their own lives from the contemporary context. Relying on Grossberg, McLaren argues that a danger of postmodern culture is the establishment of a 'disciplined mobilisation', the accrual of both stability and mobility within everyday life through social practices which draw texts into spatial and temporal articulation.

In postmodernism, young people exist within a space between subjectification (boredom) and commodification (terror), against which media culture has become a buffer zone, a paradoxical site in which youth live out a difficult if not impossible relation to the future. Youth, McLaren (1995, p. 19) contends, have been largely formed out of the media strategies of the 'autonomous affect', in which politics, values, and meanings have been reduced to individualised images of morality, self-sacrifice and community.

Razack (2000) illustrates this as a general phenomenon when she describes how the intensive media commentary on a white Canadian UN peacekeeper, returning emotionally broken from service in Africa, concentrates almost exclusively on his affective responses to the Hutu-Tutsi brutality he has witnessed. The persistent focus of media commentary effectively privileges the immediacy and assuagement of Western white pain over the history of Black African colonialist dispossession, Razack concludes, and limits the possibilities of appropriate Western assistance to Africa. In similar vein, goodlooking media tart Gilderoy Lockhart is quite willing, in *Harry Potter*

and the chamber of secrets, to see others die to keep feeding his own façade of heroism (CoS, p. 220).

‘Young people’, concludes McLaren (1995, p. 19), ‘are living the surface identities of media images in which the politics of interpretative insight is replaced by the politics of “feeling good.”’ Using McLaren’s perspective, the affective alliances between Harry Potter and his readers – that is, the permission to feel good and to adore Harry, relentlessly validated by repetitive media pedagogy – largely precludes those readers’ critical appraisals of Harry’s positioning.

At this point the pleasures of the texts need to be brought into sympathy with the value of the texts for the critical educator. At the same time as they produce pleasure, the *Harry Potter* texts are directly shaped to powerfully induct teenage readers into a particular world view, challenging the work of creating a critical distance without demeaning their value (Misson, 1998, pp. 88-89). Analysis can constitute an invasion of students’ private space, unless it is managed with empathy; yet on the other hand, the refusal to engage critical capacities constitutes ‘dumbing down’.

McLaren (1995, p. 254) locates a broad response to this conundrum in the infinity of mirrors which constitutes the project of knowledge construction. Acknowledging the necessarily situated processes of the epistemological project, he avers that the philosophy driving the production of meaning gives epistemology its basic characteristics. If epistemology is pre-supported by particular ethico-political imperatives, he argues, teaching can be informed by a project of social transformation which can produce radically liberating forms of knowledge. Effectively, he advocates a classroom always already based on democratic principles such that texts are received into a socio-cultural milieu which favours critique:

It is possible a priori to stipulate ethically yet still advance relationally and contingently a pedagogical project that cautions against rationalizing the social sphere based on the idea of individualism or taking as its normative subject the obedient, hard-working and creative citizen whose goal is to preserve existing

relations of social privilege that have been produced out of the blood and mortar of official history. (McLaren, 1995, p. 254)

Should the latter (the preservation of agonistic privilege) be the outcome, Harry will get away with it, of course, since he inhabits a fictional universe; but, unlike Harry, the complex lives of his readers include a bellicose international political environment on a globe hosting increasing competition over potable fresh water, fossil fuel energy, the use of arable soils, clean fecund oceans and clean air. Such circumstances, whether actual or potential, contraindicate the reproduction of thoughtlessly obedient subjects.

As Hugh Stretton (2000, p. 249) notes, the developed economies are productive beyond any sensible judgment of need, and Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss (2005) describe the inability of people in the same economies to comprehend and apply limits to their personal consumption, or to derive feelings of wellbeing and happiness from their enriched status. As well, Luke (2001) expresses concern that the secondary school system is retraining people for an economy which no longer exists, and he looks to radically increased complexity in literacy education and schooling to prepare young people for life pathways not fully understood, but which nevertheless need to include preparedness for diverse sunrise industries.

To a more predictable degree, these life pathways will encounter key characteristics of the youth labour market within a global effect in which working conditions in rich economies are drawn into a downward alignment with poorer economies, a decline sometimes referred to as Brazilianisation (Furlong & Kelly, 2005, p. 211). Youth labour market characteristics include higher job mobility, lower average incomes, casual and part time work, periodic unemployment, complex and variable education and employment pathways, and the concentration of young workers in the retail and food service sector. Additionally, socio-economic status will continue to disadvantage the most vulnerable labour market participants: young women, the least skilled, and sections of the service labour market (Furlong & Kelly, p. 223).

To assist in resolving these issues, which speak to both mass and individual welfare, Harry's real-life cohorts need to access highly complex literacies, schooling, and what comes with them, not just to position themselves for the globalised information economy, but also to become critical textual operators with the ability to take action for social justice and democracy.

Literacy is not the problem and not the solution, but it helps

To follow the introductory quotation from Gee is to remind ourselves of the irrelevance in comparative gender terms of the lesser literacy achievements of boys once they reach the workforce (Hillman & Rothman, 2004; Kenway, 2000). In global terms, President George W. Bush's idiosyncratic grip on oral literacy ('[T]he illiteracy [sic] level of our children are [sic] appalling'¹⁹) is similarly irrelevant to his capacity to hold political power. In terms of values, norms and beliefs, Bush's brief is to iconise the socially conservative, neo-capitalist Right, and for this task his qualities are exemplary. Socially, culturally and politically, the Right front can remain confident of advancing through Bush, whose errors and accidents of communication may not only be seen as irrelevant, but may also become the terms of his endearment to particular traditions of hegemonic masculinity (and their supporting forms of femininity) which cherish anti-intellectualism.

In his spouse's description, Bush corresponds quite well to the 'Ideal Type' which obsessed Germany's National Socialist movement from 1933 to 1945. About her spouse, Laura Bush is quoted as saying:

George is not an overly introspective person. He has good instincts, and he goes with them. He doesn't need to evaluate and reevaluate a decision. He doesn't try to overthink. He likes action. (Weisberg, 2004)

¹⁹ Drawn from *The complete Bushisms*, an encyclopaedia of George W. Bush's 'accidental wit and wisdom', compiled by Jacob Weisberg on *Slate* on-line magazine (<http://www.slate.com>). Among other errors of oral literacy, Bush often fails to correctly conjugate nouns and verbs.

George Mosse's description of the attitude of the Nazis bears comparison:

Activism was important.... The hero is no academic, no man of knowledge, but one who had developed his power of will to the fullest in order to activate his "healthy" instinct for what is right. [Ellipses added] (Mosse, 1966, pp. xxvii-xxviii)

On a neo-capitalist Planet Earth, literacy is necessarily technicist-instrumentalist: practitioners must have a certain broad compendium of knowledges and skills sufficient to port to the highest bidder in order to fulfil each person's own enterprise trajectory. Coherently, the striking of values (consistent with the prescriptions of Outcomes Based Education, in which each student is required to know, to do and to value at certain levels in each learning area) is necessarily confined to the values, norms and beliefs of the free market: the supremacy of competition, private enterprise and private profit; the necessity of private ownership of resources; the reliance on the individual as the sinecure of social meaning. As McLaren suggests, within this regime literacy practices are likely to produce subjects politically and ideologically configured as neo-capitalism's efficient, compliant workers.

Despite the constraints inherent to policy based on neo-capitalist philosophy, more is requested. In the discourses of economic futures, teachers are called on to produce human beings who will participate actively in 'knowledge nations', 'clever countries', 'creative nations', 'smart states', cultures of innovation, and the like. In education, curriculum is the mechanism, constituting a design by which futures come into being: out of knowledges, practices, values and their modes of transmission. Curriculum imagines certain kinds of human beings with particular characteristics (Kress, 1995, p. viii). Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (1999, p. 5) emphasise that literacy education, in the end, is about the kind of society and citizen/subjects that could and should be created.

Literacy and subject English together hold crucial places in this endeavour. As a culture's possibility of making its images of itself and of its world, Gunther Kress (1995, p. 74) maintains, literacy

is foundational in the shaping of the future. The means of [making] representations which we provide for children and for adults, are the means which enable them to be fully human and fully social.

Literacies cohere the curriculum. However, the project of literacy-across-the-curriculum has made indifferent progress, measured by the distance between Luke's doleful declaration that the project has failed (Luke, 2001) and Mary Ryan's careful explications of why that might be so and how it could be different (Ryan, 2005). Subject English and its versions by other names continue to be the master vehicles for committed literacy practice in many schools in Australia. According to Kress (1995, pp. 94-95), subject English, along with mathematics and science, advances foundational capacities for thinking. English exceeds the other two subjects in these powers, however, because it provides the means by which human beings may understand themselves as making the means of meaning-making. In this way, children may see themselves as powerful actors in the world, as producers of their own futures

In terms of the politics of literacy, then, habits of literacy curricula and associated pedagogic practices set the boundaries on the possibilities of the making of the self by each child (Kress, 1995, pp. 74-75). Accepting this, it becomes imperative to think of curriculum overtly and directly in relation to likely social, economic and political changes, in relation to likely futures, and in thinking of the English curriculum as a central and crucial means of intervention in the construction of futures (Kress, p. 15).

In these contexts, Kress (1995, p. 80) asserts, teachers have a right and responsibility to envisage the kind of society and the kind of subjectivities they wish to produce. A failure to fulfil these tasks means that others who have less interest in socially just outcomes may set the agenda for curriculum.

By this assertion, Kress positions teachers within an independent field of theory and practice responsible, whether assenting to or dissenting from the tenor of

governments or other societal institutions, for the provision of education as democracy. As Apple (2003b, p. 222) confirms, education is not simply a passive actor, a mirror of external relations; it has relative autonomy, generating profound effects that may block or modify the course of State formation (Wong & Apple, 2003, p. 81). Teacher 'neutrality' in the classroom renders the curriculum opaque, domesticating it and disempowering students (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 174).

The conservative lean

As a mechanism of democracy, social justice has been a persistent theme in Australian discussions of literacy and curriculum since at least the 1950s, contributory to a popular movement against discrimination which took strength from the civil rights movement in the USA (Stephen Kemmis, 1990, pp. 93-94). In introducing a 20 year retrospective of articles published in *Curriculum Perspectives*, journal of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), Lesley McFarlane (2004, p. v) notes that across the period of review works on equity are strongly represented. Beginning in the 1950s, simultaneous with civil, women's and gay rights movements, postmodern and poststructural theoretical approaches assisted to reveal the central role of Australian schools in the reproduction of society through ideologies of class, gender, ethnicity and physical ability (Stephen Kemmis, 1990, pp. 93-94). As pressures in the economy forced competition both between students within schools and between school leavers for work and for places in higher education, education's prevailing meritocratic ideology, aided by the complicity of curriculum in power, as Marginson (1997, p. 137) terms it, came under tension for its inability to deliver just outcomes for all.

However, the incompletely realised attempts of the 1970s to direct better support to disadvantaged groups revealed the structural complexity of disadvantage, and the parallel complexity of its remedies. As Stephen Kemmis (1990, p. 93) explains: '(T)he problem was not merely one of the opportunities available to disadvantaged students, but a fundamental problem about the structure of schooling as an institution premised on the values of hegemonic groups.' In response, education professionals generated pressure for more just, equitable and inclusive forms of education which would better accommodate Australia's increasingly diversified multicultural society – resulting, for

instance, in the inclusion in texts and curricula of issues related to the personal, social and cultural impacts of and on the lives of indigenous peoples and women. *Queensland's social justice strategy 1994-1998*, for instance, stated that it was

based on a belief that quality education empowers all participants as active and informed citizens with knowledge, skills, attitudes and processes to behave ethically, to question and challenge injustice, and to participate as equals. (Queensland Department of Education, 1994)

Progressively, widening polarities in Australian society have been paralleled by deliberate and systematic attempts to outwrite competitive and academic educational contents and practices which privilege the children of some social groups and disadvantage children of other groups.

Thus, Jack Thomson's position as outlined in a manual used in one teacher training course in Western Australia is typical in its intents, if not in its remedies:

A new model of English teaching that supports egalitarianism and ethical responsibility rather than social division and competitive materialism is urgently needed in Australia...as the fissures in the social fabric grow wider and multiply.... A rhetorical/ethical model is designed to give students from disadvantaged groups a powerful literacy and access to mainstream culture, with all of the choices that such access entails.... It is a model which involves all students in learning to work together co-operatively to solve problems and in coming to understand other people and their beliefs, while at the same time developing an understanding of the social origins of such beliefs. It is a model designed to help all students to live ethically in a plural but increasingly tolerant society, where difference is respected and valued. (J. Thomson, 1998, pp. 15-16)

In the context of present politics of literacy, including the establishment of a national inquiry into teacher training to examine, inter alia, 'the education philosophy underpinning the teacher-training courses' (Nelson, 2005), Thomson's concluding statements are significant:

It is a model designed to problematise the current theory of 'economic rationalism' (itself a contradictory text in a liberal-humanist society) driving the political and economic policies of Australian Governments for the past 10-15 years – a theory which assumes that people need increasing material rewards to work conscientiously; and a theory which assumes a view of human behaviour as being inherently motivated by greed, selfishness and fear. (J. Thomson, 1998, p. 16)

Thomson's declaration is marked by its opposition to the contemporary positions of both major political parties in Australia. The philosophy of the Australian Liberal Party supports private initiative, competition and choice and opposes government direction of resources and intervention in society; these are the foundations of a conservative party of private enterprise, unfettered markets and contracted social welfare provision. One consequence of applied Liberal philosophy is that under the Howard government, public funding of public education has deteriorated as public funding of private schools has improved, while restrictions on the establishment and growth of private schools have been curtailed (such as in the Howard Government's abolition of the Hawke Government's New Schools Policy, which assessed the local demographic justifications for new private schools). Related to claims of expanding school 'choice' (Buckingham, 2001), such policies have nevertheless not affected the capacity of private schools to concentrate social and cultural capital, consolidate positional advantage, and fail the possibility of serving the public interest (Bates, 2005).

On the other hand, the history of the Australian Labor Party while in government allows it to be seen as a de facto party of the right, equally bespoken by the politics of economic rationalism. Through its alliances with trade union bureaucratic élites and the forces of capitalist, rather than socialist, globalisation during the Hawke and Keating governments (Beams, 2004, part 2), the ALP was responsible for the dismantling of protective barriers to global capitalist market forces. The outcomes and processes of this particular phase of Australian economic globalisation were complex, but overall more favourable to capital than to labour: the long-standing system of national economic regulation was progressively abandoned; working conditions deteriorated, real wages were reduced, the 'user pays' principle was introduced into health and education, and business and the wealthy were accorded innovative tax concessions.

The share of gross domestic product attributed to wages, which was 63.3 percent in 1982-83, fell to 57.8 percent in 1996, while profit share in the same period rose from 12.1 to 16.3 percent (Beams, 2004, part 2), attesting to a significant upwards redistribution of wealth in Australia. The Dawkins reforms in education signalled the alignment of government with business and its economic priorities through the instrumentalisation of education in service to economic policy. The policy document *Strengthening Australia's schools* (Dawkins & Holding, 1987) was instrumental in propounding the same kind of market reforms for compulsory schooling as had already been presaged for higher education (Marginson, 1997, p. 162), reprising the thrust of England's *Black papers in education* to make market principles and central control stand as the pillars of sound educational systems. More recently, during the 2004 Australian election Labor and Liberal policies were mutually compliant, evidencing the unlikelihood that Labor will reclaim the grounds of democratic socialism in the foreseeable future.

Thus, the desire of education through its major vehicle – literacy curricula through subject English – to ameliorate disadvantage so as to produce citizens with equal capacities to participate fully in Australian and global society appears not to be underwritten by either the philosophies and/or the practices of the majority parties of Australian politics. Guided by belief in capitalist modes of production and minimalist State interventions, the parties appear now to share a view of social justice in which the rights to life, liberty and legitimately acquired property predominate. Whatever patterns of distribution arise from these are held to be just, regardless of the inequality of such distributions (Hatton & Elliot, 1998, p. 69).

A number of commentators see the predominance of the right in education as the consequence of a long period of conscious and conscientious conservative activism (Apple, 2003a; Cahill, 2005; Cambourne, 2003; Marginson, 1997). 'How did neo-liberalism ever emerge from its ultra-minoritarian ghetto to become the dominant doctrine in the world today?' demands left activist Susan George (2002, p. 3), and answers herself in a manner which synthesises other, more dispassionate, commentaries:

(N)eo-liberals have bought and paid for their own vicious and regressive “Great Transformation”. They have understood, as progressives have not, that ideas have consequences. Starting from a tiny embryo at the University of Chicago with the philosopher-economist Friedrich von Hayek and his students like Milton Friedman at its nucleus, the neo-liberals have created a huge international network of foundations, institutes, research centers, publications, scholars, writers and public relations hacks to develop, package and push their ideas and doctrine relentlessly. No matter how many disasters of all kinds the neo-liberal system has visibly created, no matter what financial crises it may engender, no matter how many losers and outcasts it may create, it is still made to seem inevitable, like an act of God, the only possible economic and social order available to us. (George, 2002, p. 3)

The education/literacy debate in Australia

In the Australian context, the public education debate may have been influenced by the assiduity and vocalisation of a strong research sector and robust professional organisations, and thus protected from vulnerability to a single-event galvanic flashpoint for public opinion. However, as national politics solidify to the right, an enlarging catalogue of events reprises those in England. ‘Although’, records Damien Cahill (2005, p. 10),

the New Right’s ‘free market’ ideology had a long heritage within Australia, it was very much a fringe position in the 1970s and broke with the ruling consensus around managed capitalism and the necessary, positive role for the state, in the provision of services and the redistribution of income. Cohering through a series of think-tanks, and with its funding base provided by leading factions of Australian capital, the New Right aimed to dismantle this consensus and shape society according to its particular ideological vision.

In describing the importance of neo-liberal think tanks to conservative reconfigurations of education, Cahill (2005, p. 9) refers to the Howard government’s allegations throughout 2004 that public education was the subject of capture by teachers’ unions, with public school curricula reflecting fashionable, Leftist views involving a ‘values neutral’ approach (like the term ‘politically correct’, a disparagement of progressive views on multiculturalism, the family, sexuality and religion) and a dearth of serious intellectual content.²⁰

²⁰ As before, while the diagnosis by the Right may be partially correct, the right’s treatment of the malady is likely to constitute recidivism to industrial era, monocultural education systems dependent on moral anchorages, functionalism, literalism and certainty; thus the thesis of this chapter, that such recursions are incapable of meeting the demands of new times.

In remedy, the Federal budget of that year required every public school to fly the Australian flag and to undertake a program of 'values education', significantly referenced to an Anglo-Celtic inheritance (Jayasuriya, 2002, p. 42), in satisfaction of new Federal funding criteria. This strategy might be recognised as an ideological assault on the legitimacy, independence and diversity of public education, Cahill comments, but such actions are 'simply the latest' in a long campaign by the New Right in Australia by which it targets public education at all levels:

First, New Right think-tanks have mobilised to influence educational curricula, often using the institutions of public education to promote their own neo-liberal values. Second, the New Right has actively set out to undermine public education in Australia. The educational agenda of the Howard Government is the culmination of this campaign. (Cahill, 2005, p. 9)

In this context, Marginson (1997, p. 133) observes:

For cultural conservatives, market liberals and employers, the basic skills issue was too useful [to] ignore. It had strong public resonances that could be used to set off a range of other issues. This was indicated in the asymmetrical character of the 'debate'. Statements about improvements in standards, accompanied by substantial evidence, had no news value. Claims about declining standards, whether proven or not, drew maximum publicity. 'Declining standards' was a narrative and symbolism too strongly entrenched to be negated with logic, surveys, and numbers.

For instance, *Australian literacies*, published by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1997, used a wide evidentiary base to conduct a longitudinal, generational survey of literacy standards. The report stated with some force that there was no general literacy crisis in Australia (Little, 1998, p. iv). In fact, literacy was improving generationally: consonant with improved generational opportunities to access formal education, younger people demonstrated more literacy difficulties than older people. The six categories of people which emerged as likely to have literacy difficulties were in the main the same categories which emerge consistently in contemporary research: the socio-economically disadvantaged, those with non-English speaking backgrounds, some groups of urban and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, rural and remote Australians, people with disabilities, and older Australians whose schooling has been interrupted.

In another example, the 2003 national literacy and numeracy benchmark results, which report on students in years three, five and seven, show that the majority of students meet the benchmark standards. In reading, 93 per cent of year three students, and 89 per cent of years five and seven students, achieved the benchmarks; in writing, the figures are 92, 94, and 92 per cent respectively. Indigenous and very remote students are less likely to achieve the standards, although indigenous performance, especially in years five and seven reading, has improved since initial testing in 1999 (Nelson, 2005b). These improvements have occurred in an environment of systematic contraction in professional development funding since 1975, reduction in the numbers of curriculum advisors and consultants in all States, and the increasingly multicultural nature of the student body. Results that do not lose previous ground could be reasonably claimed as net gains.

In addition, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tested more than 250,000 students aged 15 internationally in 2000, including about 6200 from 231 schools throughout Australia (Lokan, Greenwood, & Cresswell, 2001). The test for reading was comprised of a two-hour multiple choice and essay style assessment, accompanied by a 30-minute attitudinal questionnaire, all of which are assumed as adequate parameters to test the ability of students to meet the literacy demands of the future. Of the 32 countries which participated, 28 were members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); that is, relatively rich countries.

In PISA 2006, participating countries will represent one-third of the world's population and almost nine-tenths of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) (ACER/OECD, 2005, p. 3). Since the cost of testing within each country is borne by that country, and therefore an obstacle to poorer countries, PISA itself attests to the elitism and anti-progressive assumptions of standardised testing by which rich nations seek to confirm and advance their global economic competitiveness; nevertheless, progressive educators are driven to point to PISA and other standardised testing results to defend education outcomes against the inroads of conservative policy.

Overall, Australian students performed well in PISA 2000²¹ : only one other country, Finland, outperformed Australian students in reading literacy overall; 18 per cent of Australian students achieved level five, the highest reading proficiency level, requiring very sophisticated reading skills, compared with the OECD average of ten percent. More than 40 per cent of Australian students achieved level four or higher in reading, while 66 per cent were placed at level three or higher.

Twelve per cent of Australian students did not reach at least level two, compared with the OECD average of 18 per cent. Three per cent of Australian students could not do the simplest reading tasks, compared to the OECD average of six per cent. Boys from disadvantaged backgrounds were twice as likely as girls from similar backgrounds to be in the lowest quartile of reading scores and boys were much less engaged in reading than girls. Indigenous students, on average, performed more than one proficiency level lower than non-Indigenous students in each domain; however, 40 per cent demonstrated skills at least at proficiency level three, and some achieved very highly.

Apart from gender in relation to reading literacy, socio-economic status (according to parental income) was the most important student background variable related to achievement (Lokan, Greenwood, & Cresswell, 2001, p. 207). Commenting on the policy implications of the data, Lokan, Greenwood and Cresswell (p. 210) state that Australia has a long way to go, compared to some other countries, in compensating for socio-economic disadvantage. The summary report for PISA 2003 comments that the difference in results between high and low socio-economic groups has the potential to prejudice national economic aspirations, and that Australia needs to pursue policies to counteract the effects of disadvantage (S. Thomson, Cresswell, & De Bortoli, 2003, p. 16).

The results tend to show that Australia is producing a highly-educated élite with a low-performing ‘tail’: ‘Our best students are doing very well, but far too many of our other students are doing poorly’, Vickers (2005, p. 267) comments. Vickers ties poorer

²¹ Similar results for reading literacy were obtained in PISA 2003, which focussed mainly on mathematical literacy (ACER/OECD, 2005).

performance to the comparative defunding of public schools: for instance, in 27 per cent of private schools, fees alone exceed the average resources per student in a government school, and 55 per cent of students who attend private schools are in schools which have higher resource levels than the average government school (Vickers, 2005, p. 269). The continuing trend of escalating Commonwealth funding to private schools means that, for the four years from 2005-2008, the Commonwealth will provide \$31.3 billion in funding for schools, over two-thirds of which will go to private schools (Vickers, p. 270). In 2005, private schools hosted 32.9 per cent of the total full-time school student population of 3,348,139 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). In other words, about one-third of the school population will receive about two-thirds of Commonwealth funds. Vickers (2005, pp. 266-267) comments that Australia demonstrates a low commitment to equity, noting that the costs of failing to educate all young people well are social as well as economic.

Significant to the following comments, the strong association between poverty and school achievement is widely recognised, and among a large number of countries participating in one international study (not specified by the authors), the USA had by far the largest percentage of youth who were poor (Owen, Salganik, Smith, & Baker, 2002, p. 1288). Although USA students performed only around the OECD average in reading literacy in PISA 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), Australian education is under pressure to implement similar literacy education policies. Interestingly, the Finnish education system specifically aims to remediate the effects on literacy of socio-economic inequalities through a socio-cultural approach. Finland avoids intensive standardised testing, national comprehension testing and school comparative assessments. It supports professionalised and localised literacy teaching and promotes a systematic and comprehensive multilingual focus on reading throughout Finnish society (Halinen, Sinko, & Laukkanen, 2005; Hauff, 2005).

Regardless of the relatively respectable *Australian literacies*, PISA, and national benchmarking results along with warnings that socio-economic disadvantage ought to be addressed to bring up the 'tail', in late 2004, 26 academics wrote to the Federal government's Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, warning that Australian children were failing to learn to read 'because the main teaching method in schools, the whole

language approach, was ineffective for many and had no scientific credibility.’ Confirming Marginson’s view, and as Soler (2002) notes in the English context, those advocating test-driven, basic skills approaches to literacy education seem insensitive to evidence.

The Australian news story was covered in *The Age* newspaper (Milburn, 2004, November 8). The signatories claimed reading instruction in schools was ineffective for many because the whole language approach immersed students in a rich variety of texts without ‘specific letter-sound relationships, known as phonics.’ In a simultaneous feature article strongly reliant on information from the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER), a centre-right independent research body which works closely with Federal governments, the signatories were described as academics from the disciplines of linguistics, cognitive science and psychology, that is, likely to be influenced by structuralist and positivist epistemological disciplinary orientations.

A similar moment in the USA in 1994 was described by Ken Goodman (2006, p. 31):

The conservative campaign found a group of academics and reading researchers willing to support its views. These are people who did experimental research and who were outraged that teachers had the gall to reject their research. And the well-funded campaign offered them research grants, high-profile publicity, attractive perks and titles. Unlike previous back-to-basics movements, this one is different. It has unlimited financial resources from foundations with anti-public education political agendas and it is being coordinated by neoconservative think tanks that know how to manipulate the federal and state legislative processes. They controlled access to education funding by threatening to withdraw federal funds if schools didn’t buy into their reading and math curricula and methodology.... Two national panels with carefully controlled membership and agendas coordinated through the National Institutes of Health were used to marginalize holistic research and eventually any methods or materials that were not phonics- and skills-based. And conservatives blamed teachers and their unions for the reading “crisis.” [Ellipses added]

Nelson, who was reported to have praised some USA-based reading programs, suggesting they might be used in Australia (Burke, 2004, December 8), announced that

he was considering holding an inquiry into the teaching of reading in primary schools. The Australian Education Union (AEU) responded that it was suspicious of Nelson's motivations, adding that USA students performed only just above average in 2003 PISA assessments. Nevertheless, Nelson established the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in December 2004, without, according to the AEU, seeking advice from teachers or State education ministers (Graham, 2005, p. 17). Ken Rowe, a principal ACER researcher, was appointed to chair the committee.

During the month prior to the committee's establishment, American literacy researcher Reid Lyon, director of child development and behaviour at the United States National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD), stated on ABC Radio National's *The health report* (2004, November 15) that many children in poverty in the USA were experiencing difficulty learning to read. One of the reasons Lyon gave was the impoverishment of the family vocabulary; by the time they were four, poor children were likely to have experienced only 11 million family word interactions, in comparison to 80 million for those in upper middle income families.

This approach contrasts with an earlier era of research trends, for example, an influential ethnographic study by Shirley Brice Heath (1983), which successfully elucidated that poor African-American families, accustomed to posing questions in terms of whole events or objects and their uses, causes and effects, questioned their young children differently to the way in which white middle class teachers questioned them. Answers at home often involved telling stories or describing situations, and usually there were no right answers. At school, in contrast, teachers used decontextualised abstractions of things which they then asked children to name (for example, shape, colour, or size), usually resulting in the children's blank incomprehension. Brice's clarification of these differences in language practices led to a re-evaluation of the African-American children's language use in terms of complexity and sophistication, that is, a non-deficit estimation, and productively altered questioning and engagement in the research classrooms.

The philosophical oppositions distinguishing the research approaches of Lyon and Heath bear weightily on literacy pedagogies and their outcomes for children. The single most important theoretical and practical consequence of the development of socio-cultural perspectives on literacy, according to Luke, is the reorientation of literacy from something that is lodged inside students' heads – interiorised skills, knowledges and cognitions – to its externalisation as visible social practices with language, text and discourse. 'This social "externalisation" of literacy acts to preclude "deficit" models of literacy,' states Luke (2000). 'For as long as we locate literacy within human subjects, we will invariably find lack and deficit.'

Predictably, then, Lyon's version of literacy relies heavily on deficit – of both students and teachers. In *The health report* (2004) interview, Lyon stated that reading requires six essential elements, none of which on its own is sufficient. These elements are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, word knowledge (vocabulary), world knowledge, and comprehension strategies, each of which requires explicit teaching. According to Lyon, the USA's No Child Left Behind legislation, which he assisted to write, targets funding to at-risk children in K-3, instructional programs which sequentially teach the six elements, and professional development that assists teachers to deliver such programs. In addition, teacher training institutions were being investigated to determine if the courses provided to teachers to teach reading are based on scientific evidence, and to insist that such courses become 'evidence based' as a condition of funding.

Lyon's information was based on the NICHD's *Report of the national reading panel: teaching children to read* (2000). The report has been criticised for failing to use mutually accordant definitions of reading, for concentrating on reading as a word level process to the exclusion of higher order comprehension processes, for relying heavily on the alphabetic processing research of one of its own panellists rather than regarding the research as one model of reading among many, and for failing to consider contestant models or theories (Australian Literacy Educators' Association, 2005, p. 6). According to the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), the report develops from a reductionist philosophy and delivers, endorsed as scientific, a 1950s view of reading utilising a narrow instructional range:

A psycho-perceptual perspective locks the USA Report into a view of reading as a 'complex set of skills' made up of an hierarchical set of complex 'habits', which in turn promotes lock-step teaching based on behaviourist theories of learning and teaching. (Australian Literacy Educators' Association, 2005, p. 6)

In addition, Allington (2005), Garan (2001) and Krashen (2001) point out substantial mismatches and misinterpretations between the almost 600-page report and its summary versions which were widely read and accepted. Allington comments:

The errors in reporting the findings reflect, to my mind, a simple ideological bias in favor of a particular sort of reading instruction for beginning readers and for struggling readers – the sort of reading instruction that the full NRP report doggedly avoided recommending. (Allington, 2005)

Pressley, Duke and Boling (2004) call for a second generation of substantially broader research, stating that the USA Federal government's position on what constitutes 'scientific research' embraces only a narrow range of potentially effective instruction (a concern omnipresent in ALEA's submission to the Australian inquiry into reading). According to the Civil Society Institute (2005), 47 states are now in revolt against the No Child Left Behind legislation based on its intrusive, prescriptive, time-consuming, intellectually limiting and fiscally punitive effects. The economic subtext to the legislation is its support, through the prescription of basal reading programs, for a massive schoolbook publishing industry.

Luke (2001) describes three scenarios emerging initially in North American environments that have adopted test driven, basic skills and single-method instructional policies: 'rise and stall', 'fourth grade slump', and 'let them eat basic skills'. 'Rise and stall', with an immediate instructional focus on normed approaches, standardised materials and supporting professional development can bring rapid order to disarray, improved time on task and elevated levels of focused instruction, which can generate early gains in test scores. However, overall curriculum reform is needed to establish continuous pathways for improvement beyond the basics, and test scores can stall without such reform.

This scenario is related to the ‘fourth grade slump’, in which schools invest heavily in early years basic skills, remediation and recovery intervention programs but fail to provide intellectually engaged upper primary and middle school classrooms. Performance gains by children returning to such classrooms from intervention programs will markedly residualise, so that by the time such children reach years six or seven, the gains of the most at-risk students have dissipated.

In the third scenario, the high-stakes test-driven policy succeeds in focussing curriculum and pedagogy on the basic skills. The gap between best and worst achievers increases, aided by socio-economic factors. This results in public and systemic Catholic schools becoming purveyors of basic skills to working and underclasses, while élite and selective entry non-government schools are free to engage with higher order thinking and intellectually demanding classrooms.

Regardless of the disquiet over contracted and prescriptive pedagogical approaches to the teaching of literacy, Australia’s then Federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, signalled his preference for a ‘back to basics’ approach to reading instruction by praising a phonics program in a Perth primary school as an excellent model for other schools to follow (Taylor, 2005, August 24). Together with a reductionist focus in the terms of reference of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading (Australian Literacy Educators’ Association, 2005, p. 3), Nelson’s statement constituted undue influence on the inquiry to return findings compliant with a ‘back to basics’ approach.

A similar story of regressive concentration on basic skills curriculum and deskilled pedagogies emerges in the English situation. In recounting the recent history of literacy debates in England, Janet Soler (2002) nominates a cascade of conservative reforms beginning with the Thatcher government’s 1988 Education Reform Act. Policy initiatives included the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). Under Thatcher, refined under Blair, a national curriculum was instituted, with requirements to both conform to national standards and implement national testing of seven and 11-year-olds. In

addition, New Labour's electoral successes in 1997 and 2001 were at least partly attributable to its emphasis on the need to improve literacy standards.

Understood as moral technologies of the Foucauldian kind, these strategies are seen as changing 'narratives of the pupil', producing a redirection of schooling through testing, grading and publication of school performance 'league tables' away from the liberal humanism which prevailed in the 1970s and early 1980s towards a technicist/rationalist notion of learning and a view of the individual as a subject to govern and/or be governed (Soler, 2002). In contrast to the liberal humanist subject-in-process, such a perspective constitutes the child as an invisible, averaged or median subject constructed around quantifiable norms, reprising Benthamite simplifications of the child and of education.

Soler (2002) states that analyses of literacy strategies under the NLS emphasise the adoption in key NLS texts of technicist, prescriptive and less flexible pedagogical practices, particularly antagonistic to the dominantly developmental orientation of early childhood educators, and a rejection of progressive, child-centred ideals and reflective practice. Additionally, the impact of pressures within the NLS to teach to a prescriptive curriculum that emphasises the raising of literacy standards through testing and grading tends to regulate teacher behaviour and deconstruct professional identities. Critics of the NLS describe it as a deskilling initiative based on groundless claims of superior effectiveness, enshrining a mythology that teachers do not teach literacy effectively.

In England, a single event galvanised public acceptance that literacy standards were falling and that progressive whole language/whole book teaching methods should be replaced by a formal, skills based focus on literacy 'basics'. A front page story in *The Times Educational Supplement* in June 1990 reported findings by an educational psychologist that reading standards among seven-year-olds had shown the biggest drop in 40 years. In a subsequent publication by a right wing think tank, the psychologist nominated the lack of phonetic methods of reading instruction as a problem. His data were subsequently criticised by a variety of authorities on many grounds, including the small and unrepresentative nature of the sample. Approximately six months later, the

Office for Standards in Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research published separate reports indicating little change in primary school standards.

In the meantime, however, the original story – which had been widely disseminated in the popular press – stimulated widespread popular outcry, stimulating a torrent of consequences. These included further investigations under order of the Education Secretary, a reshuffle of junior ministers, meetings between the psychologist and both the ruling conservative party and the opposition labour party, increasing support for the government's plan for national testing, adoption of the issue by the labour party as a 'killer' electoral opportunity, an Establishment attack by Prince Charles on 'progressive' educators, and the relentless demonising by the media of a leader of whole language/real book approaches (Soler, 2002). Finally, a national testing system was implemented and the published results simplistically interpreted, without regard for socio-economic or geographical variances, nor for the lack of previous comparative data.

Subsequently, the Education Secretary established an inquiry into primary school teaching methods, the 1992 findings of which cautioned against diverse, child-centred teaching methods including co-operative group work, topic work, problem-based inquiry and authentic assessment strategies; and endorsed a reversion to traditional, transmission-style or 'bullet' delivery, methods of teacher-centred learning, whole class (expository) instruction and norm-referenced assessment.

Thus, accommodation for cultural and linguistic difference, for socio-economic disadvantage, for learning problems, for special talents, for gender effects and for any other educationally effective conditions of difference and diversity became the responsibility of the learner rather than the education system itself. A progressive view might regard this as an attack on democracy through an intention to treat all children the 'same' (the 'normalised' child) and a refutation of equality, where equality is about ameliorating any circumstances which prevent children from aspiring to the same best future as any other child. In terms of the epistemologies of pedagogy, the turn is from

the constructivism of post-structuralist theories to the positivism of modernism; in other words, the remanufacture of certainty.

The *Harry Potter* texts are well aware of the struggles between progressives and neo-conservatives over education in the UK. Struggles between opposing political forces for control of the education of young wizards thematises the *Harry Potter* series. Hogwarts' munificent built and extensive natural environments, its generational patronisation by establishment families, its oversight by Board of Governors, its boarding house, dining hall and sporting traditions, its dress and discipline rules, and its curricular, pedagogical and assessment traditions mark it as an institution of conservative establishment interested in the perpetuation of hierarchies of power.

Nevertheless, it can also be held to stand for the comprehensive tradition in public education through its financial facilitation and academic and social elevation of poor students such as Tom Riddle (the young Voldemort) and the Weasley children, its forthright canvassing of non-establishment entrants such as Hermione, its multicultural inclusiveness signified by students such as Padma and Parvati Patil, Cho Chang and Dean Thomas, and its placid entente with secular spiritualism rather than active advocacy of religious tradition.

In addition, elements of his role mark Dumbledore as a progressive educator. For instance, he encourages the critique of establishment traditions: Hogwarts' school song can be sung to each person's choice of tune and sense of timing, satirising conventional loyalties (*PS*, p. 95). He attends to, and actively moderates, the school's political positionings. He actively detects and organises resistance to regressive conservative infiltration (with the apparent exception of Snape, Dumbledore's killer in *HBP*). His integration of school learning with real-world experience, at least for Harry, demonstrates a progressive pedagogy.

On the other hand, Voldemort stands for the most regressive aspects of conservatism. The young Voldemort, Tom Riddle – who was prefect, head boy, winner of the Special Award for Services to the School, and who excelled in every examination – applies to stay on at Hogwarts after his final year to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts (*HBP*, pp. 403-405). Voldemort fails in his application on the grounds of his youth, but Dumbledore explains his misgivings to Harry about this potential appointment:

‘(A)s a teacher, he would have had great power and influence over young witches and wizards. Perhaps he had gained the idea from Professor Slughorn, the teacher with whom he was on best terms, who had demonstrated how influential a role a teacher can play. I do not imagine for an instant that Voldemort envisaged spending the rest of his life at Hogwarts, but I do think that he saw it as a useful recruiting ground, and a place where he might begin to build himself an army.’ (*HBP*, p. 404)

The notion of the potential for the military mobilisation of the school body persists. Thwarted in his first aim, Voldemort begins a patient and assiduous cultivation of the forces of regressive conservatism, slowly infiltrating both the Ministry of Magic and Hogwarts. He scores a major success when the Ministry, convinced that Dumbledore’s allegations about the return of Voldemort are incorrect and mark him as unstable and likely to raise a student army against the Ministry (*OoP*, p. 272), inserts one of his adherents into Hogwarts’ teaching staff. Dolores Umbridge unprecedentedly interrupts Dumbledore’s start of term address to presage the Ministry’s intentions to exert control. The language is redolent of the rationale of competitive economic markets, couched in ominously bland bureaucratese:

‘...because some changes will be for the better, while others will come, in the fullness of time, to be recognised as errors of judgement. Meanwhile, some old habits will be retained, and rightly so, whereas others, outmoded and outworn, must be abandoned. Let us move forward, then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.’ (*OoP*, p. 193)

Soporific for other students, the speech quickens Hermione’s well-developed critical capacities. Her hand hovers aloft after Professor Umbridge opens her first

lesson with an announcement, written on the blackboard, of a return to the basics in Defence Against the Dark Arts, followed by the course aims:

1. *Understanding the principles underlying defensive magic.*
2. *Learning to recognise situations in which defensive magic can legally be used.*
3. *Placing the use of defensive magic in a context for practical use.* (OoP, p. 216)

Professor Umbridge eventually abandons her attempts to ignore the relentless Hermione and grudgingly permits her to speak. ‘Surely,’ Hermione asks, ‘the whole point of Defence Against the Dark Arts is to practise defensive spells?’ (OoP, p. 218). Her temerity provokes the teacher’s derision:

‘Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Miss Granger?’ asked Professor Umbridge, in her falsely sweet voice.

‘No, but –

“Well, then, I’m afraid you are not qualified to decide what the “whole point” of my class is. Wizards much older and cleverer than you have devised our new programme of study. You will be learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free way – ’ (OoP, p. 218)

The students are redirected to the textbook, the stupefying *Defensive magical theory* by Wilbert Slinkhard, to keep reading. The everyday ‘texts’ (spells) which students need to learn to take agency in their increasingly dangerous world are reduced to theoretical ephemera stripped of real-world relevance, pedagogy retreats to its least challenging level, and assessment will disconnect from the curriculum since it will require students, at examination, to cast spells they have been prohibited from practising. Umbridge successfully destroys the logical alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, the three ‘message systems’ of schooling.

This dumbing-down of the curriculum is closely followed by Professor Umbridge’s ministerial appointment to the newly-created position of High Inquisitor, by which she is empowered to inspect the other teachers and report their performance to the Ministry. Following rapidly behind, educational decrees prohibit students’ free association (OoP, p. 313) and restrict teachers’ freedom of speech (OoP, p. 486). Professor Umbridge’s interventions manage to exacerbate an atmosphere already vulnerable to fear and tension, an atmosphere reprised in the Australian context in the following abridged report from *The Australian* newspaper in September, 2005:

Fran Hinton, chief executive of the new National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership, revealed that a system of national teacher accreditation affecting the content of teaching courses was under development. Education faculties would have to adapt their courses to the new national standards, she said. “By establishing a set of criteria of what we expect in terms of standards we require, we will have an impact on the courses,” Ms Hinton said. The move signals an overhaul of the teaching profession, which critics, including [the then] federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson, say has been too quick to seize on the latest teaching fads and which is overly reliant on academic jargon.... (Ms Hinton) signalled a “more clinical approach” to teaching and teacher education as part of a push to enhance the professionalism of teachers. “We in the profession regret the fact that there hasn’t been the level of research that we would have hoped into the effectiveness of particular models of the teaching of children,” Ms Hinton told *The Australian*. [Ellipses added] (Slattery, 2005, August 18)

The *Harry Potter* texts are also acutely aware of the role of the media in generating moral panics and crisis structures of feeling. As Mitropolous and Neilson (2005, p. 15) see it,

in Australia – where there exists a degree of homogeneity in press, radio and television comparable only to those countries often denounced as ‘totalitarian’ – [mainstream] media continue to play a significant role in configuring both ‘publics’ as well as any ‘public sphere’.

As conservatism deepens and opinion is drawn to the right both in real-world terms and in the wizarding community, the *Harry Potter* texts track and lampoon the real-world popular print media’s progressive political polarisation between a brutalising dominant right/Right, represented in Australia by Murdoch, Packer, and to a lesser extent, Fairfax media, and a struggling residual left, represented by discrete union publications and particular left magazines and quarterlies. The wizarding world’s media confrontations occur largely through the broadsheet/tabloid opposition of the conservative *Daily Prophet*, usually aligned with the powerful Ministry of Magic, and *The Quibbler*, reactively and subversively arraigned against the right. Both outlets are equally scurrilous.

The *Prophet* relentlessly undermines the Harry/Dumbledore forces through the breathtaking evidentiary omissions and manipulations of Rita Skeeter; for instance, in the story introduced by ‘The boy who defeated He Who Must Not Be Named is unstable and possibly dangerous’ (*GoF*, p. 531). *The Quibbler*, positioned by its name as struggling to locate the substantive issues, relentlessly undermines the Ministry through rumour and innuendo: for instance, it uses an anonymous ministry ‘insider’ to allege defamatorily that the Minister for Magic wants to gain control of the goblin-administered wizarding bank, and that he has boasted about baking goblins in pies (*OoP*, p. 174). The Ministry, meantime, activates its own information machinery to insist that students are safe against the terrorism of Voldemort’s advance guard, the Death Eaters, and to issue leaflets instructing the wizarding community on how to protect themselves from ‘Dark Forces’ (*HBP*, pp. 45-46), actions resonating with government responses to the threat of terrorism in the world of Harry’s readers.

On the front lines of New Times

Teachers stand at the headwaters of political systems, guardians for a time of the fluid forces which channel into social, cultural, and political formations. The influences which finally construct disparate political systems – democracy, or fascism, for instance – are nurtured, or not, at these same headwaters by the teacher, who constitutes the nodal point of the multitudinous forces affecting the construction and dispensation of curriculum (S Kemmis & Stake, 1988/2000, p. 22; Tripp, 1994, p. 34). Especially in times of great change, such responsibilities constitute the creative ground for the perennial task of teacher renewal: why educate? Educate whom, for whom, and for what? And in the context of this inquiry, why literacy/ies? Literacy/ies for whom, and for what? And what do the answers to these questions mean for curriculum?

Literacies cathect power in societies which increasingly count as wealth the capacities to deal successfully, particularly in the service of capital, with information, information management, knowledge, knowledge production, multimedia and multimodalities. As economies move into new means and new technologies for the production of wealth, contests over literacy flagfall contests over the future, over evolving subjectivities, over identities, communities, societies, cultures and institutions,

and finally, for the means of production. Underlying the turbulence centred on literacy as metaphor is confusion about the future, uncertainty about the new purposes of schooling, and struggles to comprehend learning and teaching in the context of postmodern, post-industrial globalised nation States (Grieshaber & Luke, 2004, p. 5; Soler, 2002).

The trajectory trends towards something reminiscent of fascism: a ‘something’, however, unpredictably fashioned by the New Times of neo-liberal global capitalism exponentiated by instantaneous communications. Nurtured by modernist hierarchies of status, wealth and power and fundamentalist religious allocations of merit and fault, these trends synthesise through poststructuralist notions of discourse, the construction of subjectivity and the ideological positionings of human beings. Ontologically, the trends participate in an individualist ethic: the desire to preserve the relationship of self to self ahead of any other forms of relationship, such as self to other, other to other, or self to planet.

The persistent failure of a protective, productive dialectic between progressives and conservatives is at issue here. The violent hyperbole which accompanies the rightward tilt (Marr, 2004) and its leftside resisters illuminates the deep fears from which polarisation springs: the intuitive and apparently increasingly evidenced suspicion of global human survival as threatened. Rapid environmental degradation of the planet, possibly or probably as a consequence of the unsustainable exploitation of planetary resources, together with a converging scientific consensus confirms that, under current regimes of exploitation, climate change (as only one aspect of environmental degradation) may pass from the likelihood of human restitutive intervention within one or two decades. Such prophecies invoke both despair and desperate politics, into which must fit attempts to contract notions of literacy to matters as simplistic as phonics alone. In the production of literacies, phonics may be important – indeed, essential; but by itself, insufficient to produce genuinely critically literate subjects.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the value of a critical literacy approach to reading a globally influential popular text in times of increasing political conservatism. Through critical exegesis, it has endeavoured to draw together a number of disparate influences: the international popularity of the *Harry Potter* series; the intensification of neo-capitalist globalisation; the global rise in conservative politics; and the relationships between young people and their literacies. In this process, the thesis has engaged with the question, raised by Luke and Carrington (2002c), of what literacy education might be in Australia in intensively globalising times, and how Australian literacy education might interact with globalisation to advantage, rather than disadvantage, students. Like Luke and Carrington, I have argued for critical literacy as a tool to mediate students' relationships to globalisation, particularly in regard to its anti-democratic effects. In my attempt to establish a case for reading locally powerful popular cultural texts in a global context, the *Harry Potter* novels have provided the medium for an engagement between cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy (as explicated in Chapter One).

The process has involved elucidating certain meanings of the *Harry Potter* fictional novels, situating the texts globally (particularly in Chapter Three) and critiquing them pedagogically (exemplified in Chapters Four, Five and Six). Critical literacy necessarily emphasises that diverse readings are both possible and desirable, and my readings are of course partial. Nevertheless, they aim to produce pedagogical insights and stances which optimise the teaching opportunities presented to the critical educator by highly libidinal popular texts. My study seeks to bring the word and the world together in the classroom in ways which properly acknowledge certain global politics in relation to which students must situate their lives.

The thesis has worked with the idea that without a critical literacy approach the *Harry Potter* texts may easily be read in accordance with culturally pervasive politically conservative views which favour conventionally masculinist, martial outcomes in

society and culture. It has opposed this idea with the notion that the times call for the skills of peaceful global citizenship, as outlined in Chapter Five.

In making my case, Chapter Two examines the ways in which the *Harry Potter* narratives can be seen as positioning readers conservatively through familiar generic forms offering well-known conventions which on balance comply with, rather than disrupt, established socio-cultural outcomes. The composite demands of folk and fairy tale, myth, allegory, legend, and fantasy, while producing absorbing and entertaining narrative, also produce a familiar agglomerate of good versus evil, of quest and reward, and of the reproduction of existing class, gender and race relations. As an orphaned Cinderella who rises to fortune, fame and fighting, the generic precipitation on young Harry's shoulders marks him as another in a long line of heroes dispensable to the needs of a culture's self-image and strivings.

Chapter Three considers the ways in which school literacy practices and globalisation may interact within mutually shaping fields, using the examples of Harry and Hermione to demonstrate possible differential and disadvantageous outcomes of conservative pedagogies. The emphasis Dumbledore places on positioning Harry within a liberal humanist discourse robs him of a genuinely critical education while situating him as a soldier for neo-capitalism. His school subjects nevertheless position him ideally for the workforce, while the intellectual Hermione, having chosen subjects which increase her social and cultural capital, may have to work harder to find employment at the same level of reward as Harry. Marked as a cultural worker by her interest in freeing the enslaved elves, Hermione may well be disadvantaged in entering the workforce by the pervasive nature of neo-capitalist economic logic in the globalising workplace.

Chapter Four considers the ways political fear may be manipulated, within both the *Harry Potter* novels and in the cultures of their audiences, with the potential to position readers as acritical consumers of global terror. Voldemort has another history than that of terrorist: abandoned as a baby, he is denied the economic privileges of his wealthy father and, through lack of adult understanding and oversight, his talents for

magic become perverted. Constructed in the wizarding world as a totalitarian monster, Voldemort's existence activates apocalyptic terrors and is used to validate extreme measures of social control. Harry must rid the world of the scourge of the villain, and his positioning to do so is built out of Voldemort's irremediable evil, the sterling qualities of the Enlightened, unitary subject as extolled to Harry by Dumbledore, and Harry's entailment in a patriarchal hierarchy of obedience and authority.

Chapter Five examines the potential for the conventional characterisation of the hero, however hybridised with 'sensitive new age' traits, to deliver traditional martial masculinities of doubtful value to global citizens in 'new times.' The traditional white male hero is a particularly seductive form, steeped in an ancient history, repetitively retold, of often violent supremacism. The companionate heroine form, as demonstrated in my reading of Hermione, is disclosed as delivering similarly disadvantaged positioning. Hermione willingly subverts the intellect to the physical, and speech and thought to action, thereby constructing her own status as subordinate to the hero. Harry, situated between young readers and the 'war on terror', is a powerfully popular cultural hero during times that favour traditional hegemonic masculinities.

A closer examination of Harry's literacy education in Chapter Six demonstrates the value of the 'hands-on', high demand curriculum devised for Harry by Dumbledore. However, it also notes Dumbledore's inability to situate learning in a sufficiently global context. Failing the test of the critical pedagogue, Dumbledore is unable to facilitate Harry to bring the world into the (symbolic) classroom without either unwittingly imposing his own highly influential interpretations on it; or, if wittingly, seeking to explain and justify them.

Prior to the seventh and final novel in the *Harry Potter* series, then, Harry is positioned as the killer hero, about to jeopardise his life for the assumed good of his people. He will approach this moment apparently unburdened by any convincing explanation of why: why must Harry inevitably fight Voldemort? Must he absolutely destroy the villain to save everyone else? Why is Voldemort irredeemably 'evil'? Why does he seek his own kind of justice? Could the hero bring peace through means other

than violence? And for millions of avid young readers whose subjectivities may be influenced by Harry, does this deeply attractive hero serve as an adequate model for the postmodern adolescent reader in a dynamically globalising world?

Barring a stunning authorial turnaround, the coming showdown is steeped in readily available traditional representations of genre and character, and conventional ideologies of pedagogy and politics. Harry is bereft of an integrated cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical literacy approach which determines critical curriculum, classroom and lesson. Apparently, he is unable to ask the crucial critical question that may preserve not only his and other lives, but the peace of society: in whose interests?

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